



VOLUME 51: NO. 5  
WINTER 1997 ISSUE  
THE NESTING SEASON  
June 1–July 31, 1997

# field notes

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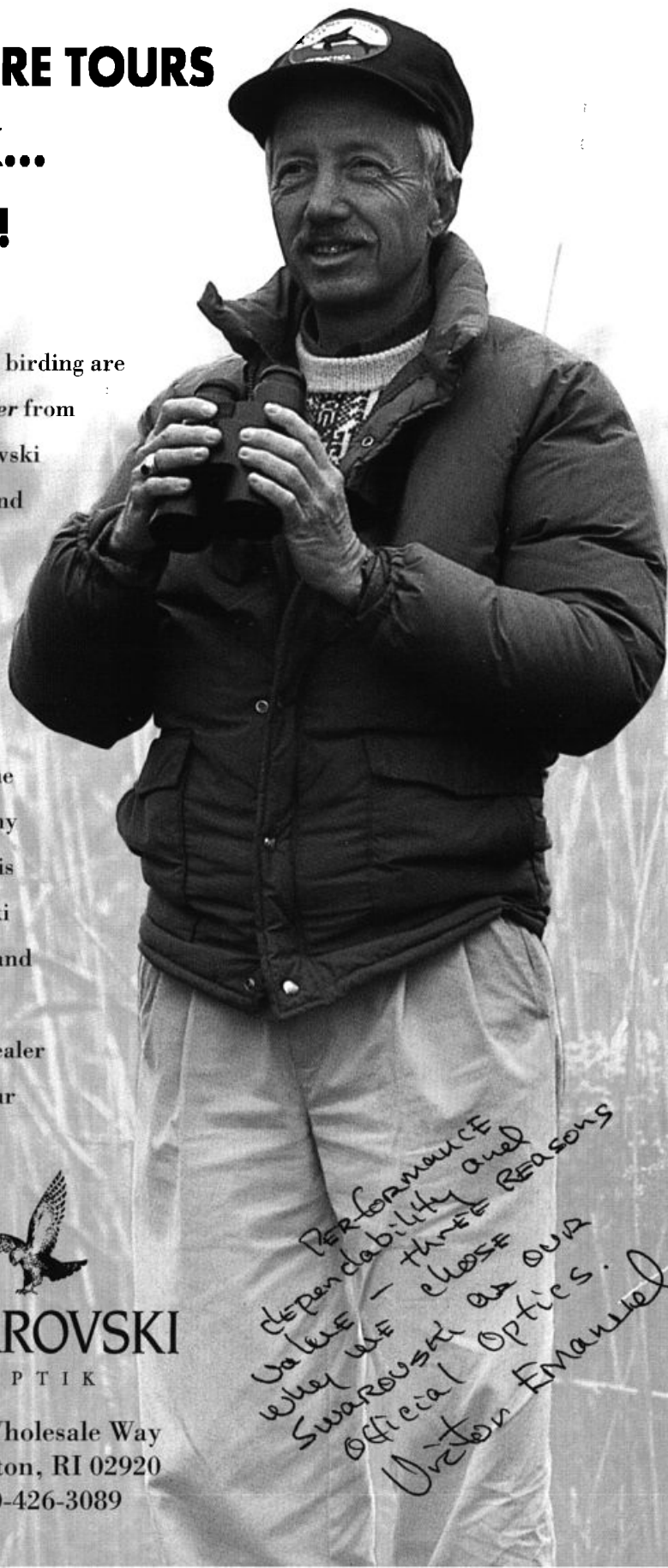
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## ON THE COVER

The thorny woods along the Rio Grande in southernmost Texas have produced many rare birds over the years, but perhaps none to rival the discovery made by John and Paula Wright and their son Nathan on December 26, 1996. While touring the loop road at Bentsen State Park, the Wrights were pleased to spot a Gray Hawk (*Asturina nitida*) harassing an owl in a tree. Then they took a second look at the owl.

Stygian Owl (*Asio stygius*) has a wide range in the American tropics, from Mexico to Argentina, and it is even thought to wander somewhat, but it had never been found anywhere close to Texas. Probably no one would have picked it as a potential vagrant to the ABA Checklist Area. The full story of this first U.S. record is given by John and Paula Wright, in an article beginning on page 950 in this issue.

The silvery patch on its forehead is distinctive, but otherwise this species might be taken for a blackened version of Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*). Its overall dark color accounts for the name 'Stygian', a reference to the dark and sinister regions along the River Styx. In Greek mythology, those unfortunate souls who were ferried across the Styx were on their journey into Hades. Birders who happened to be in Stygian territory on that day in December may have felt that they were in heaven instead. One of those birders was Jim Culbertson, a talented photographer visiting from Merritt Island, Florida, who took the portrait on our cover.



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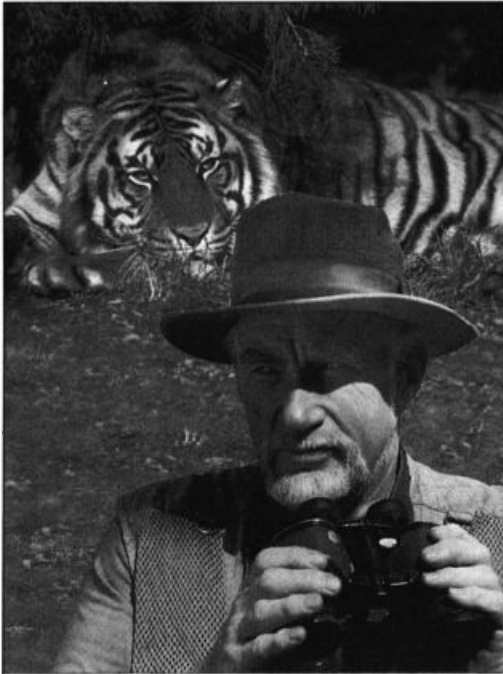
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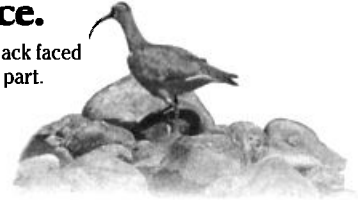
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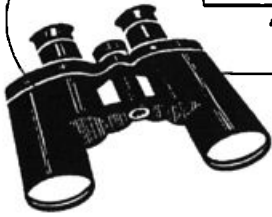
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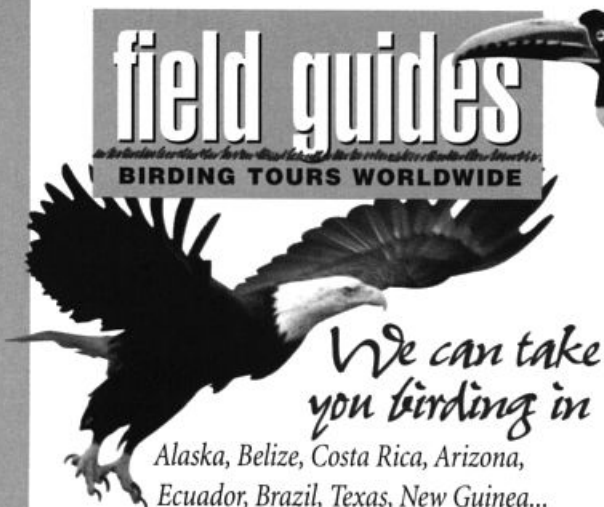
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The plumage of the White-tailed Ptarmigan changes constantly with the seasons of the year. From its pure white appearance in November through February, it molts into breeding plumage around March. The colors are generally black and grey with many white-tipped feathers. Another molt in August brings autumn plumage of grey, brown and white, which helps the Ptarmigan blend in with the gray, lichen-stained rocks.



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