

THE GENTLING BOOK OF TEXAS BIRDS

Because the forthcoming book, Of Birds And Texas, by Stuart and Scott Gentling and John Graves is an expensive book, I would like to provide the prospective buyer with a few important facts about what he will be receiving for his investment. As the accompanying brochure has already stated, we know of no other book in the history of Texas publishing that has been produced in such a grand format as Of Birds And Texas. The modern Imperial Folio size for the printing of books is now considered to measure 15 by 20 inches, but the Gentlings in collaboration with the artists and craftsmen at Wind River Press in Austin have decided to return to the original nineteenth century Great Imperial Folio size of 22 by 28 inches so that all the birds in the book but one, the young wild turkey, could be depicted life-size. Those buyers who pay the full purchase price of \$2,500.00 upon subscribing will receive as a gift a color print of the turkey measuring 29½ by 38½ inches -- the actual size of the original painting. This large facsimile-size print will be numbered and signed by the artist, Scott Gentling, and it will have an issue value of \$450.00.

The edition limit of this book is 500 signed and numbered copies plus 25 signed and remarked artists' copies. The edition limit of each individual print in the book is 750 so that apart from those prints reserved for the book itself, there will be only 250 copies of each plate available for the public to purchase separately. This is a very small issue for prints to be offered for sale individually on the national and international market, and though no prints will be offered for sale apart from the book until all the books have been sold, the initial price of these separate prints will be between \$100.00 and \$150.00. Since the book contains 50 color plates, all individually signed and numbered, it requires the use of only the most elementary arithmetic to determine that the buyer of the book would be purchasing the entire collection of prints for only \$50.00 apiece. This in itself would make Of Birds And Texas deserving of special consideration, but there is more.

Apart from the introduction and the commentaries to the plates which the Gentlings have written, the main body of the text is a much awaited new work by John Graves, one of this country's most highly respected authors. Patrick Bennett in his book, Talking With Texas Writers (1980), writes that, "He is perhaps the writer most admired and respected by his fellow Texas writers. . . John Graves is the writer's writer in Texas . . . He thinks clearly and then writes in wonderful style, one of the more distinctive styles of our era." John Graves is not a very prolific author. He has produced for the public only a few precious works in hard cover, all of which have won awards and unqualified praise from the most difficult critics of all -- his fellow artists. His three major works, Goodbye To A River (1960), Hardscrabble (1974), and From A Limestone Ledge (1980), and his two shorter works, The Last Running (1959, 1974) and Blue And Some Other Dogs (1981), have created a dedicated following of readers that knows well that any new work by Graves is a publishing event of importance. John Graves' text will never again be republished in the same format as it appears in Of Birds And Texas, so that the purchasers of the book will not only be acquiring the 50 color plates of Texas birds and landscapes, they will also receive an autographed first edition by John Graves, a rare and important work of literature from the pen of one of our best writers.

The Gentlings have included in the book an additional literary contribution by a writer who is perhaps the most famous painter of birds who ever lived -- John James Audubon -- who visited Texas in 1837 to search for new birds to paint for his monumental publication, The Birds Of America (1826-1838). The book, Of Birds And Texas, is dedicated to Audubon's memory and, oddly enough, the 1985 publication date for the book marks the Bicentennial anniversary of his birth. The Gentlings' plate of the Red-shouldered Hawk, perched on a branch with a freshly captured crayfish, will, in addition to their own remarks, be preceded by the original commentary concerning

this species written by Audubon himself in the winter of 1830 for his famous Ornithological Biography (1831-1839). Audubon's commentary is here published for the first time in its original, unedited version, printed from a manuscript in Audubon's own hand, a document which is among the Gentlings' most treasured possessions. It is interesting to see just how the original manuscript differs from the text as it appeared in print in 1831 after having been thoroughly polished by the editing of William Macgillivray. The Gentlings' inclusion of this original work of literature offers us a charming and wonderfully revealing look into the mind of this great artist, and it symbolically links their book in a small way to Audubon's own great Birds Of America.

The Gentlings have chosen Wind River Press at Austin to undertake the awesome task of designing and printing the text and plates of their book. David Holman and his father, William R. Holman, are both award-winning artists and craftsmen who stand at the top of their profession. They will work together to design each printed page, to select the type, to set the type by hand, and to print each page of the text by letterpress. They will supervise and personally print each of the 50 color reproductions to insure maximum fidelity to the original Gentling paintings. Because of the exceptional size of the Great Imperial Folio format of the book, David Holman recently purchased from Germany two special presses needed to handle the demanding printing requirements of this monumental project. The Holman reputation for innovation, good taste and the best in craftsmanship is recognized not just in Texas, but throughout the United States. For further information, see Al Loman's book, Printing Arts In Texas (1975). It is a book which William Holman designed, and for which he won the 1975 Book Design Award from the Texas Institute of Letters.

Finally I am pleased to say that the Gentlings have been most fortunate in their choice of Craig Jensen of Austin to oversee the manufacturing

of the two portfolios and the special box that will contain the text and the prints. He comes to the project from the Humanities Research Center library at the University of Texas at Austin where for a number of years he was the Chief Conservator in charge of restoring and preserving rare books and manuscripts. He and his staff are working with the Holmans and the Gentlings to design and construct a container of archival quality for safely housing the unbound pages of the book. That the book is boxed and not bound reflects a current practice frequently employed to display books of uncommon quality and importance, and it makes it possible to remove individual plates for inspection and exhibition without damaging the rest of the work. Jensen is an experienced, demanding craftsman. His participation in the book project fulfills the project's last major requirement -- that of handsomely protecting the book by providing a container that is both elegant and free of acids, lignins and other destructive materials. The archival quality of the box and portfolios, then, will insure that the book, Of Birds And Texas, will be preserved in its original condition for the enjoyment of future generations.

The creators of this book have spared no labor or expense to bring to you a truly remarkable publication. The collaboration between John Graves, the Holmans, Craig Jensen and the Gentlings represents a very special investment of talent and expertise that is certain to gain for Of Birds And Texas the official recognition and praise that it deserves. Though the Gentlings have been working for over seven years on this project, it is only by a fortuitous coincidence that it should reach the public by 1985, a year that marks both the Bicentennial of John James Audubon's birth in Santo Domingo (now Haiti) and the beginning throughout our state of many observances of the 150th anniversary of Texas' independence from Mexico. These celebrations will reach their climax in 1986, the year of the official Texas Sesquicentennial. Even though the publication date of this book accidentally occurs at the same time as these important

anniversary observances, somehow the timing seems right and appropriate. That the book, Of Birds And Texas, should be a good investment in financial terms is, I think, made self-evident by the facts that are here presented. We hope, however, that with the purchase of this volume the buyer will be making more than a financially sound acquisition, that he or she will be making a far more profound investment in a work of both esthetic and historical importance created by an unique and exceptional group of artists to celebrate our state of Texas and an important part of its natural beauty.

Sincerely,

E. Ralph Carr
General Manager