

THE BURROWING OWL

This small owl of approximately 10 inches was once a familiar sight in open fields and virgin prairies all over Texas. Its decreasing numbers are the direct result of the destruction of its habitat by the plow and the fatalities due to the improvident use of pesticides and indiscriminate shooting by varmint hunters. These birds are easily recognized by their unusually long legs. They are not strong flyers and are most often seen on the ground standing by the entrance to their nests which are made in the abandoned burrows of prairie dogs, ground squirrels, skunks, badgers, armadillos and other digging animals. These birds are frequently seen nesting in colonies with the adults and fledged young standing near their burrows, their heads bobbing up and down and from side to side as they focus their eyes to look out for potential intruders. If threatened, they immediately retreat to their burrows. They have the unique ability to make a noise which sounds exactly like the rattling of a rattlesnake, and this frequently discourages their enemies. They do more daylight feeding than is common among most owls. Their food consists mainly of grasshoppers and other insect pests, and this diet is occasionally augmented by small snakes, mice, young prairie dogs and small birds.

This drawing by Stuart Gentling is the pencil study for the painting of Burrowing Owls which will appear on plate 32 of the much awaited book, titled, Of Birds And Texas. This book which will appear early in 1985 will be unique in the history of Texas publishing. Nothing like this project has ever been done before in Texas. The plates and text measure a Texas size of 22 inches by 28 inches which in publishing terminology bears the impressive name of "Imperial Folio" size. There will be forty plates of Texas birds depicted against backgrounds of the state's many different regions showing all changes of the seasons and the weather, and the different times of the day and night. In addition to this there will be five plates dealing more closely with the land and the people of Texas painted in the Gentlings' more familiar drybrush watercolor style. No more than 750 copies plus 25 artists' copies of this book will be printed. The title page of each book will be signed and numbered by John Graves, and Scott and Stuart Gentling, and the artists will also sign and number each individual color plate.

Of Birds And Texas is not solely a collection of paintings; it will also be a remarkable work of literature. Besides the introduction to the book and the commentary to the plates written by the artists, the main body of the text will be contributed by John Graves who is universally considered by literary critics

throughout the United States as one of our finest prose writers. Such books as Goodbye To A River, Hard Scrabble, and The Last Running, have become recognized as modern classics. Graves's text, which will not be merely an introduction but a separate work of art, a first edition in itself, will surely take its proper place among his other remarkable literary accomplishments. As with many fine art publications of this importance, the pages of the text and the plates of this book will not be bound but will be contained in a very fine handmade linen-covered box. Included with the unbound text and plates will be a booklet containing a smaller version of the text with a photographic catalogue of the pictures for more convenient reading and reference. Only the finest PH neutral, acid-free materials will be used in the printing of the book and the manufacturing of the box that will contain it. The design and printing of the text will be by award-winning book designer and printer, David Holman, of Wind River Press in Austin. Also the design and construction of the elegant box will be handled by Chief Conservator, Craig Jenson, and the staff of the Humanities Research Center library of the University of Texas at Austin.

This great book, Of Birds And Texas, is certain to become a landmark and a classic in the history of Texas publishing. It will represent the result of a unique combination of unique talents drawn from the exacting disciplines of painting, literature, printing and design. This book, then, will be an appropriate monument to celebrate the 1986 Texas Sesquicentennial, the anniversary of Texas Independence, and as such this work of art will have been created to commemorate the past, to celebrate our present, and to provide us and our descendants with a truly exceptional heirloom for the future.

For further information you are invited to call Mr. Ralph Carr at 732-0302.