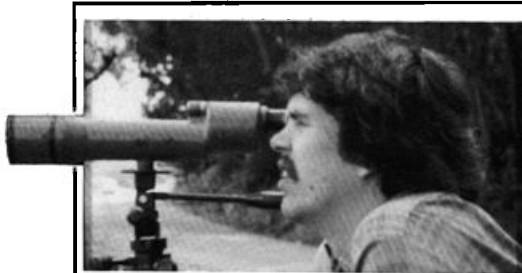


The Well Tempered Line

Art by F. P. (Tony) Bennett, Jr. and Keith Hansen
Text and captions by David DeSante



AT THE AGE OF ONLY 27, KEITH Hansen has received widespread acclaim in the West for his avian illustrations, and with the publication of the *Distributional Checklist of North American Birds*, should soon be nationally recognized as one of America's finest bird artists. Keith developed his skill with a pencil during long school days; his love of birds evolved from woodland walks in his native Maryland

with his older brother and "my great-grandfather's pair of 3X-power opera glasses."

Since 1970, Keith has lived in California, where the richness of the avifauna has matched the productivity of his career. With Rich Stallcup, another prominent West Coast birder, he turns out the identification column, "Focus," for the Point Reyes Bird Observatory newsletter. Additionally, Keith illustrated Stallcup's 1985 *Bird for Real*. In 1985 came *Discovering Sierra Birds* (authored by Edward C. Beedy and Stephen L. Granholm with additional illustrations by Tad Theimer and John Petersen), a fine field-guide featuring 28 Keith Hansen color plates and adorned by a magnificent cover by him. Many more thousands of birders will enjoy Keith's work with the publication in 1986 of the *Distributional Checklist of North American Birds*.

The independent-minded Hansen envisions a life of painting in solitude in the American tropics. For now, he is content to visit the precious Farallon Island, of which he writes, "Where else can you simultaneously see a Black-throated Blue Warbler, a Red Bat, a Northern Saw-whet Owl, a Black Oystercatcher, a Clark's Nutcracker and a Blue Whale, all from one spot?" Keith Hansen's works have appeared previously in *American Birds*, and his "Gray Jays" graced the cover of our 1986 Christmas Bird Count issue.

ONE OF THE TWO GREAT JOYS that Peter Pyle and I experienced in creating the *Distributional Checklist of North American Birds* was that of choosing, and to some extent planning, the content of each of the 51 full-page illustrations in the book. All twenty of the works presented here made their debut in that book. (See the Birders' Bookshelf this issue—S.R.D.) We spent two happy days arranging the potentially pictured species by habitat, by general geographical location, and by specialized birding areas. We wanted birders, no matter where they lived or how much experience they had, to be able to identify closely with at least one of the drawings. Our only constraint was that each species that was illustrated on a page had to be one of the species listed on the facing page. Once we had completed our first mock-up of the entire list, we could then sit back and let our imaginations go wild, a rare luxury and a real joy for "scientists."

The second and greatest joy was when we got our first look at what Tony and Keith had done with our suggestions. We truly were stunned with the accuracy, the detail, and the sheer artistry of their work. We trust that you will enjoy gazing at the splendid sample of drawings presented in these pages as much as Peter and I enjoyed choosing the species to be represented.

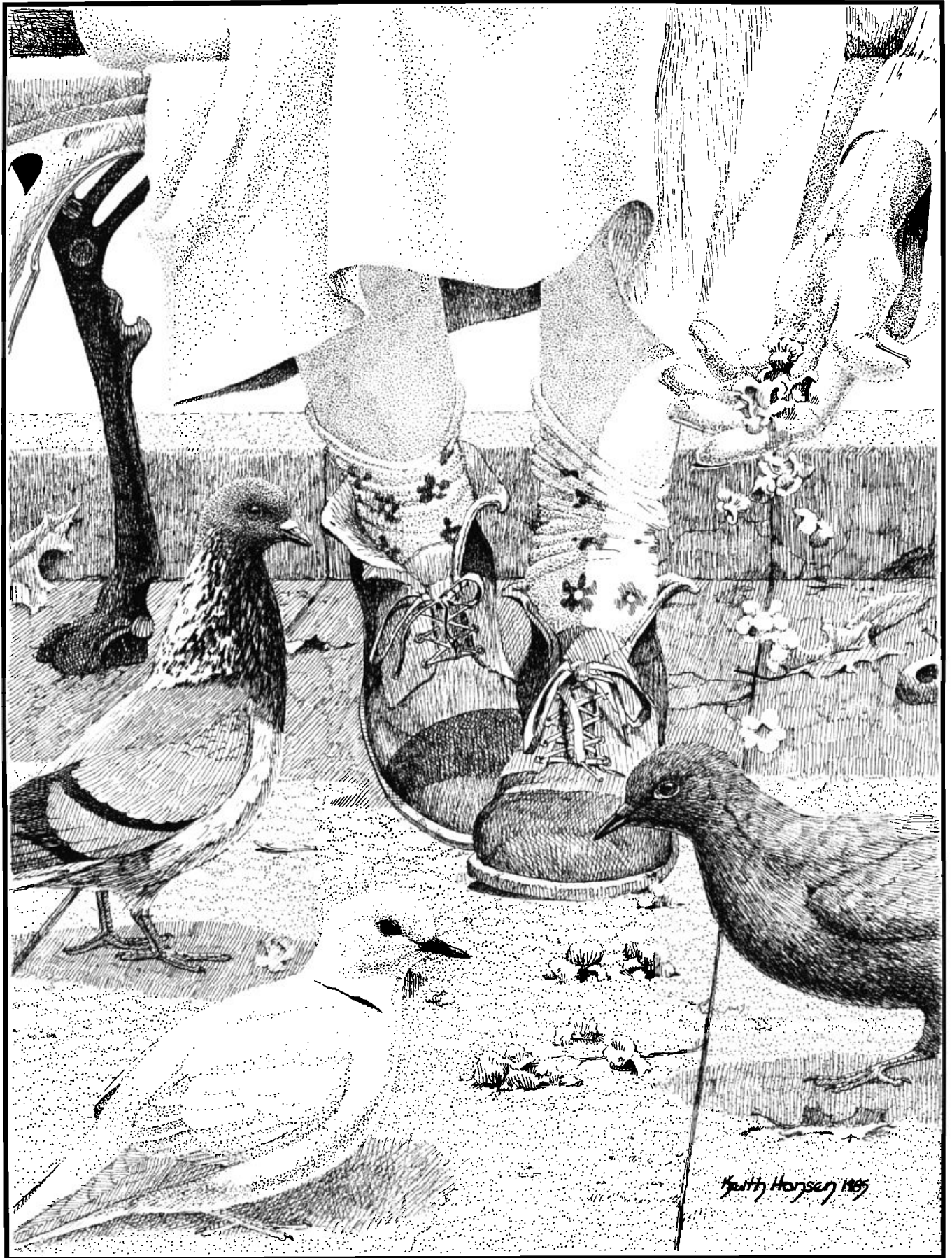
F. P. (Tony) Bennett, Jr.

FP. "TONY" BENNETT has amassed nearly 20 years of experience in drawing and painting birds. This native Texan has lived his entire life in the Lone Star State, and the region's unparalleled variety of bird life quickly drew his attention at an early age. By the time he was 14 years old, Tony had already become "obsessed" with depicting the tropical avifauna, an obsession that still motivates him. He began his formal art education in secondary school and college, which culminated with a B.S. in Commercial Art from Southwest Texas State University, in 1972.

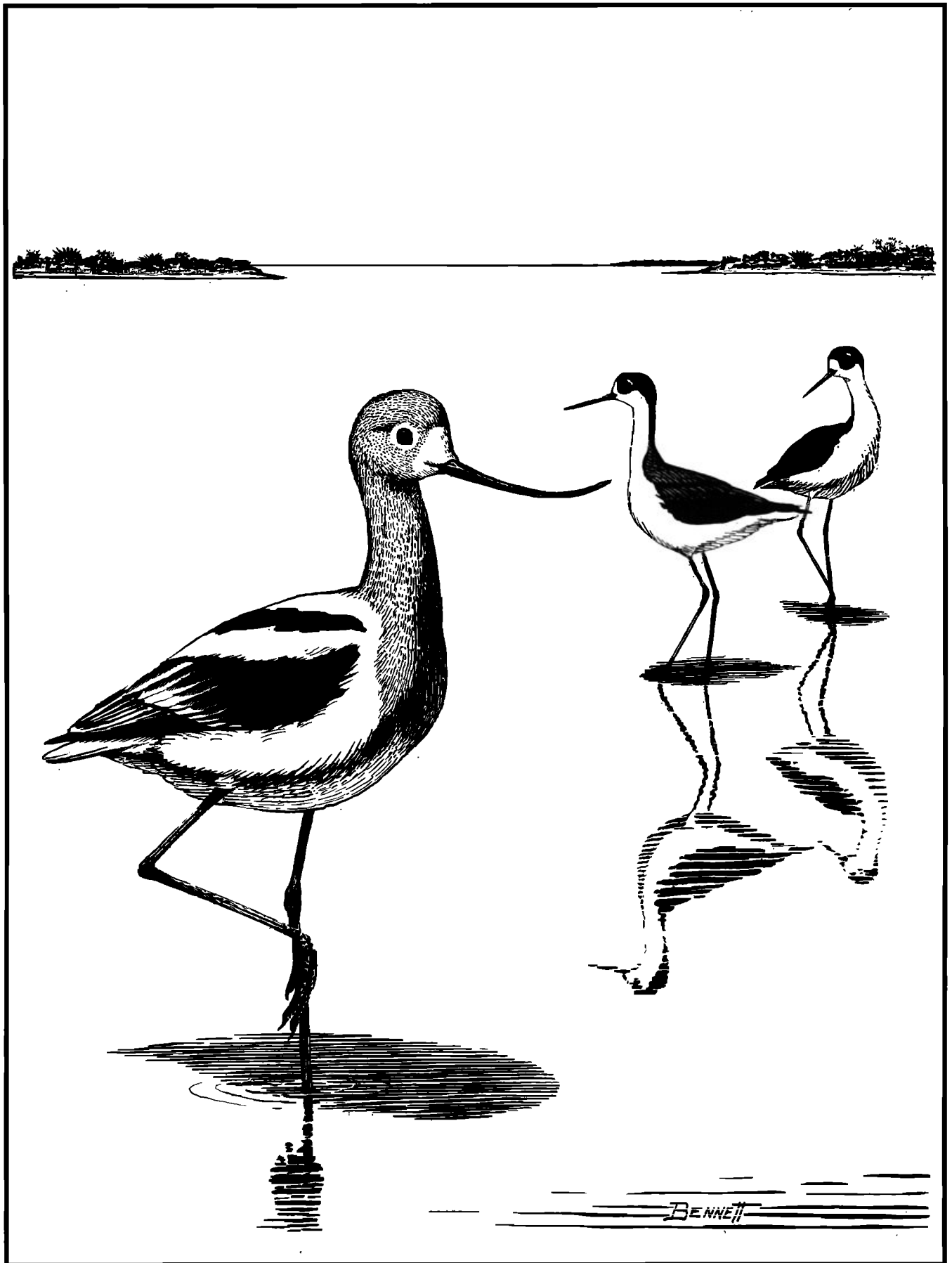
However, the pivotal point in his career arrived in his junior year in college, when he illustrated Irby Davis' *Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Central America*, with no fewer than 48 color plates, plus the cover. Other works have included the revision of the *Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan* by S. Dillon Ripley, the *Distributional Checklist of*

North American Birds, and the *Birds of Peru* is in-progress under the auspices of Louisiana State University. In addition to many other shows his works have appeared at the Leigh Yawky Woodson Art Museum "Birds in Art" exhibit; his watercolors were shown at the 1979 American Ornithologists' Union Convention, the Cincinnati Museum of Natural Science, the Louisiana World's Fair, and his drawings added a welcome touch to our 1986 Christmas Bird Count issue (Vol. 40, No. 4).

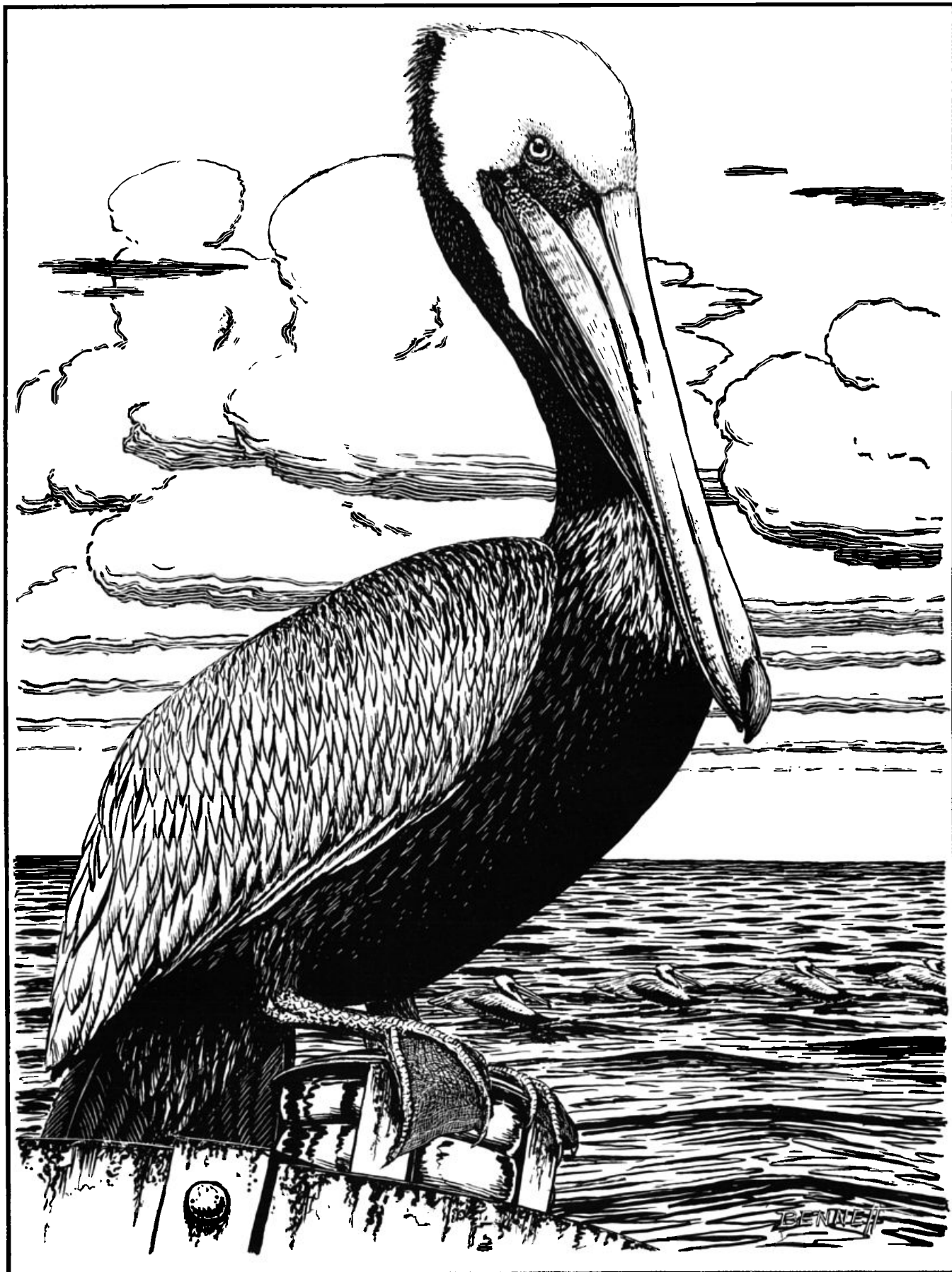
As a natural outgrowth of his efforts, Bennett has cultivated a deep concern for the neotropical forest's rapid disappearance. "I believe realistic paintings showing habitat and an aspect of the life history of a bird or animal will go a long way toward helping prevent the destruction," he says. "I hope my work can contribute to the cause of conservation through education."



When we made our decision to separate introduced from native bird populations, we weren't truly aware of just how many introduced populations there were in North America. It was with a sense of dismay that we first realized how many non-native species we had to illustrate. Then we realized that for many Americans these are the birds that add joy to their lives. So we asked Keith to illustrate some pigeons (and maybe a Ringed Turtle-Dove) being fed by their "bag lady" friend. The result is one of Keith's most sensitive works. Note yet another touch of Keith's special brand of humor: the lady sits pigeon-toed!



The clean, elegant beauty of Tony's breeding-plumaged American Avocet and Black-necked Stilts wading in a shallow embayment somewhere along our southern coasts, echoes, in my mind, the old Shaker song, "Tis a gift to be simple, tis a gift to be free. . . ." Gazing longer, however, makes me feel that at any moment I could be discovered and that the peace of the scene might erupt into strident calls and flashing black and white flight patterns.



We chose the Brown Pelican because of its picturesque yet familiar grotesqueness and the fact that the species played such an important role (through its suffering) toward the banning of DDT. We gave Tony free rein on the design and he produced a truly masterful piece having much the flavor of a fine woodcut yet with incredible detail and fidelity. Note, particularly, the webbing between the toes.



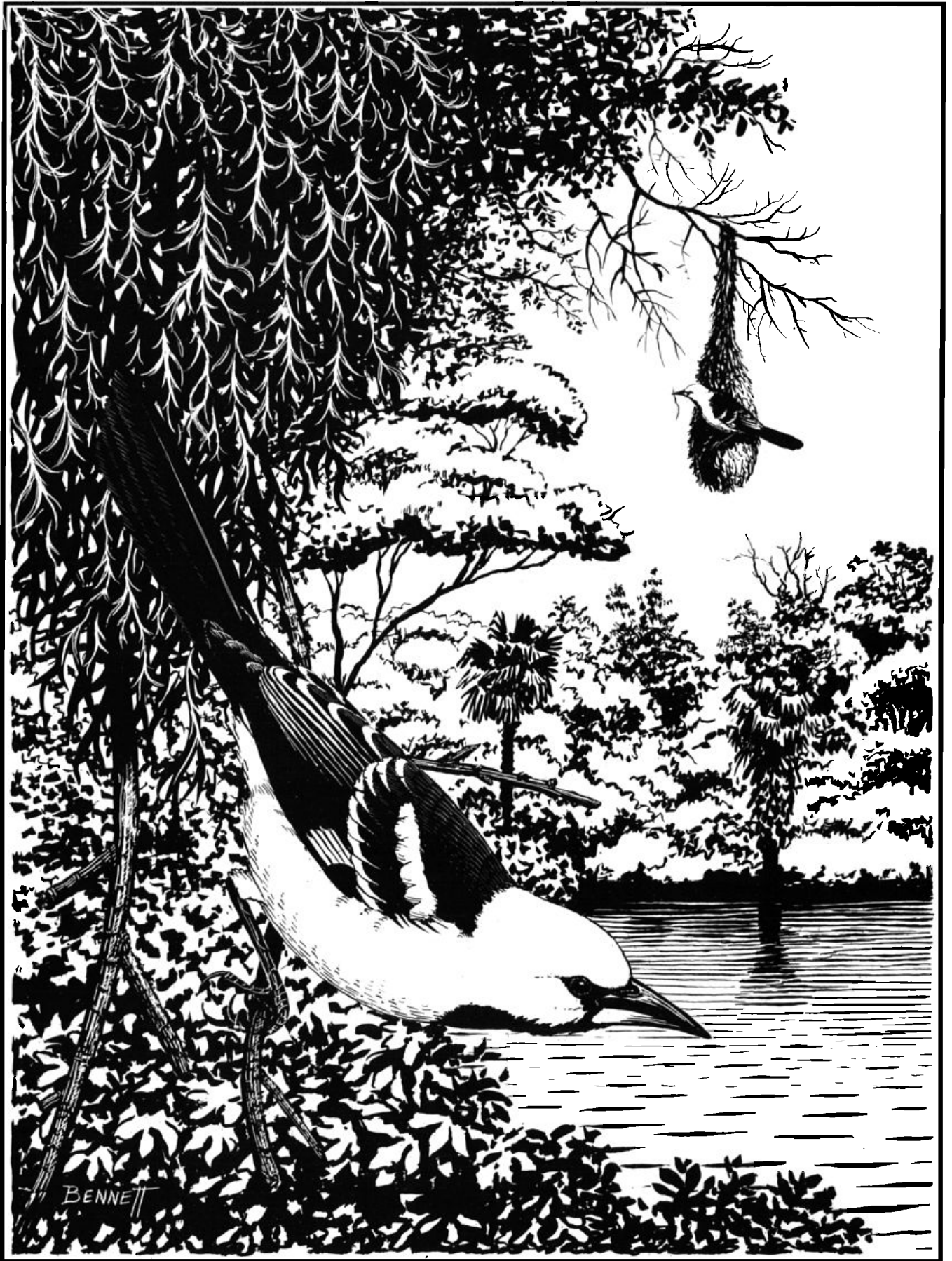
The Black Rail is one of the most elusive and least understood birds in North America. We wanted a scene to evoke the mystery and magic that still surrounds this tiny crane. Keith's depiction wondrously captured this feeling by showing the parent and chicks creeping out of the marsh under a partially obscured full moon. His inclusion of the last chick stumbling and falling, however, adds a delightful bit of realism and humor to the scene that balances the sense of mystery.



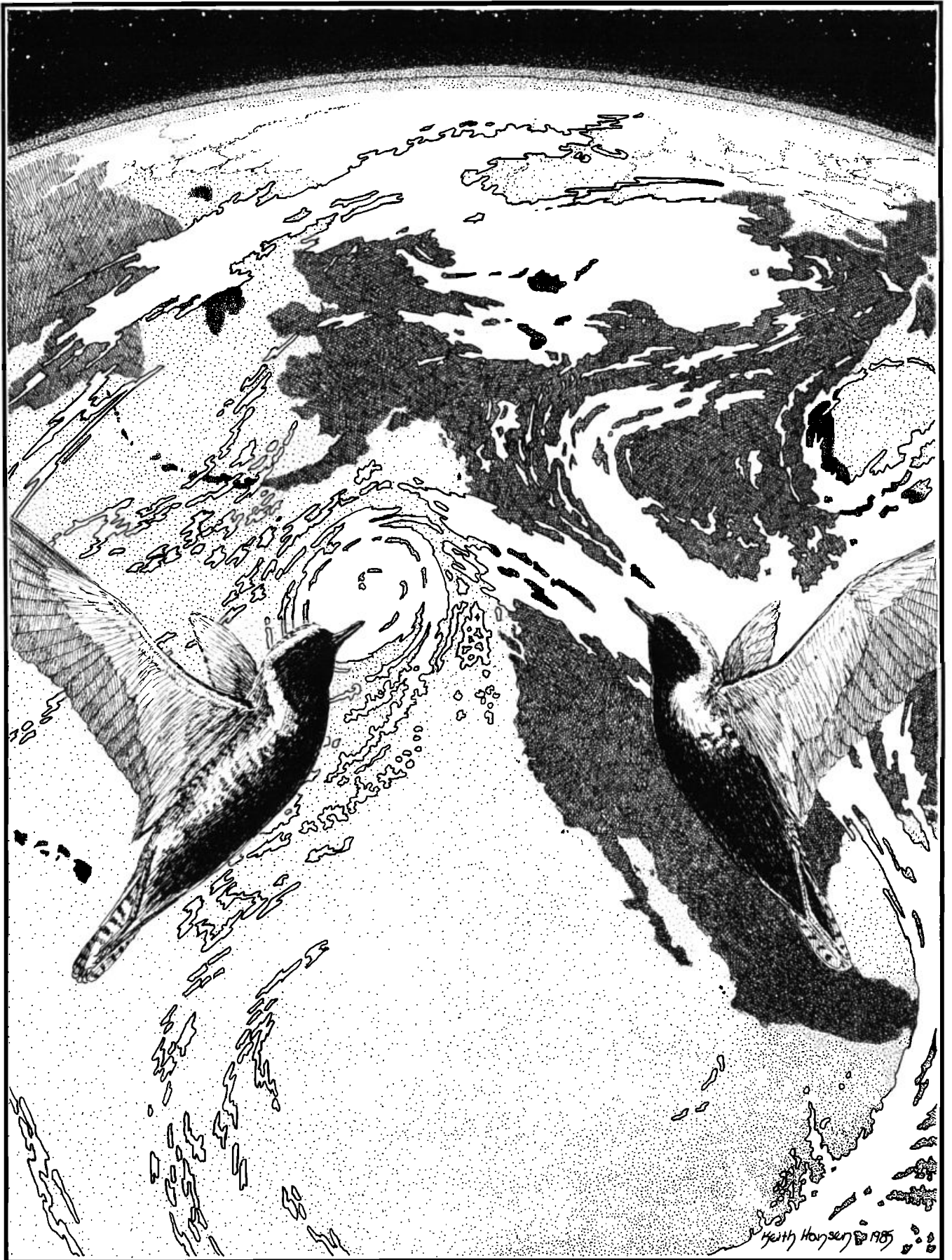
Alcids in breeding plumage have long been favorites of artists and photographers alike. We felt, however, that everyone was familiar with scenes of puffins, murres and auklets on their nesting cliffs, so we opted for a tribute to the last North American species to give up the secrets of its nest, the Marbled Murrelet. The nest and chick were drawn by Keith from photographs of the first nest found in Big Basin State Park, California. How many seabird biologists would have believed such a scene a mere 20 years ago? How many of us can truly fathom it now?



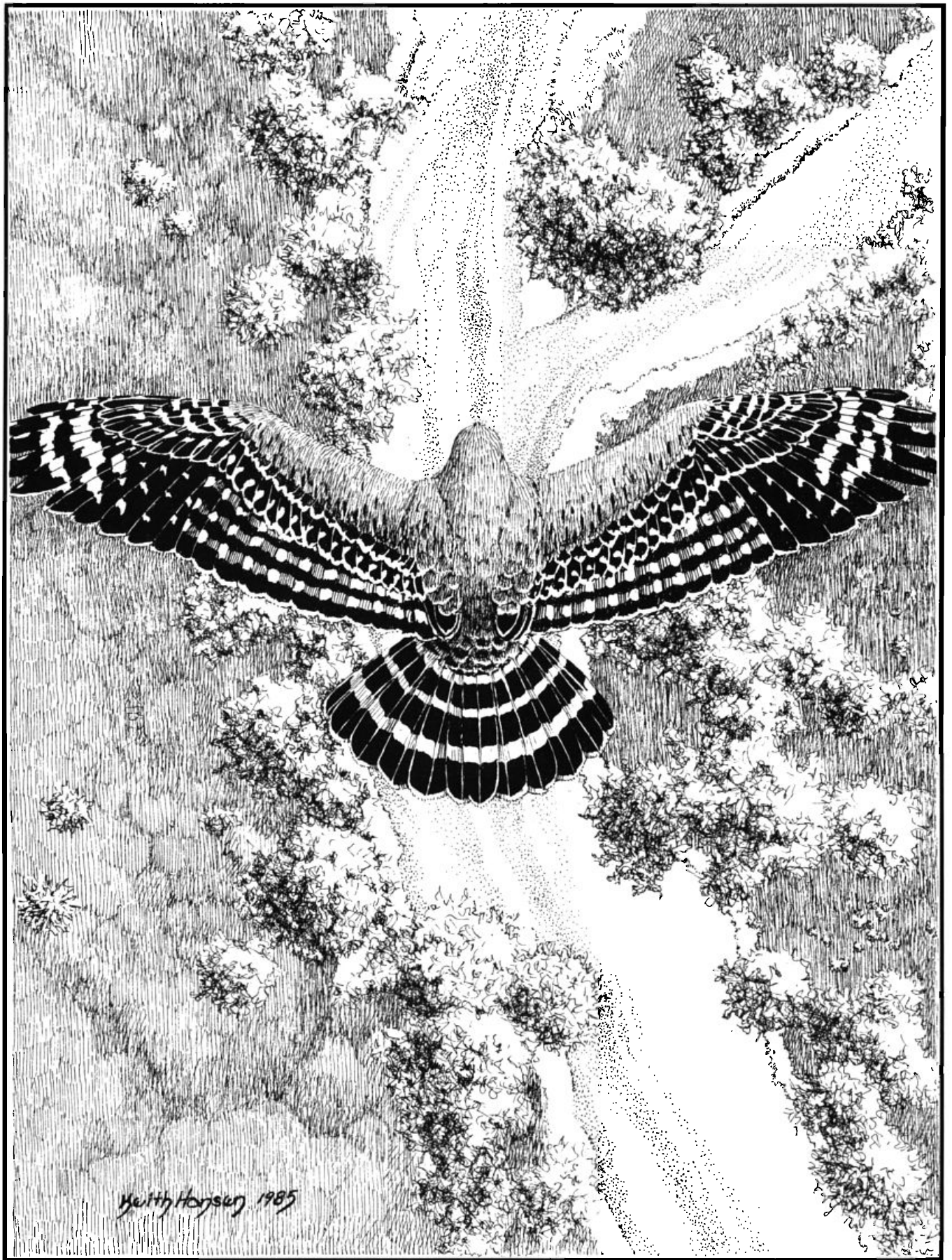
We asked Tony to do our "southern cypress swamp" scene, chose the Anhinga and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron to represent it, and then held our breath for two years hoping that both species would end up being listed on the same page (they were—the first and last species on the page). Tony's confident command of scratchboard and his use of stark blacks and whites make this rendition one of the most striking and dramatic in the book.



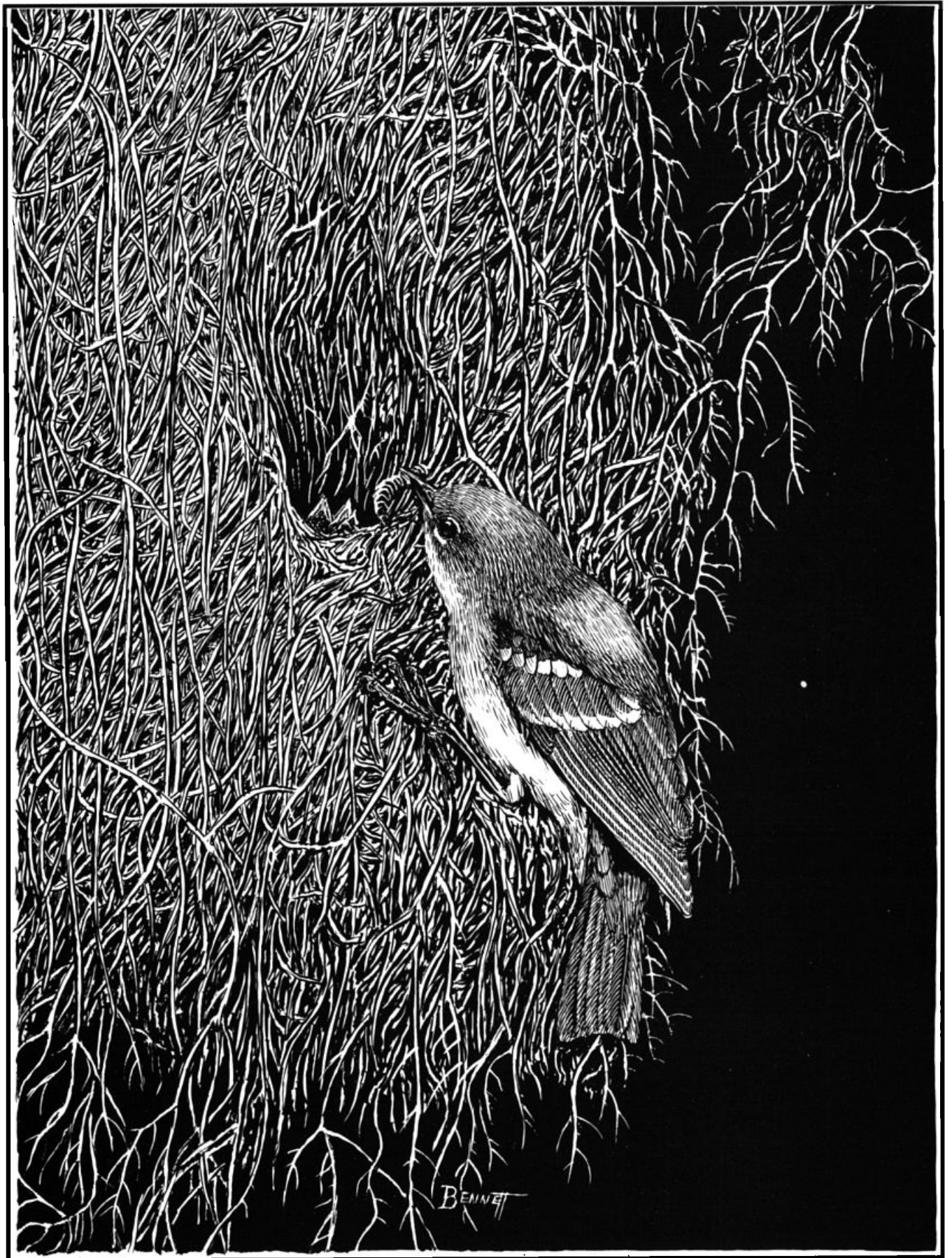
Tony has been a long time resident of the lower Rio Grande Valley and has watched in sadness as his beloved woodlands have been cleared and his magical resacas have been drained and channelled in the name of progress. The lush sparkling background for his magnificent Altamira Orioles, with its endangered native Sabal Palms, reminds us of just how much we have lost and how courageously we must fight to protect what is left.



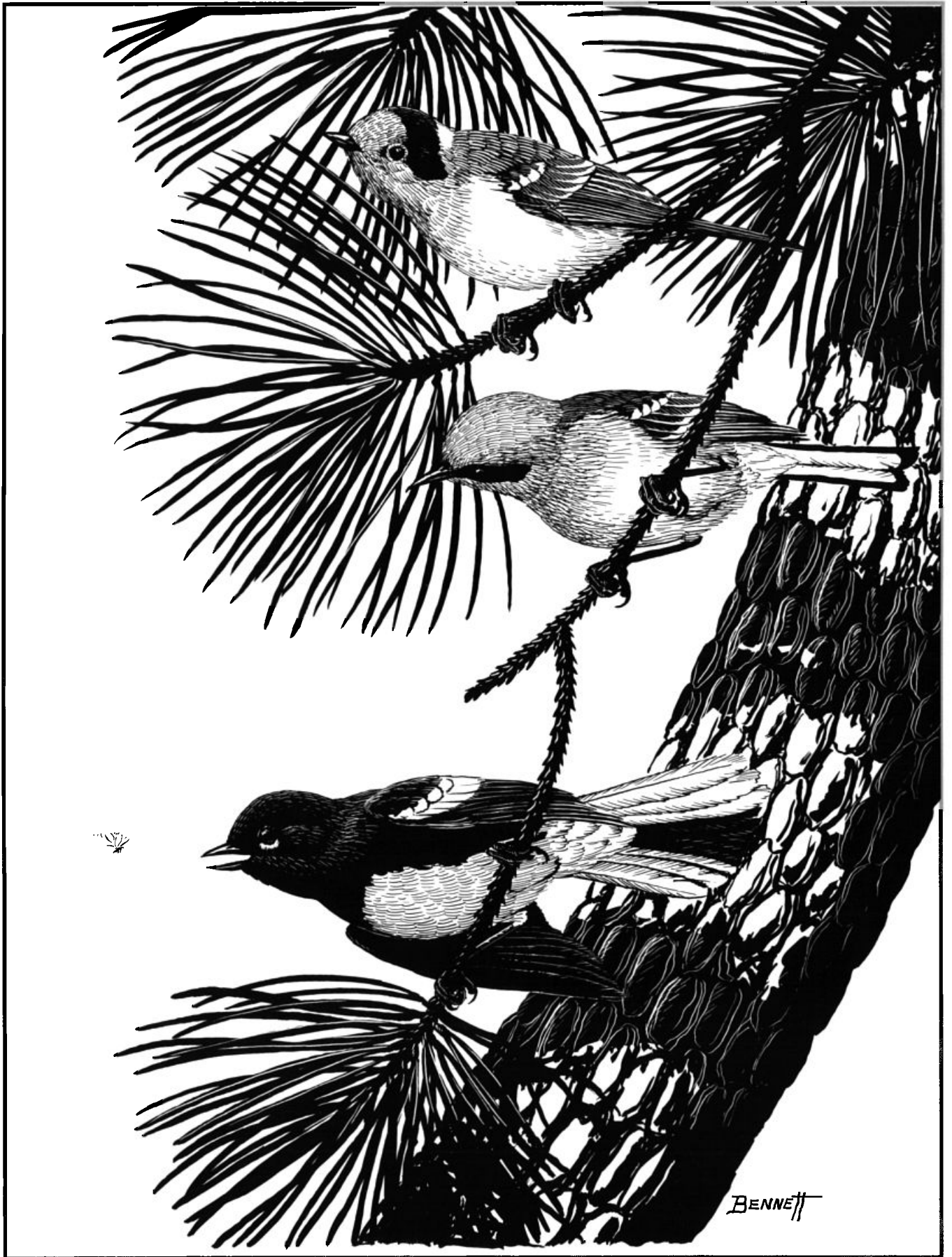
Some ornithologists favor the splitting into separate species the two races of Lesser Golden-Plovers. While we may not yet be convinced, we do agree that their very different migration routes and winter homes are notable. We asked Keith to illustrate with a global perspective of the earth with dominica flying up over the Texas coast and fulva leaving Hawaii for its Alaskan breeding grounds. We were stunned and deeply moved by the accuracy and geomancy (earth magic, the ancient philosophy of existing in harmony with natural patterns) of his work.



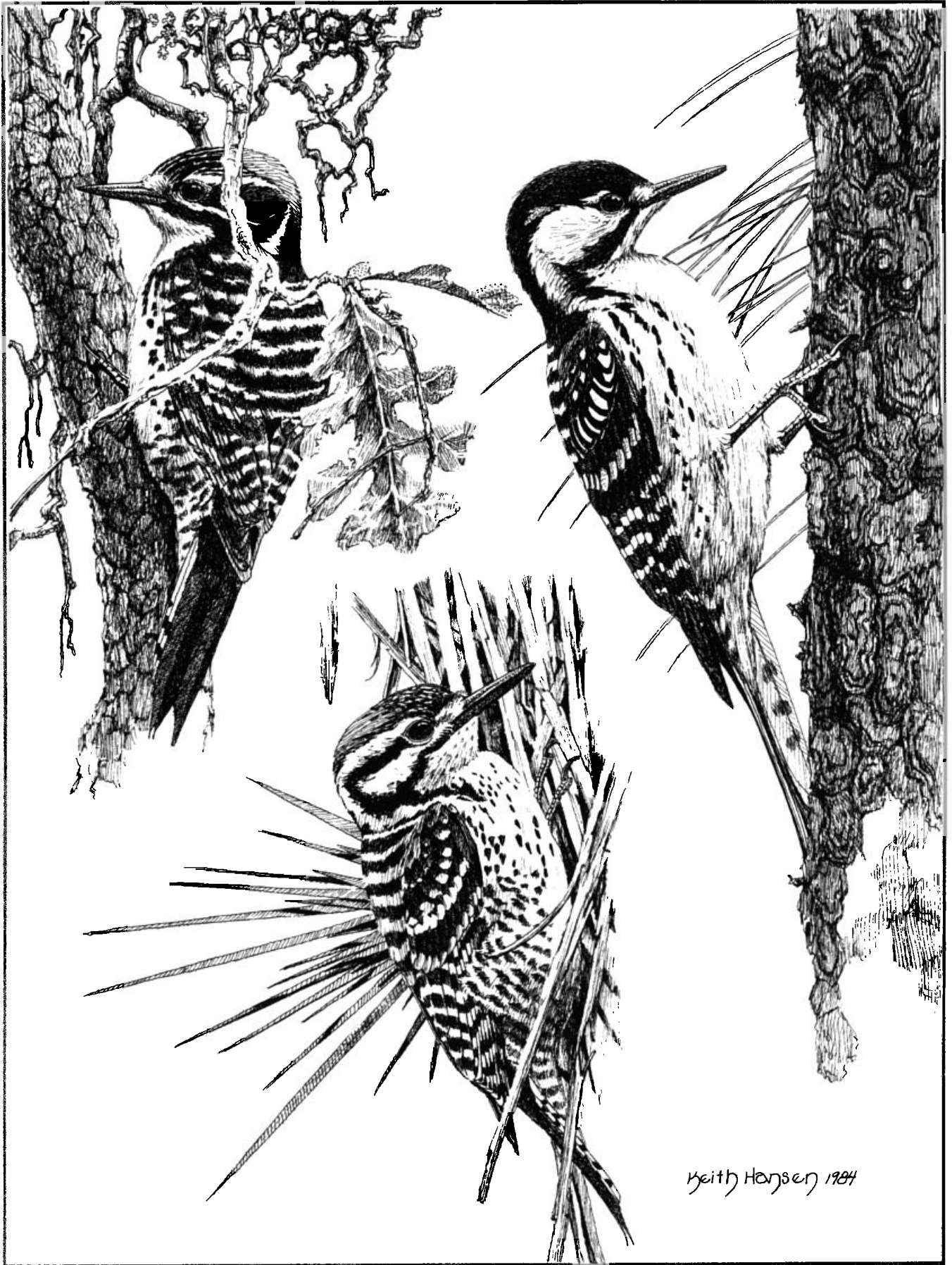
The Red-shouldered Hawk, a common species for many observers in North America, may well be one of the world's most handsome raptors. We envisioned one sweeping up into a riparian tree showing the striking complexity of its flight pattern. Keith took this idea one step further and illustrated a soaring Red-shouldered Hawk—from above. It is certainly one of his finest and most dramatic pieces.



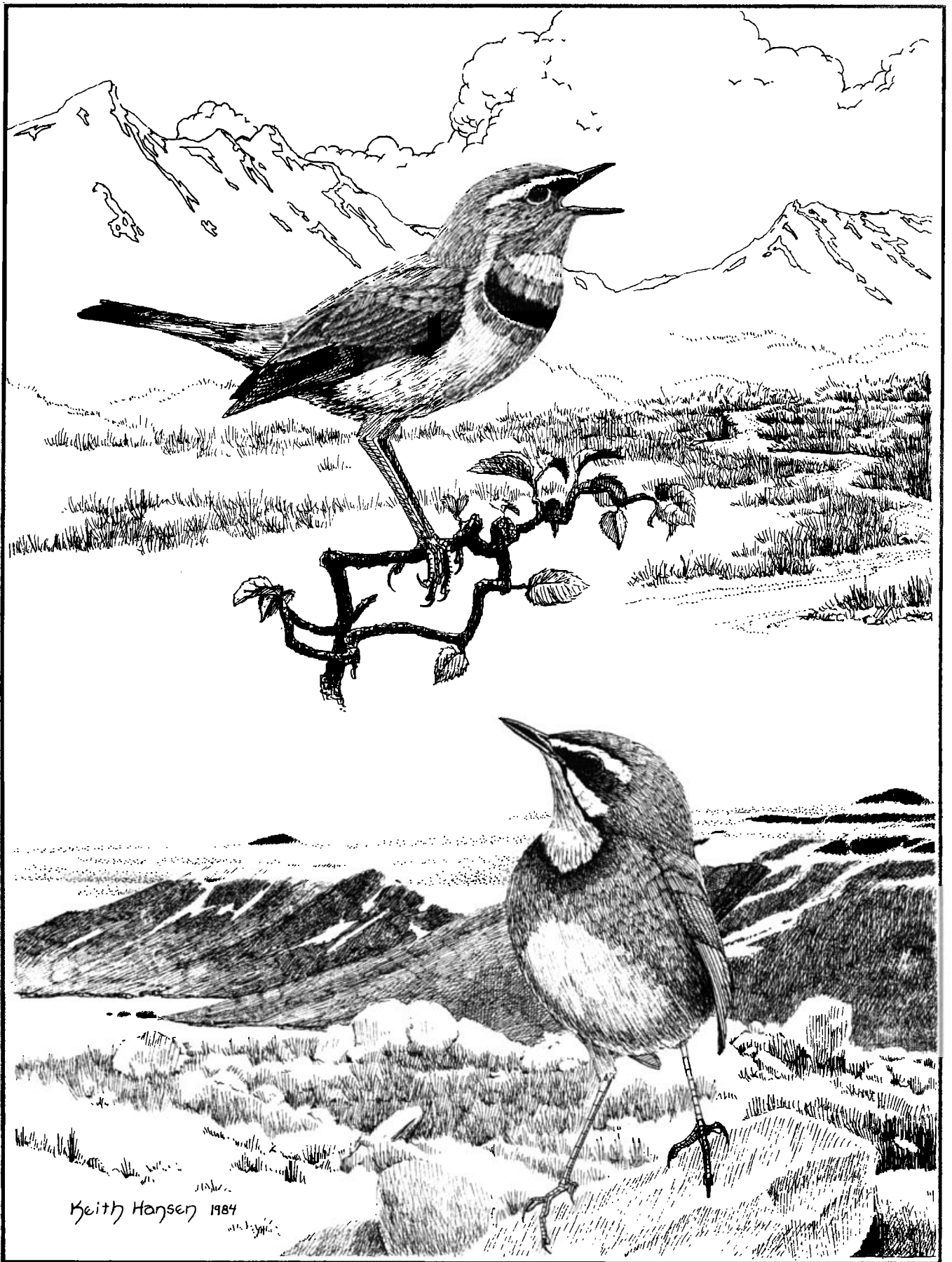
We have long felt that bird books have always placed far too much emphasis on the gaudy plumages of male birds and neglected the more subtle blendings of beauty in their female counterparts. To counteract this trend and to balance the yin and yang we started our series on wood warblers with a demure female Northern Parula at her nest in Spanish-moss. Tony's delicate representation of this amazing airplant is wondrously complex yet elegantly simple.



Southeastern Arizona is a mecca for North American birders. Here, species of some two dozen sorts, that are all but rarities elsewhere in North America, cavort commonly. Three of the most eagerly sought are the Red-faced and Olive warblers and the Painted Redstart. Tony has exquisitely placed all three together in a single tree somewhere in the magic mountains of that enchanted land.



We had a hard time deciding which woodpecker to illustrate—they all have so much artistic appeal. So we decided on the three small ladder-backed types, arranged geographically, and left Keith to provide the rest of the design. This he did in a beautifully simple manner using only brief hints of their typical habitats. The elegant placement of the oak, the yucca and the pine provides the mastery in this depiction of Nuttall's, Ladder-backed and Red-cockaded woodpeckers.



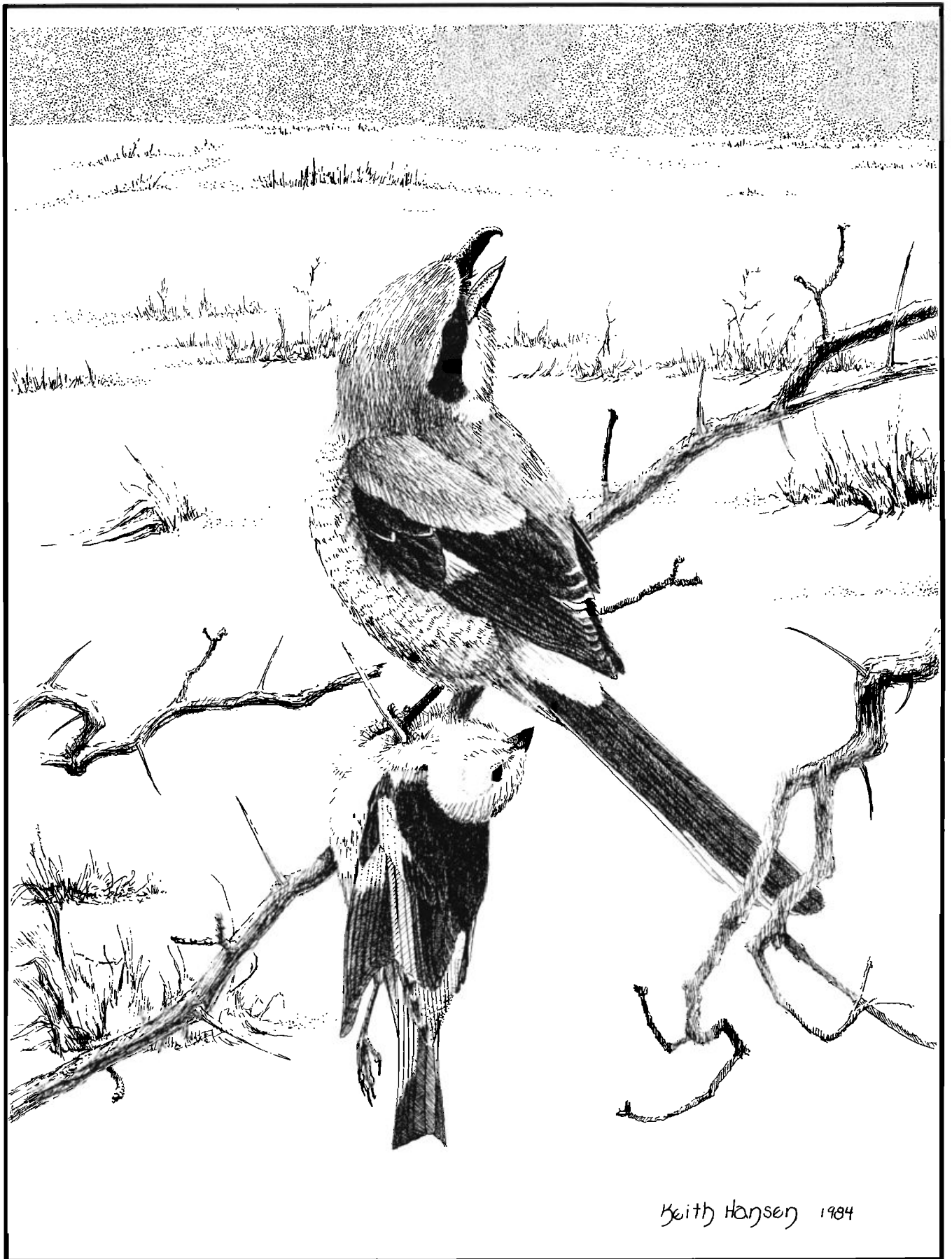
We needed to do one for those lucky souls who get to venture to the far reaches of Alaska in their search for birds—and for all of the stay-at-homes that can only drool at pictures and envy those who go. The singing Bluethroat is in Denali National Park, the Siberian Rubythroat is most certainly on Attu, and we all are transported a little closer to Alaska by Keith's artistry.



The Say's Phoebe was our choice as representative of the hot, arid, open country of the West. Tony's depiction of this species on its wintering grounds in mid-day siesta-time is one of our favorites. It has great depth, not only in space, but in other dimensions as well. You can literally feel the warmth and hear the stillness in the scene.

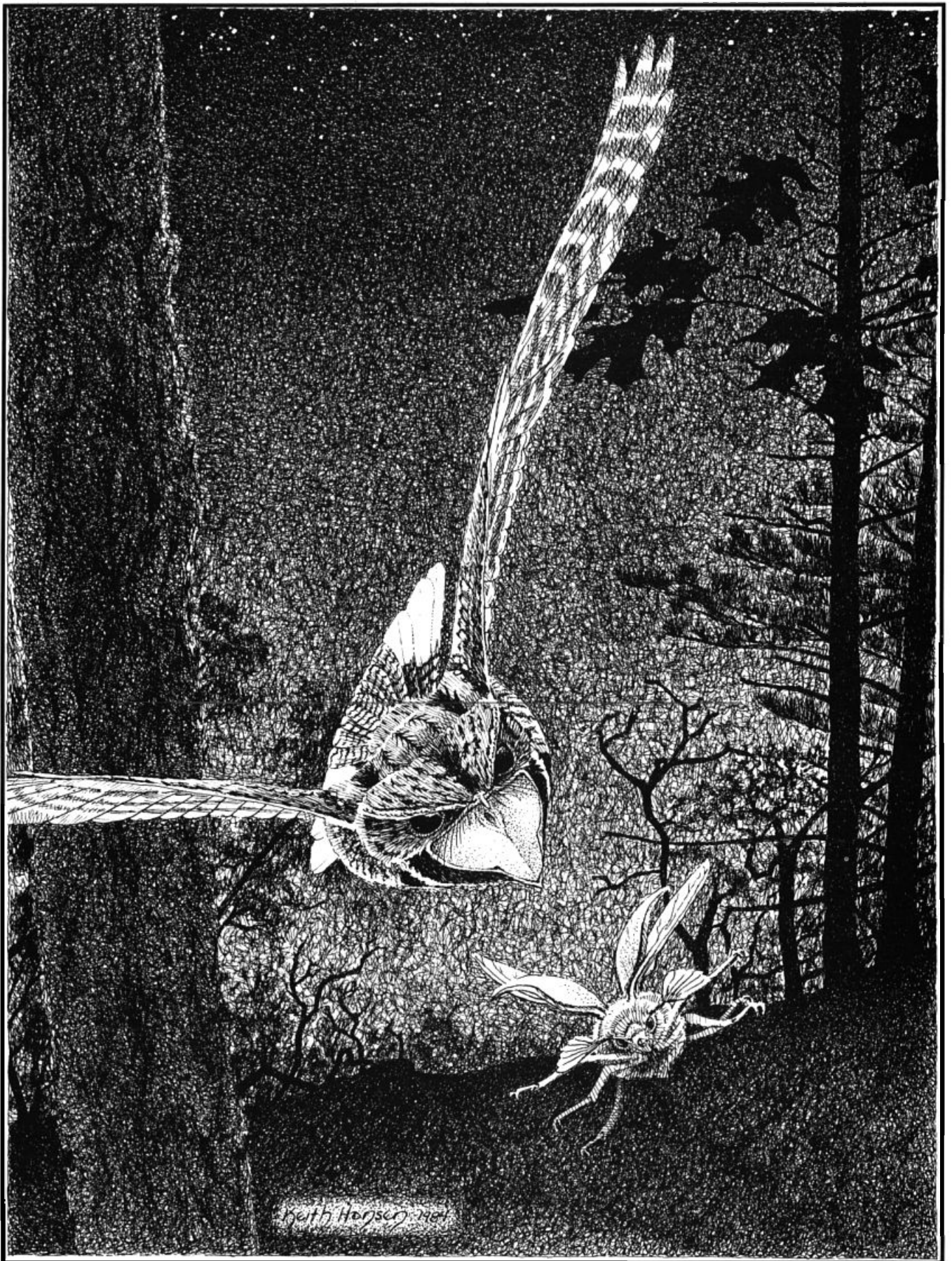


The shape and pattern of Ocotillo is as characteristic and as striking a symbol of the American deserts as is the Black-throated Sparrow. In this drawing Tony has elegantly captured the essence of William Leon Dawson's writings of this sparrow (Birds of California, 1923): "Silence, the dearest simplicity of all, broods over the desert, yet before its comfort stales, the occasional offerings of some of the desert's mild children stand forth in naked, beautiful simplicity."



Keith Hansen 1984

We wanted to represent a winter scene for all those folk living in the northern part of the continent where winter birdlife is often anything but abundant. When Keith first showed us his dramatic Northern Shrike with an impaled male Snow Bunting I said, "Keith! Snow Bunting isn't listed on the adjacent page. It shouldn't be in the picture." Keith responded with a twinkle in his eye, "There's a message here. You can't count a dead bird."



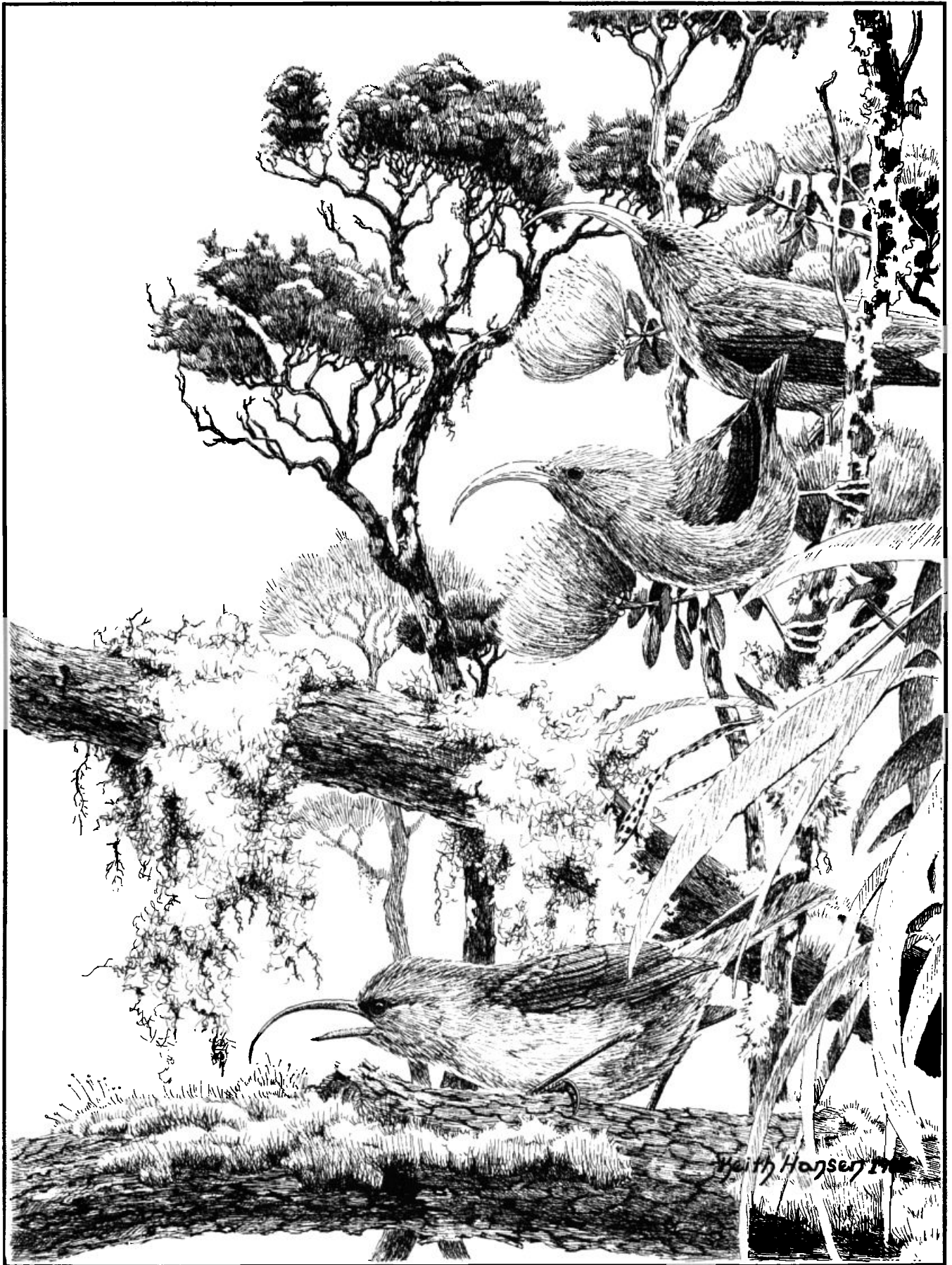
"For a young artist, he sure has a lot of guts," was Tony Bennett's first response to Keith's Whip-poor-will flying out of the page into the face of the observer while chasing a June-bug. Peter and I chose the Whip-poor-will but we provided no information on how to do it. The concept was entirely and unmistakably "Keith Hansen."



Sugar-powered, belligerent and totally outrageous are Tony's three south-western male hummingbirds: Magnificent, Blue-throated and White-eared. The action is real and the wings fairly blur as these aggressive, iridescent and seemingly impossible products of natural selection jostle for position at a patch of flowers.



Tony lives with two Red-crowned Parrots, one for over 15 years. These amazingly intelligent and deeply sensitive birds are native to northeastern Mexico where their very existence is threatened by rampant habitat destruction. Heartbreakingly, the day may soon come when more Red-crowns exist in introduced than in native populations. These pairs could be near Miami, or near Pasadena, or near Harlingen, Texas, where some of the breeding birds may have arrived naturally from Mexican populations.



To me, the most striking feature of Keith's Hawaiian honeycreeper depiction is that the pen strokes making up the adult Iiwi are virtually identical to those making up the flower heads of the Ohia tree, the bird's major food source, which are superimposed against its throat and vent. Only in seeing this did I realize what a powerful statement Keith had made, for in a very real sense, the Iiwi is a functioning part of the Ohia and could not exist without it, just as the Akiapolaau could not exist without the Koa tree, the long slender leaves of which drape across its wings and tail.