

2 January 1988

Martha Hill, Picture Editor
Audubon Magazine
950 Third Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022

Dear Ms. Hill,

Please permit me to re-introduce myself. My name is Stuart Gentling. I am an artist, a new board member of the Fort Worth Zoological Association, and I had the pleasure of meeting you when you lectured on the work of Wilhelm Euhner here in Fort Worth early last December. Unfortunately for me our meeting was all too brief, since I had to leave immediately to give a lecture of my own on ancient Mayan art to a group of scholars and collectors — most of whom knew more about this subject than did I.

I am hoping that you may recall my speaking to you about a book, a great imperial folio, which my twin brother Scott and I recently published. This book with pages measuring 22" X 28" contains 50 offset color plates of Texas birds and landscapes along with 87 pages of text — all printed by letterpress with Centaur Monotype set by hand. The work is entitled OF BIRDS AND TEXAS and is dedicated to the memory of John James Audubon. We worked ten years on this project, and it has been received by critics and book collectors and bird people as one of the finest publications of its kind produced in America in the twentieth century. I am enclosing a few pages of commentary from important art and book people which might be of interest to you.

John James Audubon is a prominent part of our book as he has been a part of our artistic lives since we first began painting thirty years ago. Scott and I are not wildlife painters in the professional sense. The painting of birds forms but a small sideline, a kind of hobby, in relation to the main body of our work which is the painting of landscapes, still lifes and portraits. OF BIRDS AND TEXAS is the only bird book that we ever plan to produce. Audubon's importance to our book and the book's importance to Audubon scholarship is highlighted by an extraordinary coincidence which happened to us while we were in the process of publishing the work. We discovered and purchased a small watercolor that was only attributed to Audubon. We authenticated the picture to our satisfaction, and our research was confirmed by Carol Slatkin of the New York Historical Society. The picture, a pair of boat-tailed grackles, turned out to be a long-lost Audubon painting which was his first pub-

lished work. (It appeared in 1825 in volume one of Charles Lucien Bonaparte's four-volume supplement to Alexander Wilson's AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY, the first great bird book published in America.) Ms. Slatkin pointed out in her letter which I am sending along to you that this picture is directly related not only to Wilson's book but also was the point of departure from which Audubon created the plate which appeared in his own BIRDS OF AMERICA. It is a fascinating part of the story of Audubon's first attempts to be published in Philadelphia, but the facts of the story could not have been accurately told without knowledge of this little picture. Its publication in our own book unites OF BIRDS AND TEXAS in a wonderful way with Wilson's AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY and BIRDS OF AMERICA by John James Audubon — the two greatest books about American birds published in the 19th century!

To help finance our publication we sold the painting last year at Sotheby's for the highest price ever paid for an Audubon painting at auction. The CNN network broadcast the sale across the country, and even People Magazine covered the story. I'm still getting letters from people as far away as Nova Scotia wanting to know more about our book or claiming to have discovered a long lost Audubon. I think that what makes our relationship to the grackle painting even more intriguing is that, not only had we dedicated our book to Audubon ten years earlier when we first began work on the project, but I had even mentioned this picture when I wrote the introduction to our book six months before I discovered it for sale in a print dealer's catalogue. It is a fascinating story, I think. And it has never been told in full. I might add that the original painting was much altered in the print which appeared in the Wilson-Bonaparte supplement and that it is reproduced in our book for the very first time in its unaltered, original version.

Also reproduced in our book is a facsimile-size reproduction of the first page of an original Audubon manuscript which Scott and I own. It is the unedited commentary he wrote on the red-shouldered hawk in 1830 for his famous ORNITHOLOGICAL BIOGRAPHY. It has never been published as he originally wrote it until it appeared in OF BIRDS AND TEXAS, and it serves as a charming commentary to our own plate of this species.

I do hope that our book will merit some mention in Audubon Magazine. I noticed that the magazine did a fine job covering Andrew Hoyem's book on Andrew Jackson Grayson's BIRDS OF THE PACIFIC SLOPE (September 1987). Andy and I are trading copies. Although I have great admiration for Hoyem's publication, I really believe that our book is the more beautiful of the two works — and the

critics agree. Our book is more elegant, more self-contained (being all under one cover) and the color work of the plates is much richer.

Currently there are slightly more than 100 books left for sale out of the original edition of 500 books plus 25 artists' copies. Unfortunately most of these sales have been to Texas collectors or to rare book libraries where the book's chances of being seen by the general public are greatly reduced. I would very much like the book to be better known outside of Texas, since three-fourths of the bird species we have depicted in the book are birds which inhabit other parts of the United States. That our book has TEXAS in the title should not obscure the fact that from the very beginning Scott and I wanted to create a publication that would appeal to lovers of birds and bird art in the rest of the country. Audubon Magazine could be very helpful in bringing our book to the notice of more people, and I think an article or review might be of considerable interest to your readers.

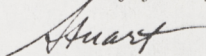
I have not talked to Les Line directly, but he was made aware of our project back in 1984 by George Peyton, an Audubon Society board member from Oakland, California. In August of 1987 I sent a copy of our book to Mr. Line c/o the 950 Third Avenue address as a gift to the Audubon Society library, but so far I have not had any response from him. I admit I was warned that the magazine was bad about this, but I thought that a 46 pound book would be difficult to misplace or ignore. I am naturally disappointed by the lack of response, but I was fully aware that our book was sent as an unsolicited gift and that I took a chance knowing that something like this might happen. In spite of the magazine's silence, it would certainly be some comfort to me knowing that at least somebody was enjoying our book and that it was not rotting away in some basement mail room.

I am sending you in the accompanying mail tube probably more information about OF BIRDS AND TEXAS than you will ever want to know, but the book is difficult to sum up in just a few words. The fact that it has been so well received by well-respected museum directors and curators and librarians, by wildlife artists and bird people and by the general public is, I think, a fitting tribute to what we have created. The remarks of Dr. Edmund Pillsbury, director of the Kimbell Art Museum, and Henry Hopkins, the former director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, or Roger Tory Peterson, Andrew Wyeth and Guy Coheleach or such book people as A.C. Greene, Michael Harwood and Mary Durant provide ample testimony that OF BIRDS AND TEXAS merits at least some consider-

ation by Audubon Magazine. If you do receive this tube and are interested in knowing more about our book, please call me, and I will be glad to send you a copy for your inspection. My home telephone number is I-817 738-4427, and my studio number with answering service is I-817 332-7059. I am genuinely looking forward to hearing from you, and I hope that you enjoy the color plates and the other material. All the plates are signed by Scott and/or me if you should want to frame them.

By the way, I enjoyed your lecture at the zoo immensely, and I was stunned by some of the examples of Kuhnert's work which I had never seen before. They only increased my admiration for that artist - if such is possible. I can't wait until your forthcoming book is published which I will keep next to your splendid work on Bruno Liljefors. In spite of the limitations of the viewing area, I believe we did a pretty good job with the zoo collection. I have been pestering them for a couple of years to display the works and now that I am a board member I am going to quietly press for the establishment of a small self-contained display facility for the Kuhnerts and for a permanent collection of wildlife art. I am very gratified to say that all our original bird paintings for OF BIRDS AND TEXAS have been purchased by the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History. This museum is one of the largest of its kind in the United States, and the paintings will be seen by more than a million people a year. That is more than all the people who visit Fort Worth's other three art museums put together. The museum also plans to put the paintings on tour throughout the United States and perhaps abroad in the not-too-distant future.

Sincerely yours,



Stuart W. Gentling