

Alexander F. Skutch, author of *The Imperative Call* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1979) and *A Naturalist on a Tropical Farm* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) was launched rather early in a career as a temperate botanist (I mean a botanist of plants of temperate latitudes) and then succumbed to the tropics on his first trip south of the Tropic of Cancer. As a result, he made up his mind to spend his life there, no simple decision in the absence of the kind of financial support young scientists now can expect.

His father did not discourage him ("I never knew a shiftless man to starve to death") and *The Imperative Call* tells the tale of how the author became a tropical botanist, switched to a career in ornithology; of his early work as a research fellow in Panama; of his experiences on a banana plantation; and of a sojourn on Barro Colorado Island.

The second book, and I recommend they be read in that order, *A Naturalist on a Tropical Farm*, tells how Skutch acquired a farm in Costa Rica and describes his life thereafter as a naturalist specializing in studies of bird behavior. The book is a cornucopia of information about tropical ecology, beginning with a phenological trip through twelve months, "a tropical year," of birds, blooms, weather, and harvests of maize, rice, and sugar cane. Subsequent chapters ("the patient puffbirds," "flowers and bees," "cooperation with ants," "which should I protect?") tell of bird behavior, pollination ecology (now a booming area of research), and the conservation ethic.

Both books should be read slowly, savoring every anecdote for its full flavor. There is too much information to pass over lightly, for these are the kinds of books that require an investment of one's time and are best not read in a single afternoon or evening.

Knut Norstog, Ph.D.

AS a teacher of botany, from time to time I have encountered students who turned conversations around, finally, to "How can I know this course of studies, this career, is right for me?" The question is a difficult one because, in fact, it has no answer, at least not an objective one. My answers, accordingly were usually rather vague: "Don't worry about it; do the things you like best and are successful in; life will select your course." This question about what one does with one's life is, I suppose, why we enjoy reading books describing how others have found their way, sometimes tortuous, into a career in botany, ornithology, or anything else.