

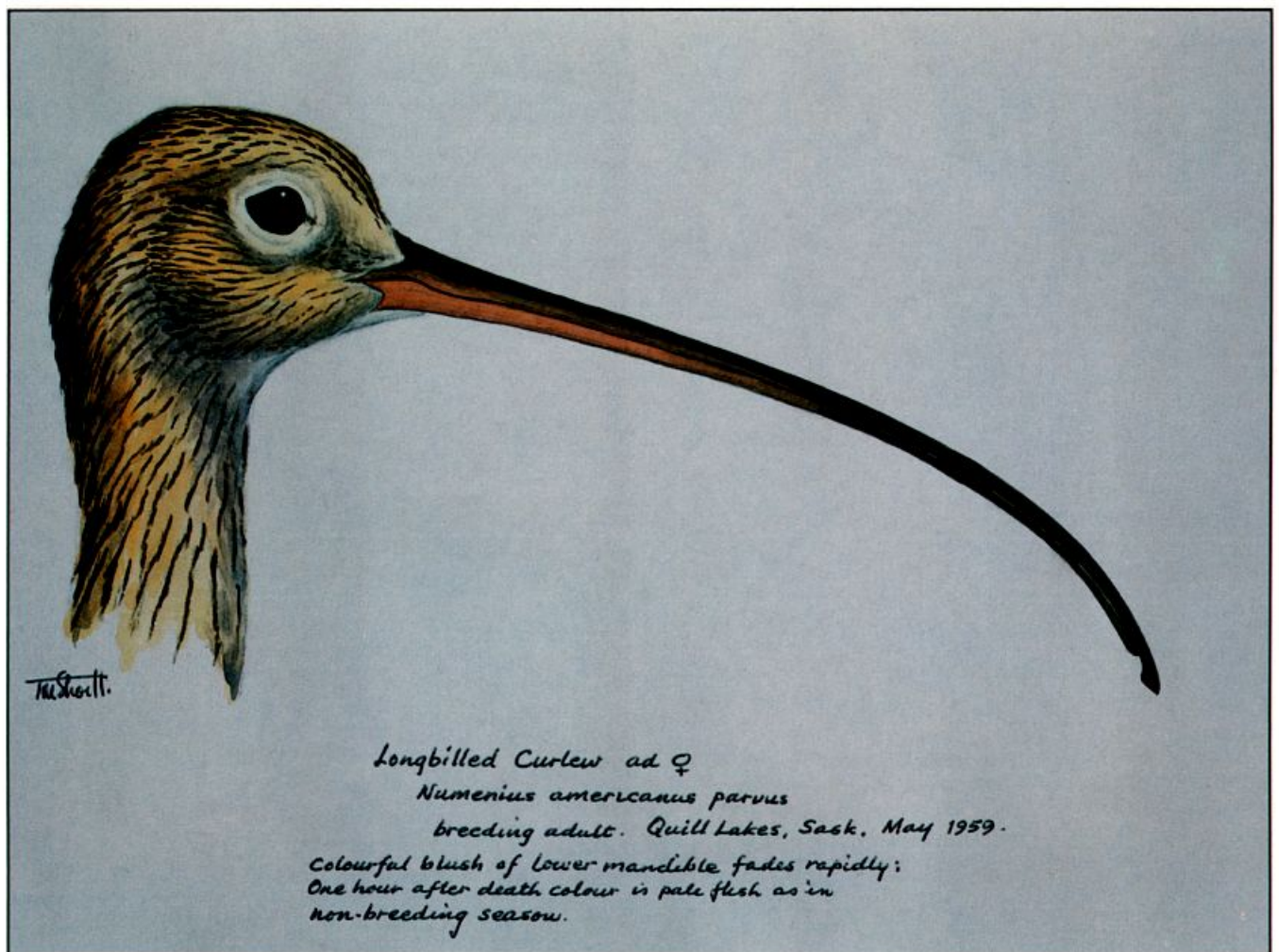
From the sketchbooks of Terence Michael Shortt



It is with the greatest sense of pride that AMERICAN BIRDS begins its 40th volume by bringing to you a small sampling of the work of Terence M. Shortt. Throughout a lifetime devoted to the profession of ornithological illustrator, he has attained the highest position of honor within scientific and artistic circles, and is accorded the inestimable respect of his contemporaries. Shortt, more than any other, has recorded Canadian fauna and flora by exquisitely illustrating what he felt could best be explained visually. His wildlife studies are all executed with scientific precision and artistic sensitivity. His depictions of birds in their natural habitats are infused with a sense of movement and vitality not usual in the works of others. Through decades of the most energetic application, he has cultivated his special talent for capturing the individual characteristics and personality of each species to a level where mere imitators are left in the shameful shade. Here is a man who has, throughout his long and successful career, presented a fresh look at Canadian wildlife. His style is sure and direct. His output has been prodigious.

His dramatic and elegant portrayals of birds have and will continue to endure the test of time. Is it any wonder that Roger Tory Peterson has called him "The Dean of Canadian bird portraitists"? As one of his critics puts it, Shortt is "the professional's professional."

Terence Shortt was born March 1, 1911, on the outskirts of Winnipeg, Manitoba. His upbringing was patterned after the interests of his parents. The exposure to and sharing of his father's free, outdoor lifestyle blended with an atmosphere in which his mother taught him early the use of watercolors, cultivated and encouraged his own passionate desire to view and paint wildlife. Well before he was even a teenager Terry took to field and stream to record all that he saw. He rapidly developed the skill to draw animals and plants after carefully observing them as they lived. He not only closely watched and noted each species' shape and coloring, but also its movements, its habitats, and whatever set it apart from other species. In his autobiography *Not as the Crow Flies*, he identifies this



Shortt painted the head of this Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) with fidelity and attention to its exquisite details.



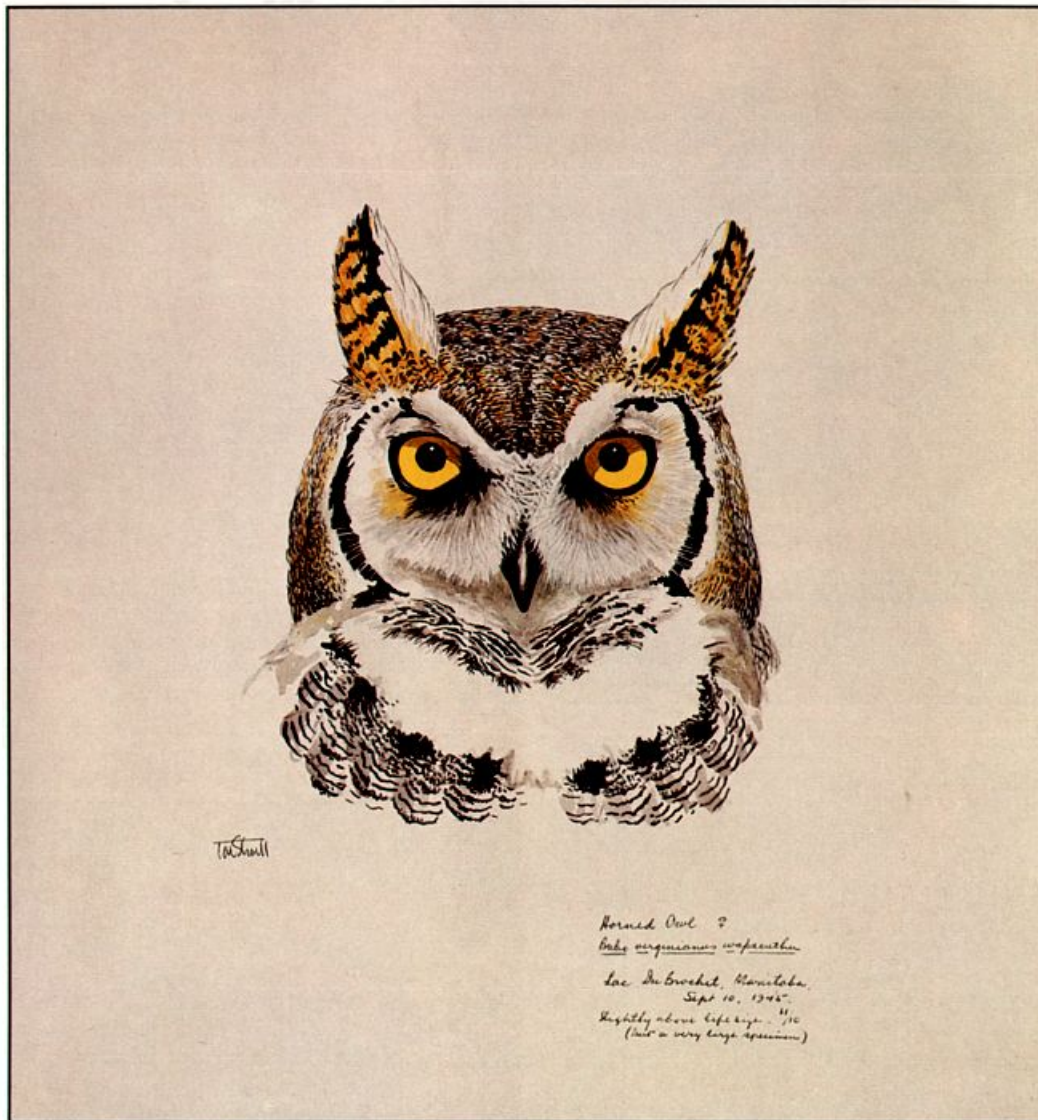
Wood Duck, *Aix sponsa* ♂
Lake St. Anne, 80km Cr. Ont. Oct 26 1950

*Shortt has recorded the essence of the myriad species he encountered, not the least of which is the visually satisfying and ever-appealing rendition of the male Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*).*



Horned Grebe ad ♂
(*Colymbus auritus*)
Lac La Pense, Chipewyan, Alberta.
June 28, 1945.

*Terence Shortt has sketched from life the flight, postures, stances, and plumages of more than 2000 bird species and has so mastered his technique that he has painted the full portraits of more than one-half of these while in the field. His Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*), perfectly illustrates his attention to balance and detail.*



*Shortt's many field experiences were so rich that he reacted to the stimulus by producing a breathtaking and varied series of color studies and sketches. One of our most preferred is this portrait of a Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*), drawn in September 1945, in Manitoba. This female is of the extremely pale, extensively white, very seldom seen *wapacuthu* subspecies, found only in northern Canada.*

guiding force: "From a day in my twelfth year when I discovered the splendour of a common crow, I have been engrossed by the expression of birds." His love of nature, his pleasure of being outside, and the desire to capture it on paper led him, at the age of 15, to enroll at the Winnipeg School of Art, where he studied for the next few years.

During the early 1930s, he gained added experience in sketching birds and making accompanying notes as a means of study with two outstanding Toronto artists, Roy Fisher and Luke Bradley. During these young years he developed a thorough devotion to precise detail and an ability to portray birds in their most charming yet most characteristic postures, along with a broad base of field experience.

In 1933, Shortt was appointed artist-ornithologist with

the Division of Birds at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. He has lived in the city of Toronto, Canada, ever since.

In 1938, although he was a mere 27 years old, Terry Shortt was chosen from a group of many other artists by the Federal Government to accompany the official party on the Hudson's Bay Company ship "Nascopie," which was to sail to the Arctic Archipelago and Northern Greenland. Shortt's cabin-mate on this voyage was the noted artist, Frederick Horseman Varley. These two artists were commissioned to collect bird specimens for the R.O.M. and to record an artistic and scientific chronicle of the three-month voyage.

There is a humorous story told about Shortt on that voyage, which only underscores the man's wonderful unassuming sense of humility. Varley, who painted mostly

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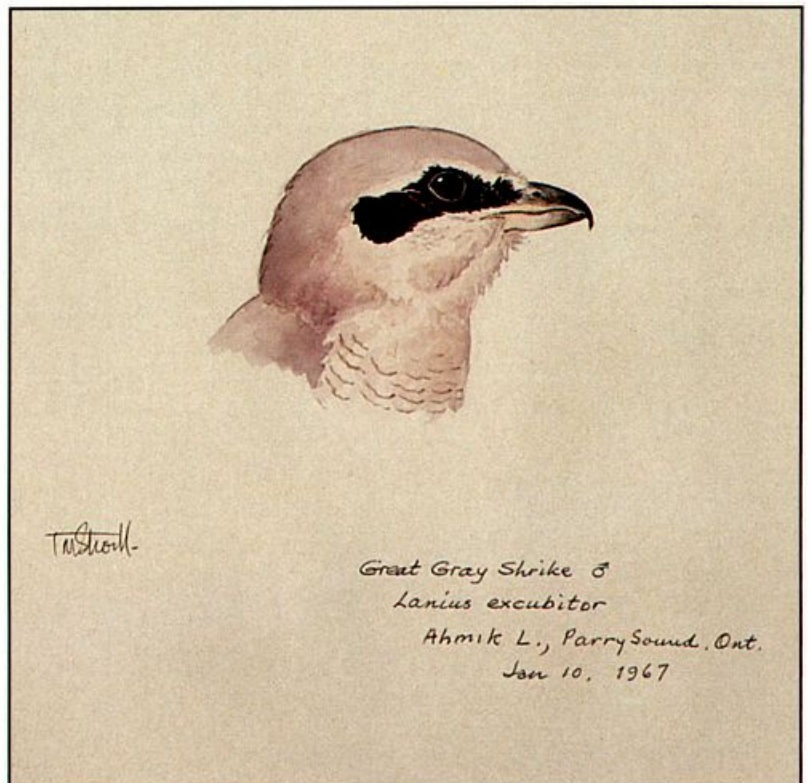


These field studies of the adult male Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*) and female Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*) were rendered on location and are representative of Shortt's excellence and concentration on natural things in their own habitats.





Shortt's delicacy in handling the coloring of birds is nowhere more evident than in the head of the male Clark's Nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*) and the male Great Gray [Northern] Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*).



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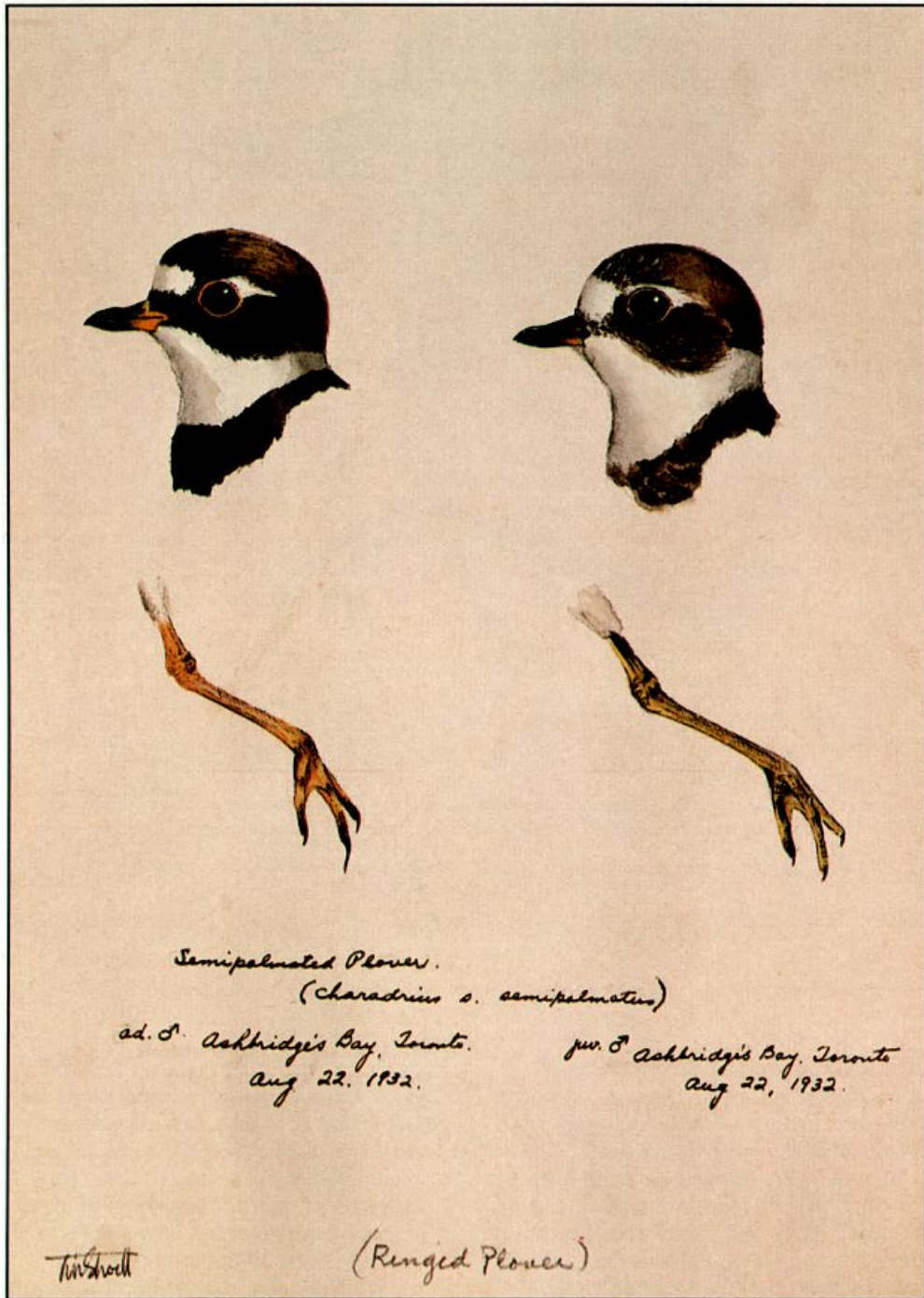
*The raucous, proud demeanor of the Steller's Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) is beautifully captured in this 1959 painting.*

in oils, might never have known that Terry was an artist and interpreter of birds, and not merely a museum technician, if he, Varley, had not been undergoing problems with his oils drying, owing to the Arctic climate. Finally, Varley's frustration encouraged Shortt to bring out his own watercolors and papers, revealing himself as an artist. The two became friends and Varley was, for those three months, Shortt's informal but highly influential instructor. Although this was Shortt's first experience working in the field on expedition, it presented a foretaste of how he would later spend most of his career. Extended scientific expeditions and collecting trips were an extremely important aspect of his development.

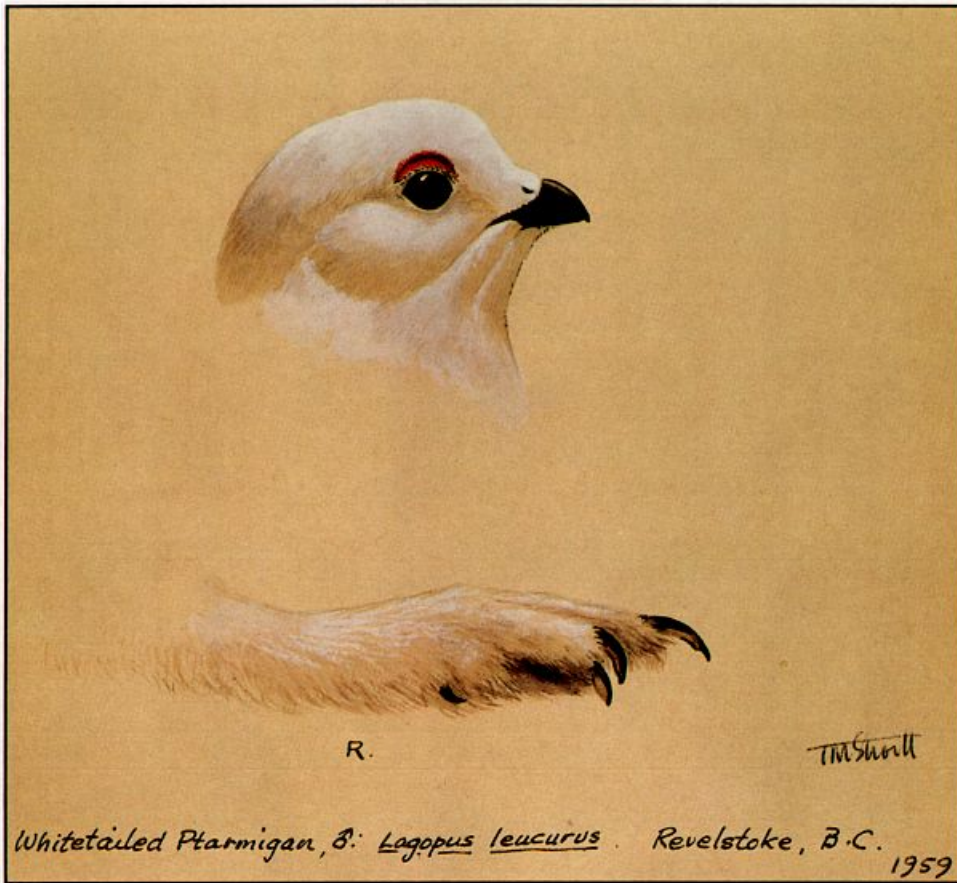
Meanwhile, the artist completed work on many commissions and freelance assignments while simultaneously organizing habitat exhibits for the R.O.M. Even with the extra-museum activities, his work at the

museum advanced so quickly that, in 1948 he was made Chief Artist in the Department of Art and Exhibits. This promotion, of course, led to more research trips, collecting more specimens, more drawing, taking notes, and exploration of his findings. These trips were a natural extension of Shortt's awareness of nature. They provided ample opportunity for study. Exploration of remote lands was one means of better understanding nature at home. He was virtually educating himself as he progressed with his work. They increased his interest and he became more fired by the prospect of developing his ability to handle watercolors so that his method maintained the subjects' lifelike appearances.

During his forty-six year tenure with the Royal Ontario Museum, Terry Shortt led more than 30 major expeditions to virtually every part of the world—from the Arctic to the Galapagos, from Alaska to East Africa. He traveled in



It is in his care with this Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) that one becomes aware of his intense attachment to these little birds. Left: adult male; right: juvenile male. August 22, 1932, Ashbridges Bay, Toronto.



The value of Shortt's work lies not only in the mass of carefully thought out attention to color and detail, but in his entire approach to natural history. The head of the male White-tailed Ptarmigan (Lagopus leucurus) is a fine example of this point.

each of these regions adding a number of new birds to his portfolio, while always improving his approach to composition and ability to manipulate his media to achieve the soft qualities of the feathers as well as the variety of textures found in legs, talons, beaks and eyes.

In the striking composition of the Common Loons (*Gavia immer*) on the front cover of this issue of *AMERICAN BIRDS*, Shortt's love for the drama and beauty of nature, as well as his remarkable feeling for the texture of the birds, is certainly evident. It is one of our favorite renditions.

The work of Terence Michael Shortt has been of sufficient caliber to warrant publication in 23 major books, including those listed in the bibliography, and many shorter articles published both in Canada and the United States. He has had upward of ten private and public exhibitions of his wildlife paintings in Canada, the United States, the Seychelles, and Africa.

This gifted artist is now retired from the R.O.M., but leads an active life as ornithologist, conservationist, writer and illustrator. Throughout his career he has accomplished a truly outstanding amount of work. The excellence of his contributions and importance of his legacy stand as a lasting record to be fully appreciated by those of us with an acquaintance with nature, who will instinctively feel the great talent and magical qualities of beauty and truth which are the very hallmarks of his work.

—Susan Roney Drennan

BOOKS AUTHORED AND ILLUSTRATED BY SHORTT (Publisher in parentheses)

- 1975. *Not as the Crow Flies* (McClelland & Stewart).
- 1977. *Wild Birds of the Americas* (Pagurian Press).



This study of Bohemian Waxwing (Bombycilla garrulus) retains a quality of freshness and a sense of the delight with which Shortt pursues his work as an artist/ornithologist.

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| 1955. <i>Last of the Curlews</i> (Dodd). | |