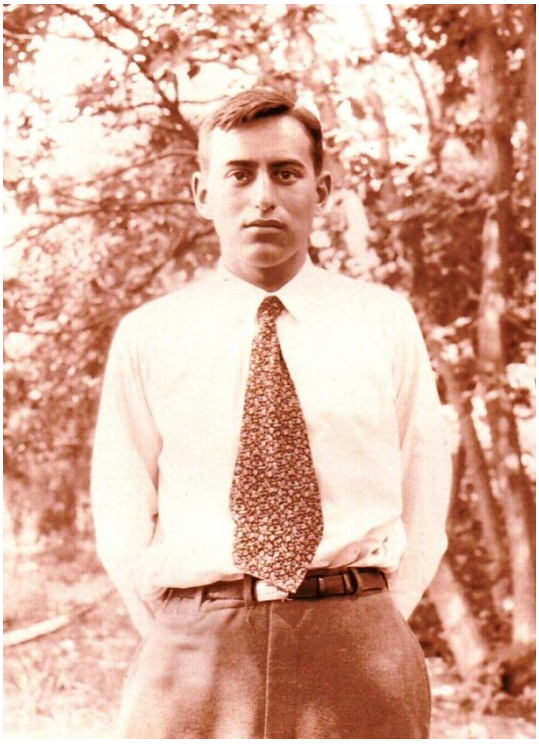
EARLY VIEWS
OF ALEXANDER F. SKUTCH

SELECTIONS FROM HIS
NATURE DIARIES, PHILOSOPHICAL NOTEBOOKS
& SEVERAL OTHER MANUSCRIPTS
— 1928-1946 —

- I -
Becoming and Being a Naturalist
on a Tropical Farm



Edited & with contributions
by Peter Scheers

- 2016 -

Cover photo:
Alexander F. Skutch - In his mid-twenties
(CCT archive)

Often I feel very close to all my past selves, or more properly, to my one self in all its former stages, as though they are still with me, or that I am a composite of them, with all my past life compressed into the present. I am simultaneously the child who roamed over a Maryland farm gathering bright molted feathers, the student at Johns Hopkins, insatiable for knowledge, the young scientist delighted and humbled by his first contact with tropical nature's profusion, the wandering watcher of birds and collector of plants, the homesteader trying to survive on a rough backwoods farm.

Alexander F. Skutch,
From: "Loyalty to one's past," *Thoughts*, Vol. 6, February 10, 1972

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GENERAL PREFACE TO THE TRILOGY

Alexander F. Skutch (1904-2004) garnered wide acclaim during his lifetime, receiving numerous distinguished honors, especially for his studies of avian species in Costa Rica and other parts of Central America. He also became known for his work in botany, nature conservation, nature writing, and philosophy. Today, his accomplishments continue to be held in high regard.

While admiration for Skutch remains very much alive, nevertheless we should not ignore the fact that a number of his texts, including both original material and first versions, have not yet been disseminated. As a result, our knowledge of his enterprise continues, to a certain extent at least, to be only partial. This point may seem somewhat surprising at first. The list of Skutch's publications is seemingly endless, automatically feeding the expectation that most, if not all, of his views must surely have found their way to articles and books in print. But in reality the situation is quite different.

From the very beginning of his authorship, Skutch regularly encountered obstacles in engaging a press for his papers and books. His activities in remote quarters of Central America diminished his chances of making contact with relevant people and publishers in the United States and elsewhere. In the end he was able to push through many initiatives – no doubt due to his perseverance and subsequent rise to fame – but no few other attempts remained unsuccessful. Consequently, a great deal of material was left behind in Skutch's secluded homestead. After his death these precious sources were included in the library of the Centro Científico Tropical (CCT), situated in Costa Rica's capital city.

Basic information about the manuscripts has been available for some time, but more extensive insight into the quality and range of the archive documents has emerged only in the last few years.

This regrettable delay can be explained by particular circumstances. Although the Tropical Science Center has an open policy regarding requests for consultation of its archive, it appears that but a small number of scholars have found their way to Skutch's papers, and that most of those researchers who did were largely concerned with tracing data relevant to their own biological and ecological inquiries. Hence there has been a

lack of interpretive attention with a broad purpose in mind, resulting in the neglect of many files.

Fortunately, certain significant efforts are currently underway with an eye on making the unknown texts available to a wide readership. The present editorial undertaking, too, would like to make some of these Skutch items better known.

Thanks to the hospitality of the CCT, I was able to delve into the archive several years ago. Especially keen on exploring Skutch's material from the perspective of nature writing, the history of ornithology, philosophy, and environmentalism, I soon stumbled upon an array of interesting manuscripts, far exceeding my expectations. I would have been satisfied with a few hundred pages, but in next to no time found myself overwhelmed by many thousands of sheets. After a robust review, it became abundantly clear that a large number of them contain previously unpublished contents, as well as the first drafts of pieces that were later incorporated in Skutch's publications, often in a quite different version.

Among the important items are the more than fifty volumes of a nature diary, entitled *Journal*; personal and professional correspondence; different books on Skutch's early experiences and observations in Panama, Honduras, the highlands of Guatemala, and Costa Rica; seven philosophical notebooks, entitled *Thoughts*; essays and book-length manuscripts dealing with issues in metaphysics, religion, moral philosophy, axiology, environmental ethics, philosophy of nature, and so forth; and, besides several poems and short stories, five books of fiction.

Clearly, there can be no way back after this textual find. The archive holds a great many treasures, which must certainly be taken into account in the context of a comprehensive approach to Skutch. For example, the journals allow us to observe more closely than ever certain aspects of the concrete development of his life and work as a naturalist. And the philosophical notebooks reveal the steady progress of his spiritual perspective, unambiguously showing that, besides being a zealous reader of the book of nature, he became an equally passionate thinker in the rainforest as well (this is an important point; as yet, few of Skutch's readers are aware of the full breadth and complexity of his philosophy!). Finally, his poetry and narrative writings give yet another shape to his nature experiences and thinking alike.

Most of the documents in question have rarely been consulted. Hence, the need arises to make them available to a broader public. Obviously, careful and systematic editing cannot be accomplished in one stroke; indeed, for a number of papers and larger manuscripts a careful editorial work will certainly be necessary to restore textual integrity (tracing missing pages and chapters), determine accurate dates of writing, compare different versions, and provide contextual notes. This enterprise is yet to be accomplished. Until this aim can be realized, for now a far less ambitious project would seem advisable, that is to initiate a series of text collections drawn from material which already meets editorial standards.

Since it is commonsensical to begin with what comes first chronologically, a firm decision has been made to proceed in accordance with the sequential logic of a historical approach. Hence, in the present editorial enterprise as a whole, attention will be confined to Skutch's "early views"; we shall thus focus on the life and the accomplishments of the early Skutch as given expression in his own written views. This means that, as regards the primary content, texts from the first decades of his career have been chosen, basically from the period 1928-1946 (there will be some cases of *exceptis excipiendis*, however; including a poem written in 1926, as well as some contributions noted down after 1946 but which highlight facets of the early Skutch; my own clarifying comments, too, may include quotes outside the specified time frame).

A trilogy of selections has been established, comprising volumes that contain texts (and secondary editorial notes) relating to the early stages of Skutch's life development as a naturalist (Vol. I); his early work as a naturalist, including botany, ornithology, theoretical reflections concerning (the study of) nature and the birds, and several literary pieces relating to nature studies (Vol. II); and his early philosophical perspective (Vol. III).

I have aimed to develop a set of digestible books. Hopefully, the trilogy will constitute a good beginning. It should be stressed, however, that each of the volumes is to be consulted with the full realization that numerous valuable unpublished texts of Skutch have been unavoidably left behind, awaiting future editorial initiatives. Choices had to be made, pure and simple! While remaining somewhat confident that I have succeeded in coming up with reasonable assortments, I also wish to bow full-hearted to the fact that imperfection is an inescapable part of our earthly condition.

I have predominantly chosen contents from Skutch's *Journal* and *Thoughts*, with certain items taken from other primary sources. One will find both larger contributions and shorter excerpts (frequently picked out from longer pieces; passages extracted from larger wholes can be recognized by the inclusion of "From" in the source references). The texts are basically offered in their original form (save for a few minor alterations in the division of certain paragraphs and some other very small changes).

PETER SCHEERS

- Acknowledgments -

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INTRODUCTION

By and large, this volume focuses on Skutch's development during the first four decades of his life, pertaining to his growth as a naturalist. We will especially learn about his main steps towards becoming a naturalist on a homestead in southern Costa Rica. The initial years on his tropical farm, too, will be included in the narrative.

Confining ourselves to Skutch's own words, there are at least three distinct ways into his early life history.

- The First Way

The first way consists in consulting certain useful smaller publications, such as interviews and autobiographical sketches.

One good capsule autobiography is to be found in a note added to Skutch's article "A Parable for Peacemakers" (*Scientific Monthly* 58, 1944). Skutch's note does not mention that he was born in Baltimore (Maryland, USA) in 1904, raised in nearby Pikesville (on a farm) and Baltimore, entered Johns Hopkins University in 1921, and came to devote himself to studies in the department of botany, but for the rest we can largely sit back and let him do the telling.

> During my undergraduate years, I spent the summer on Mt. Desert, Maine, studying the northern plant-life, especially that of the sea-shore. During the summer of 1926, I enjoyed my first glimpse of the tropics, on a botanical expedition to the island of Jamaica. Here we stayed for six weeks in the Blue Mountains. After the return of the party, I settled down for six weeks more on a banana plantation to make a study of the anatomy of the banana leaf for the United Fruit Company – this became my doctor's dissertation. In 1928 I went to Almirante in western Panama on a fellowship from Hopkins to continue my studies of the banana at the research station the United Fruit Company then maintained there. In 1930 I continued these studies at Tela, Honduras. Upon these visits to Central America, I became deeply interested in the bird-life. I found that the birds of this region had all been classified, but exceedingly little was known about how they lived. I resolved to dedicate myself to this study. In 1932 I spent half a year on a banana plantation on the border between Guatemala and Honduras, making an independent study of the birds. I spent all the following year studying the birds of the Guatemalan highlands at elevations ranging from 7,000 to 10,000 feet and here I also made a collection of the plants. This led to a commission from the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University to collect for them during the following year in the Guatemalan highlands.

In the mid-1930s, Skutch initiated the second half of his decade as a wandering naturalist in Central America. From then on, the greater part of his activities would be situated in Costa Rica – a country once described, in Amelia and Philip Calvert´s *A year of Natural History in Costa Rica* (1917), as a "little republic so readily accessible, easy for foreigners to travel there, offering such wonderful inducements to naturalists." Let us again listen to Skutch:

> In 1935 I came to Costa Rica, with plans to combine my studies of the birds with botanical collecting as a means of support. Hearing much about the Valley of El General, I resolved to go there. I found a pioneer community, with unspoiled forests on the very outskirts of the principal village. The local *Jefe Politico* was most helpful; through him I acquired a cabin with a tached roof in Rivas, where I dwelt for a year and a half – thrice the length of my intended visit. Later I spent two more seasons in natural history work in other parts of the valley. At the beginning of 1940, I accepted the post of curator of the herbarium in the Museo Nacional in San José, but resigned after six months to go to Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia on a rubber survey party for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Skutch's years as a meandering naturalist ended when he finally succeeded, after several attempts during previous years, in buying a farm in southern Costa Rica. To him this was a dream come true (precisely in the year that the United States entered the Second World War):

> Having come to look upon the Valley of El General as home, I returned in 1941 and bought a farm of fifty hectares (about 125 acres), so newly carved from the forest that the pastures are even now littered with logs and stumps. Here I have been living since then, doing subsistence farming – keeping sufficient horses and cattle for the work of the farm. All the time the farm work allows – a good deal in the wet season – I devote to studying the wild-life and to writing.

Skutch's passages deal with the initial stages of his ways as a naturalist, taking us from his days as a student in Johns Hopkins to Los Cusingos (as he soon called his tropical homestead). His brief account evidently suffices as a first introduction. But, of course, a capsule account necessarily leaves out numerous significant points; no life can be adequately captured in just a couple of paragraphs.

- The Second Way

In Skutch's case, however, there is a great second way available – evidently much more laborious, but also far more gratifying – which consists in at least going through the

pages of his *The Imperative Call* (1979) and *A Naturalist in Costa Rica* (1971), as well as certain chapters of his *A Bird Watcher´s Adventures in Tropical America* (1977) and *A Naturalist on a Tropical Farm* (1980).

The Imperative Call provides invaluable information about Skutch's boyhood, early manhood and student years (the family farm in Pikesville, the green hills of Maryland, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University), his first efforts as a naturalist and botanist (including excursions in Baltimore County, Maine and Jamaica), the formative moments of his development towards the tropics and field ornithology (including his activities as a banana researcher, and as an enthusiastic birdwatcher on the side, in Panama and Honduras), his adventures and observations as a wandering naturalist, independent ornithologist and freelance plant collector in Middle America (including stays in the Guatemala, Barro Colorado Island, and Costa Rica), and, at the end of the book, his 1935 return to Costa Rica.

A Naturalist In Costa Rica tells the story of Skutch's decades-long residence in this "little republic," including extensive material on the early years. A large number of things can be gathered about his residence in Rivas, other places in the same area (El General Valley) visited afterwards, his quest for the Quetzal in Vara Blanca, and his purchase of, and early experiences as a naturalist-homesteader at, Los Cusingos. In certain chapters, Skutch shares his impressions about the house that he built; the garden with its birds, flowers and trees; his endeavors as a farmer; the rainforest on and around his grounds; and the river Peñas Blancas.

A Bird Watcher's Adventures in Tropical America includes a few chapters on the earlier adventures of Skutch, several of which have not been given a place in his other works (save perhaps for some brief lines): his travels through Mexico, in the context of his 1934 return to Guatemala; his nature and bird studies in Ecuador (several months in 1939); and, lastly, the 1940 rubber expedition in parts of Amazonia (in Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, and a ten-minute stay in Brazil).

A Naturalist on a Tropical Farm, too, contains original views on the early years in Costa Rica. The first, third and fourth chapters largely focus on Skutch's initial experiences at Los Cusingos (mostly on aspects not covered elsewhere), and the twenty-second chapter is partly concerned with his November 1937 visit to the lowlands of

Guanacaste, Costa Rica's northwestern province (*A Naturalist in Costa Rica* only briefly relates to this visit*).*

Taken together, these four books unquestionably establish the most important overall narrative of Skutch's becoming and being a naturalist in the early decades (and in the later years as well, but that is not our theme here). This principal story, offering both countless small data and substantive descriptive sections, allows one to grasp many of the movements, experiences, and contexts of his early existence. Consequently, no one with a genuine interest in Skutch's life history should fail to get acquainted with the central contents of the above-mentioned works.

As regards the second way, two qualifications are in order.

First of all, the "most important overall narrative," provided in this second manner, is certainly not to be confused with a (semi-)complete report. For, even while the first two books together already count more than seven hundred pages, much has been left unsaid concerning Skutch's early life history. No doubt the other aforementioned works provide interesting additions, but they leave many gaps open as well.

Secondly, more often than not Skutch's (autobiographical) publications are quite minimal in communicating about the psychological and personal aspects of his life experiences. This issue has been aptly discerned by Eugene Eisenmann, in his review of *A Naturalist in Costa Rica* (*The Auk* 97, 1980):

> Although the first few chapters tell about his schooling and boyhood interest in the out-of-doors, and a little about his parents, Skutch does not even give his birthday nor his mother's maiden name, and he is silent about his youthful social or emotional life, except as it bears on his attitudes toward nature. Considering Skutch's exceptional distinction as a naturalist and his long isolation in the tropics, there is understandable curiosity about him as a human being.

The sparseness of personalized information actually characterizes all of Skutch's published accounts.

- The Third Way

Luckily, there is a third way of gaining access to Skutch's early life history: to delve into the unpublished documents. This is the path taken by the present book.

In the CCT archive, it is not difficult to discover new contents concerning Skutch's development. Especially his nature journal (*Journal*) and the philosophical notebooks (*Thoughts*) are useful. To be sure, these writings are predominantly focused on nature observations and the articulation of ideas. Here and there, however, Skutch noted down autobiographical passages and personal impressions.

How exactly to appreciate the unpublished views concerning his life as a naturalist?

First, it is essential to stress that the material found in the unpublished manuscripts never supersedes, or competes, with the main narrative of the second way. To the best of my knowledge, there is no alternative lengthy life history account waiting to take over the territory. Of course, in the archive one may find early versions of (parts of) published books, perhaps written in a somewhat different style, but such drafts do not seem to propose a structurally different storyline.

Secondly, it remains equally important to recognize that a considerable number of early life history facts and events *not* (fully) addressed in the published writings are indeed available in the archive sources. Hence, the main narrative as established in the second way, though irreplaceable, nevertheless can be significantly improved upon by means of the third approach.

Thirdly, Skutch's unpublished pages also contain a number of personal interpretations of his life development, of his mind-set and emotional states at different times and places, and of his existential responses to concrete events and circumstances. To a degree, and surely more substantially than anywhere else (though again not abundantly), we get to satisfy our "understandable curiosity about him as a human being." The personalized passages that can be found add invaluable psychological depth to certain parts of the second way.

I believe it is not necessary here to insert summary statements on the main contents of the third way, for the thirteen chapters that follow will by themselves set in motion much of the precious autobiographical surplus inhering the unpublished papers. Indeed, let us delay no longer and turn to the primary views themselves.

SELECTIONS

1 / Youthful Development

The texts included in the first chapter were written after 1946. As they tell of the younger Skutch, however, it is highly relevant to give them a prominent place. Before we enter more specifically the narrative of Skutch as a naturalist, it is important first to introduce aspects of his boyhood and early manhood, described in several autobiographical passages.

Approaching seventeen, Skutch had not yet decided to become a naturalist or a biologist, but he was already much involved with nature. Several entries shed some light on his youthful urge to see beautiful and good things in nature. Another passage mentions his explicit quest for knowledge. In the beginning this quest was in part strongly directed to language and letters (we may infer this from the fact that, in his freshman year at Johns Hopkins, Skutch first devoted himself to literature and Latin; the academic study of botany came only later). Even so, it is fruitful to know about the emergence of his knowledge drive, for this strongly ingrained trait would subsequently be fully applied in the context of countless nature and bird studies. We also hear about his ascetic inclinations, his vegetarian life style, and his ethical approach to nature. Such elements, too, had a great impact on Skutch's actual conduct as a naturalist: his youthful steps into asceticism prepared him well for the rough and rugged experiences in Central America; vegetarianism and compassion with animals strongly influenced his practice as a distinctly *benevolent* ornithologist (see volume II). Moreover, as we find out in the last line of the second text, Skutch's early spiritual convictions in part steered him towards a life in nature as such.

Lastly, as the first entry makes clear, it is important to note that Skutch's ways around the age of sixteen and seventeen were signs of a complex and unified spiritual transformation. Something deep and essential broke through in Skutch as a lad.

Personal Transformation

I can not recall that I ever experienced any sudden or violent change in beliefs or values such as many men of strong religious temperaments have undergone. The most radical change in my inner life occurred as I was approaching my seventeenth birthday, but it was not abrupt or violent, nor brought about by any single external influence, such as a book I had read or a discourse I had heard. It had so little influence upon the outward course of my life that I doubt whether anyone about me suspected just what was happening within me. The revolution which took place in me at this period was not caused by the discovery of any new doctrine, or the acceptance of any special dogma, but was rather the revelation of something deep within me. Through a somewhat

gradual process I had finally become aware of my true self, of the primary determinant of my character, and without quite appreciating the momentous nature of the occurrence, I adopted that standpoint, that attitude toward life, which has remained essentially unchanged through all the intervening years.

Unfortunately, I kept no written record of my thoughts and activities at this period, so that events spread over months or even years are crowded together in the backward view. It was at this period that I became a vegetarian, the only step I then took that aroused the opposition of my parents, on the score of my health. Although my family had the unfortunate habit of lying in bed in the morning, scarcely ever rising until forced to do so by their engagements, I became by preference an early riser, and have been so all my adult years. Over a considerable period I took cold tub baths (our house, unlike most modern homes in the United States, had no shower), even in winter, when they would send me shivering to bed. In addition to giving up the flesh of warm-blooded animals, I became more abstemious in my food, although I have all my life had a hearty appetite. I strenuously objected to the "Tuxedo" suit my parents thought I should have for dances and other evening occasions, for it was not in keeping with the simple life that had become my ideal. From chance acquaintances I had heard two or three "jokes" which doubtless appealed to them because they showed some slight intimacy with the facts of sex, and I had repeated these on several occasions. I now became thoroughly ashamed of them, and have never since seen anything funny or amusing in racy stories or jokes about sex or the bodily functions. But the most important change which took place in me at this period was a growing eagerness for knowledge, until it became the dominant urge of my life. From being an indifferent scholar I became a diligent one, even applying myself steadfastly to the study of languages, which were, and are, the great weakness in my intellectual equipment.

Thus, by my seventeenth birthday, the dominant features of my character and ideals were already determined: to live so far as possible without harming any creature, to live simply, and to understand the world. To have come to this point from my boyish carelessness of a year or two earlier was certainly a revolution in my outlook. Doubtless a variety of external factors were responsible for it, for I attended a good school and lived in a home well-stocked with books, where high ideals were perhaps preached more than practiced. But I had no particular "hero," spiritual or otherwise, either

among my contemporaries or the great figures of the past; I accepted no particular doctrine or dogma; and I took a position for which I found no precedent among my acquaintances, and which was even in some points opposed by my family. Hence I conclude that something deep within me had gradually broken through to consciousness and taken control of my life.

From: "Notes for a spiritual autobiography," *Thoughts*, Vol. 3, December 9, 1952

Resistance

As I look back upon the years when my character was most definitely taking shape, especially those between my sixteenth and twenty-first birthdays, it seems to me that resistance was their outstanding feature – resistance to excesses and luxuries and vices which not only solicited me but were often thrust before me by those about me, resistance to dogmas and shibboleths that circulated freely in my ambient. Perhaps the one thing which society offered me that I could freely and unrestrainedly accept was knowledge, because it increased my power of discrimination and enlightened my choice. To have been led to this attitude of resistance was unfortunate, in one aspect, because it turned me away from men and made it more difficult for me to cultivate sympathy and friendship with them. But in turning away from men I turned toward nature, in which I found ample compensation.

From: "Resistance," *Thoughts*, Vol. 4, May 16, 1954

The Preservation of Values

While yet a boy, I used to be troubled by the thought that much beauty and truth, much of what I now call value, was constantly being wasted and lost. I was saddened that "Full many a rose is born to bloom unseen, And waste its fragrance on the desert air" (note added later by Skutch: The correct quotation is "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, And waste its sweetness on the desert air" [Gray's Elegy, stanza 14]), as likewise by the wise and beautiful sayings that were continually being forgotten. I even began a poem on this theme – which also has been forgotten. With the passage of the years, it has become clear that I had already become concerned with what I now see to be one of the most important problems of philosophy, the preservation of values.

"The preservation of values," *Thoughts*, Vol. 5, December 29, 1960

Opposing Forces

Since I was a boy, I have been strongly attracted by the goodness and beauty of the world, including its human portion, and I have been equally strongly repelled by the evil and ugliness of the world, including its human portion. The whole history of my life, work, and thought might be written in terms of the interaction of these two opposing forces.

"Attraction and repulsion," *Thoughts*, Vol. 5, September 28, 1961

Delight in Nature

In my youth I knew the delight of watching the beauty, wonder and mystery of the natural world unfold before my developing mind; as when one who has climbed to a mountain-top in the night watches the dawn reveal the glorious panorama spread out before him. I have never outgrown that delight, and I hope that I never shall.

"Delight in nature," *Thoughts*, Vol. 6, August 5, 1972

A Fundamental Motive

Already in adolescence some of us bear within us the germ of our philosophy and the inchoate motive of the best accomplishments of our later years. In me, these were a feeling, that was hardly yet a reasoned conviction, that everything beautiful should be appreciated, everything lovable should be loved, everything worthy of being known should be known, everything good should be acknowledged. In short, although I could not then have stated it in these words, I felt strongly that all potential values should be actualized. I believed, firmly if still vaguely, that our proper role is to uncover and to celebrate every high value accessible to us. Every beauty lurking unseen and unadmired, every lovable creature living obscurely, every absorbing fact remaining to be discovered, deep in remote forests or high on forbidding peaks, seemed a challenge to seek it out and make it known. This intuition, which to my definite knowledge was already taking root in me while I was still an undergraduate, has been the motive of all that I have accomplished as a naturalist and the germ of my philosophy.

"The germ of my philosophy" & "The motive of my studies," *Thoughts*, Vol. 6, January 6, 1974

2 / Being a Vegetarian

In the entries below, Skutch tells more about his decision to become a vegetarian, and about the impact of vegetarianism on his ways of being and thinking. As a boy on a farm in Pikesville, he found himself distressed more than once by the slaughter of animals, often those that he regarded as friends. This distress, combined with his reading of the poets (especially Shelley) in his later boyhood, was sufficient to bring him to the decision to stop eating meat. Moreover, as we know from the first chapter, Skutch's vegetarianism was in fact a key ingredient of a wider and more complex personal transformation. Sympathy and compassion were important underlying reasons for his resolution; the issue of a healthy diet was not really a concern. Except for a period of approximately two years (due to pressure from his father), Skutch stayed true to vegetarianism for the rest of his life.

Being a vegetarian clearly contributed to his rather solitary existence (he felt distant from society). Later, vegetarianism became a central element in Skutch's theory and practice of "convivial asceticism" (the spiritual value of simplicity, the ideal of joyfully and peacefully living together with nonhuman animals by making minimal use of, and causing minimal distortion of, nature's resources), in his environmentalism (one's attitude towards food plays a vital ecological role, since "Man's stomach threatens to become nature's grave," *Thoughts*, Vol. 7, November 15, 1977), and in his moral resistance to hurting and killing other creatures (a personal stance which, as mentioned in the first chapter, led him to a benevolent approach to birds in his ornithological practice). Vegetarianism would also come to serve as a remonstrance against the evil of predation as such (in a later entry, Skutch states: "I have come to view vegetarianism as a standing protest against predation, which is life's greatest evil. If there were no other argument in its favor, that would be sufficient," *Thoughts*, Vol. 5, December 31, 1960).

Vegetarianism

I have just reread Shelley's "Vindication of Natural Diet." I first embarked upon a vegetarian regime when I was but sixteen, and in my last year at highschool. At this interval, I do not remember with certainty all of the influences which prompted me to enter upon this course. I had read "Queen Mab" that spring (1921) and the vegetarian principles set forth there, in such lines as

> … no longer now
> He slays the lamb that looks him in the face,
> And horribly devours his mangled flesh,
> Which, still avenging Nature's broken law,
> Kindled all putrid humors in his frame …
> (VIII, line 211)

The benefits to health, happiness, longevity, temper, morality, and national prosperity, promised in the "Vindication," had as little weight with me then as now. I had from early childhood a sympathy with and compassion for animals, and the idea of killing them for food was revolting to me; it needed only the suggestion of the poet's lines to stimulate my thought upon the matter, and to make me realize how disgusting to my finer emotions this diet of flesh had become, although from long habit I partook of it every day, without so much as giving a second thought to it.

I well remember the meal at which I began to practice vegetarianism. It was on a Sunday, and while riding home from Sunday school on the street car I had decided upon the course I was to take. There was no preliminary announcement of my conversion, but when the meat was passed to me I simply refused it. My father inquired whether I had become a vegetarian, and I replied in the affirmative. I felt as though I had cast a challenge to the society of which I was a part, and should have to defend myself, with argument if not with sword, against all who should care to attack. Fortunately, for the first few months at least, no one took up his lance against the rebel. My elders might have passed some knowing remarks, but I feigned not to notice them. And since I am not by nature a propagandist, I tried to convert no one to my view of the matter, content to let alone and be left alone.

The hypocrisy of many of those who feed on flesh often moved me to sneers, but I generally kept them concealed. The man who eats the steer he has killed and butchered with his own hands at least has a vivid conception of the nature of the sustenance of which he partakes, and has a stomach tantamount to his capacities, even if he must disguise the raw and bleeding flesh by fire. But the dainty lady who, at the moment she puts into her mouth a piece of roast-beef so "rare" that the natural color of the flesh has hardly been altered by the process of cooking, expresses horror or indignation at the description of some slight wound of man or beast, seems the strangest of all anomalies. How many of those who complacently feed on more or less skillfully camouflaged flesh

would care, or be able, to prepare it from the living animal themselves. Shelley's remarks seem to the point:

> Let the advocate of animal food force himself to a decisive experiment on its fitness, and, as Plutarch recommends, tear a living lamb with his teeth, and plunging his head into its vitals, slake his thirst with the streaming blood; when fresh from the deed of horror, let him revert to the irresistible instincts of nature that would rise in judgement against it, and say, nature formed me for such work as this. Then, and then only, would he be consistent.

The first real opposition to my vegetarian diet came from my uncle, who warned me, as a physician and an authority on diabetes, that by eating an undue amount of food rich in carbohydrates as a substitute for meat, I was courting an attack of the diabetes from which my father and grandfather have suffered. My uncle has a rather imperious manner which causes many of his patients, even those who know him well, to stand in fear of him, and his advice, which he gave in the library one evening in the presence of the remainder of the family, was couched in no uncertain terms, and seemed rather a threat of impending disaster than a friendly warning. When he had concluded, I thanked him coldly for his interest, and retired immediately to my room, where I was moved and shaken to the point of tears, but resolved not to deviate from what I considered principles of justice and right, no matter what might be the cost in bodily suffering and disease.

I forget now how many months I maintained a fleshless diet, under the constant pressure from my parents and other members of my family to abandon this mode of living. Finally my father ordered flatly that I return to the fleshpots. As I remember the occasion, now some light years past, the climax was precipitated by my refusal to drink a glass of milk which he insisted that I take at supper one evening. He had himself brought about my abstinence from dairy products by his argument that the use of it was inconsistent with my vegetarian views, since in order to secure milk from the cow it was necessary to kill the calf for which nature intended it. After he had pointed out this flaw in my logic, I determined that in the face of so much opposition I must certainly be consistent, and I always preferred action to argument. The command to return to a diet of flesh was accompanied by a time limit in which to make up my mind, for my father is rarely imperious with his children. I spent the greater part of the

following day in a secluded section of the woods, in silent communion with myself, debating whether to leave home or to submit to parental authority.

I finally decided upon the latter, influenced principally by two considerations. First, that I was still very young, and had not sufficiently studied either the ethics or the economics of vegetarianism, and I required more time and greater maturity of intellect in order to settle the many doubts which began to assail my mind. Second, I hated contumacy, and it occurred to me that perhaps some day I should desire to raise my son to be a vegetarian, and I should feel very badly should he obstinately refuse to follow the dictates of my greater experience and more mature judgement, but had I myself disregarded parental authority in my youth, I could hardly require greater obedience of another. So I decided to submit to my father's demand, and meanwhile consider the whole problem of the justice and humanity of raising and killing animals for food at greater length.

During this period I ate only the ration of meat which my mother, who served at table, doled out to me. I always insisted that she be lenient, and never returned for a second helping, for flesh had become repugnant to me, and I had often to force myself to swallow it. As a protest to this enforced diet I abstained from milk in all its forms, eating my morning cereals moisted with water, my bread dry or with preserves if they were provided, and never partaking of ice-cream. When I was a councillor at the Green mountain Camp in Vermont the following summer the boys at my table would always clamor for the ice-cream which was served to me but I did not eat, and I used to give it to them in rotation.

Although perforce a flesh-eater, I never departed from vegetarian sentiment, and on my return from my first summer at Mt. Desert Island, in 1923, I again determined to eschew all animal flesh. I was now nineteen, and having spent two summers away from home had acquired a good deal more independence. I had modified my views somewhat, and now considered it permissible to eat fish and invertebrates, which are low in the scale of life, and moreover are not raised for food and subjected to all of the attendant degradation, but are captured from their native element as though my many another of their natural enemies, and soon die. But for the last six years I have not consumed the flesh of any warm-blooded animal, bird or mammal, or even of any reptile. I gradually relaxed my taboo on dairy products, and have never refused to eat

hen eggs. I should consume even less of these latter items – seafood, milk and eggs – were I situated so that I could plan my own diet, choosing such vegetables as would furnish all of the food constituents necessary for health. The latter is easy with a little foresight and planning, but when one must sit down to meals intended for flesh-eaters, it is not always possible to get sufficient proteins without having recourse to eggs or fish. Nevertheless, I have never suffered from my diet, despite the dire predictions of my uncle, and only while I was at Camp Linstead, during the summers of 1927 and 1928, was I inconvenienced and somewhat weakened by it, but here the rations were so closely limited that I felt the pinch of passing up any of them.

"Vegetarianism," *Journal*, Vol. 2, October 11, 1929

An Unconventional Course

As I reflect upon the past course of my life, I see that my vegetarianism, more than anything else, caused me to adopt an unconventional course, drove me from the busy haunts of men into a life of relative solitude. Doubtless it goes deeper than this; my refusal to eat flesh is merely one manifestation of my whole attitude toward life; but it is that consequence of my attitude which in daily practice caused me to differ most from the people about me, so that I could not feel as closely united to them as might have been possible if our habits and philosophy had been more similar.

From: "Vegetarianism," *Thoughts*, Vol. 3, July 13, 1949

Vegetarianism and Solitary Disposition

My decision, at the age of sixteen, to become a vegetarian has influenced the course of my life more profoundly than any other single step that I ever took. In the first place, it has tended to isolate me from other people, as any important difference between onself and others will do. I cannot enter wholeheartedly into festivities where flesh is consumed, and I always feel aloof and reserved on such occasions, which I avoid whenever possible. But my vegetarianism is certainly not wholly responsible for my solitary disposition, which doubtless is innate, and was intensified by a number of other circumstances of my childhood and youth.

From: "Influence of vegetarianism on my life," *Thoughts*, Vol. 5, January 19, 1961

3 / Jamaica & Maryland

In 1921, Skutch entered Johns Hopkins University. In 1925, he obtained a bachelor's degree in botany. Afterwards, he became the assistant of his mentor, Professor Dr. Duncan S. Johnson. In the summer of 1926, Skutch joined a plant expedition to the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, organized by Johnson, and subsequently stayed behind for several weeks more to analyze the anatomy of the banana at the Platfield Plantation, owned by the United Fruit Company (on whose behalf he undertook these investigations). In september 1926, he returned to Baltimore to continue his research and assistantship at Johns Hopkins.

The poem below, written while at the Platfield Plantation, gives expression to Skutch's deep appreciation of both tropical and temperate nature. The poem makes clear that, at the time, the green hills of Maryland remained most precious to him.

A pleasant land of sun and rain,
Of spreading palm and plumed bamboo,
Where broad bananas deck the plain,
And hills enclose the verdant view.

The sensitive plant we sow, then shield
And nurse so carefully at home
Is here a weed in lawn and field,
And shrinks along the path we roam.

Here fruits we once thought strange and rare,
Which friends may read about, not eat,
Are set among our daily fare,
Now proffered as a bounteous treat.

Here autumn never drags decay,
For here is summer no mere loan,
Here never is a wintry day –
Yet springtime's rapture is unknown.

A pleasant land, ah yes, and fair,
When first it fell beneath my eye,
I said I had not anywhere
Seen fairer land before me lie.

The light bamboo, the feathery palm –
The broad, wind-frayed banana leaf
No longer yield the soothing balm
To give my weary heart relief.

The wind creaks through the clumped bamboos
And plays a harsh and grating tune,
The oft repeated toll renews
And blows banana trees to ruin,

To ruin, I too am desolate;
There calls from North beyond the sea
(It calls, and I must wait and wait)
A land that's fairer far to me.

Maryland, thy fields of corn and wheat,
Thy hills prosperous farms enfold,
Thy woods which yield a cool retreat
Are fairer than the Tropics hold.

Untitled, September 5, 1926

4 / An All-Around Naturalist

In May 1928, Skutch delivered a confident defence of his doctoral dissertation, a study of the anatomy of the leaf of the banana. It is beyond question, as the fourth excerpt shows, that he felt very much at ease with the scientific exploration of this magnificent tropical plant, and of other botanical species, which allowed him to apply his keen sense of accuracy and detail. But as a student at Johns Hopkins (from his undergraduate years to his PhD research), and afterwards as a postdoctoral banana investigator, Skutch's nature interests took him firmly beyond the laboratory as well. He regularly made an effort to school himself as an all-around naturalist, by reading through the relevant books and ardently applying his new knowledge in identifications and observations while on excursions in the neighborhood. He was also eager to teach young Boy Scouts about nature, during weekend hikes and in the holidays (Skutch had joined the Boy Scout movement around the age of twelve, and steadily went through the ranks; he served as a nature educator at summer camp – Camp Linstead" – in 1927 and 1928; in 1928 he terminated his membership).

Most of the passages in this chapter confirm that Skutch's first vision was indeed characterized by a rich perception of nature, such as an early concern with birds, a keen enthusiasm for plants in the field, and other sundry areas of an all-around nature study. Also his instructional readiness to share his knowledge and love of nature becomes very evident.

Scout Hike – i

Bird Hike, August 11, 1927 (5.45 – 7. AM). 10 scouts attending. Birds Seen: Catbird, Robin, Carolina Wren, Partridge, Barn Swallow, Goldfinch, Chimney Swift, Mocking Bird, Chipping Sparrow, Wood Peewee, Phoebe, Bank Swallow, Crow, Scarlet Tanager (male).

Untitled, handwritten note, August 11, 1927

Scout Hike – ii

Today I took the troop on a hike. We met at the Scout house at 2 o'clock, and after spending about an hour there grubbing out some briars and filling the wood boxes, we set on the way. We went across the golf links, and along the bridle paths through Garrison Forest to a point along Jones' Falls just east of Park Heights Ave., where there is a good spring and an excellent camping site with an abundance of wood.

While walking along Park Heights Ave., I noticed off to the right a strip of very fresh green which stood out in sharp contrast from the dry and brown woods which surrounded it. A small spring welled out of the base of the wooded hillside at this point, and the course of its overflow through the bottom land was the site of the verdure. The channel was choked with a luxuriant growth of water cress (*Radicula* probably *nasturtium-aquaticum* L. Britten & Rendle) which seemed strangely out-of-season among the dry leaves and leafless trees which bordered the channel. Farther along the watercourse became shallower and broader, and here I found *Caltha palustris* just coming into bloom, and of course flowers of the skunk-cabbage were abundant; so these two constitute my first woodland spring flowers of the season. Numerous plants of the green hellebore (*Veratrum viride*) and of a species of dock were also pushing up through the boggy soil. The whole constituted a most pleasing illustration of the effect of warm ground water in hastening the spring awakening of vegetation.

"Scout hike," *Journal*, Vol. 1, March 24, 1928

Chickweed

Today I found perfect and chasmogamous flowers of the chickweed (*Stellaria media*) in our garden. Last fall, after the corn-stalks had been removed, this plant took possession of our small corn patch, and multiplied until it soon covered most of the surface of the ground. It then produced normal petaliferous flowers, and later in the fall I found these open on mornings when the ground was frozen and there was a heavy frost. Late in December I examined a number of plants very carefully, but found only little cleistogamous flowers of which the petals had been completely suppressed. I collected a few apparently viable seeds, but most of the pods examined were shrunken and barren. Apparently the seeds collected had been set before the onset of the severely cold weather, while of late the cleistogamous flowers had produced no good seed. Now again, with the return of warmer days, the same plants are producing normal flowers with well-developed petals. This plant would make a most interesting study, especially to determine if any new rudiments of flowers are developed in the freezing weather of mid-winter, whether fertilization is effected then, whether viable seeds are matured.

From: "Chickweed," *Journal*, Vol. 1, March 24, 1928

Doctoral Degree

I took my oral examination for my degree of Doctor of Philosophy this morning, having taken the writtens along with Mrs. Smith a few weeks ago. The meeting was in Gilman Hall at 10 o'clock. I was not in the least nervous, as others profess to have been, and slept well the night before, and was up early this morning to pick the worms off the currants and gooseberries before leaving for college.

Johnson, Livingston, Mast, Andrews, Jennings and Berry were present, and about as many more I did not recognize. Johnson, as professor in my principal subject, led the questioning, and was very pleasant and agreeable. He first asked about my dissertation, and I spent about twenty minutes or so talking about the banana, and drawing diagrams on the board. Then Johnson asked some general questions on reproduction and phylogeny and on anatomy. Livingston then gave some questions on physiology, "How did the plant take in its water?," "What determined the time of blooming of the banana?," "What is respiration?" Then Berry asked a question regarding the value of the conception of morphological units, the usefulness of which I defended. This started a discussion between the interrogator and Livingston, which exhausted what remained of the hour.

Johnson seemed sorry that more of the professors did not have time to put questions to me. I found the experience rather entertaining and not at all the frightful ordeal which some candidates for the degree, particularly the female ones, make it out to be. I did not study in preparation for the event, as I felt that any last minute brushing-up on a field so large was a futile proposition.

Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 1, May 24, 1928

The Place of Nature Lore

In the morning I gave a lecture on "The Place of Nature Lore in the Boy Scout Program" at a meeting of the Scout executives of the Maryland-Pennsylvania region, who have held periodic conferences at Hopkins this year. I made a plea to let the boy in the summer camp have more leisure to come into contact with nature in his own way, instead of trying to occupy every minute of his time with supervised activities, and closed by reading Wordsworth's "Expostulation and Reply."

Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 1, May 28, 1928

Being a Camp Naturalist

I came here to Camp Linstead on June 17, leaving Baltimore in a flurry of hasty preparation and packing. After a day spent in putting down a new section of floor for my tent, which is the same that I occupied last year, and on the same site, I took up the duties of my position. My designation is "Camp Naturalist," and I am expected to handle all of the instruction that may come under this designation.

The boys are awarded a letter, or rather monogram of the camp in felt, to wear on their sweaters upon the completion of certain designated tests, and the acquirement of a specified number of points by optional tests and services to the camp, according to a printed scale of awards. In the second year a star is added to the letter upon the completion of the second-year camper's requirements, and so on through five years of camping, when the veteran camper's letter is awarded. The preparation and examination of the scouts for the nature subjects requisite for the earning of the letter constitute my principal duty. Thus for the first year letter the scout must collect and identify 10 wild flowers, recognize 10 trees other than by their leaves, and describe 5 birds that he has seen. For the second year this becomes 15 flowers, 15 trees and 10 birds; for the third, 20 flowers, 20 trees and 15 birds, etc. For the higher awards points are also given for pointing out constellations and fixed stars, describing reptiles, and bringing in articles which are accepted for the "Museum."

To prepare the boys for these tests I conduct "bird hikes" and "nature hikes." Of the former there are three each week, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, at 5:30 in the morning. On the evening previous to a bird hike I take a list of the boys who desire to attend, with their lodge number and the position of their bunks, and then call each one personally in the morning. I limit the attendance on each hike to fifteen; this is a formidable enough array to bear down upon a songbird, but many wish to attend, and I do not desire to conduct a larger number of hikes; they are too much of a drain on my energies. The nature hikes are devoted to collecting and naming trees and herbaceous "flowers." There are three each week, and attendance on these is a prerequisite to taking the tests on trees and flowers. However, these are not as well attended as the bird hikes; there are too many other activities afoot at 9:30, the hour at which they are

scheduled, and on some mornings I can not get a handful together, and so call off the hike.

Each hike is almost an exact repetition of the last, since different boys attend each time, and need the same instruction in order to pass the requirements. They are becoming a deadly bore to me, the same today as yesterday, the same this year as last. I try to make them interesting, but the boys are usually content to gather up a minimum of specimens and a minimum of information, and run off as soon as they have collected the required number of species. Occasionally there are some interested lads in the assembly, and this was especially so during the first two-week period, and then I can warm up to my subject.

In addition to these duties, I have a daily exhibit to prepare. At the beginning of last season I constructed a little shelf, about two feet long by a foot broad, on the outer wall of the mess hall near the entrance. The shelf was covered by a penthouse roof, and on it the daily exhibit is displayed, with a short typewritten story of each subject. I call the structure "The Naturalist's Shelf" and under the name appears the motto "Learn to Know a New Animal or Plant Every Day," which explains the purpose of the exhibits.

Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 1, July 11, 1928

American Egret

Beyond Indian Landing we saw an American Egret. I had seen a bird of this species, most probably the same individual, near this part of the river twice before, two and three weeks earlier, and on a still earlier date had seen it flying far overhead when paddling a canoe near Cedar Point. The bird was perched in a dead tree when we first glimpsed it, but it flew before us up the river, and we saw it several times again. We stopped to cook lunch on a high point of land jutting out into the grassy marsh through which the Severn flows after it leaves its narrow inland channel and begins to broaden into an estuary. The bird had alighted to feed in the marsh, and waded about in the shallow water, its body held high and dry on its long, stilt-like legs, almost the whole time we were preparing and eating our meal. We saw it plainly with naked eyes, and studied it for a while with the field glasses. The boys were delighted with their opportunity to observe this rare and beautiful wild creature as it stood with head

upraised and the long neck, equalling in length the remainder of the body, extended to the full. We made out clearly the long yellow bill and long black legs, which in flight extended far behind the body, which was without plumes. It is not pleasant to think of the avarice and lack of vision of the men who, to gratify the vanity of woman with a few lifeless plumes, have all but exterminated a creature which adds so much to the beauty and romance of the wilderness. This is the only egret I have ever seen.

From: Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 1, August 12, 1928

First Summer as an All-Around Naturalist

Last year there was much in the flora and fauna that was new to me for, although my home is only twenty-five miles from here, it is in a different zone, and this was my first extended visit to the southern coastal plains. The level, sandy land of the coastal plains, deeply indented by broad marsh-bordered estuaries, seems almost a foreign country to one raised among the rolling hills of the Piedmont region, although only a few miles away. I spent all of my available spare time in the identification and study of the new forms which I found in my own wanderings, or the boys continually brought in to me. Then, too, it was my first summer spent as an all-around naturalist, when I might be called upon to answer questions concerning any living creature from insects to trees. My work in previous summers, since I had received any scientific training at all, had kept my attention and energies focused on particular problems of study and research, with little time to ramble into other fields of interest.

From: Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 1, August 12, 1928

Nature Education

It was only after a long debate with myself, held under the stars on my evening walks in the brisk night air, late last winter, that I finally decided to come to Linstead this summer. I should have liked very much to finish up my study of the anatomy of *Mertensia* with fresh material gathered on the spot on Mt. Desert Island, instead of merely making a flying visit, as I did last June. Then I should have been ready to make an early start for Central America, and not postpone my departure until November, as I must do now in order to allow time to complete my work on *Mertensia*, on pickled

specimens. But I felt that at camp I should be able to bring some of the boys into direct contact with nature, and I have always believed that the knowledge and study of nature should be brought to as many people as possible. My teachings at camp, however elementary, would be brought home directly to the minds of some, while the highly technical monograph which I intend to write on *Mertensia* may but add to the already overwhelming mass of botanical literature, and be read by only one or two botanists a year. This thought weighed principally with me, and the prospect of spending two weeks in camp with the boys in my troop was an added inducement, so I decided to go to camp, as Mr. Marshall, the director, had been urging me to do.

From: Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 1, August 12, 1928

So Many Forms of Life

The contact which I have had with so many forms of life, animal as well as vegetable, during my two summers at camp, has been extremely valuable to me. I equipped myself with Jordan's *Manual of the Vertebrates*, Pratt's *Manual of the Common Invertebrate Animals*, Lutz's *Fieldbook of Insects*, Reed's *Bird Guides*, Holland's *Butterfly Guide*, Weed's *Butterflies*, Hough's *Trees of the Northern States and Canada* and Gray's *Manual of Botany*. With the aid of these I endeavored to identify every animal or plant which was brought in to me, and with the exception of the insects, was usually successful in finding the correct name for it. I kept a list of all the species which I found for the first time while at camp. This includes 40 plants, mostly angiosperms, 18 vertebrates exclusive of birds, 30 insects and 5 other invertebrates. In identifying the animals, I became in many cases, albeit superficially, acquainted for the first time with the taxonomic characters of the group to which it belonged. The bird hikes and my private studies gave me a more intimate acquaintance with birds and their habits than I previously possessed, and I became familiar with several new species.

From: Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 1, August 15, 1928

5 / After Panama

After obtaining his PhD, Skutch received a research fellowship, with freedom to choose subject and place of study. In November 1928, with the idea of delving further into the banana, he left for a six-month residence in Panama, at the United Fruit Company's experiment station at the Changuinola Lagoon, close to Almirante. On arrival, Skutch immediately fell under the spell of Latin America. At the experiment station, he soon developed a particular interest in the behavior of a Green Rufous-tailed Hummingbird and her brood; years later, he would remember his experiences with "Amazilia" (the name he gave to this bird, drawn from its Latin name) as a deciding moment. Later in 1929, when his residence in the research station had come to an end, he also visited Barro Colorado Island (then in the Panama Canal Zone), the highlands of Guatemala, and Honduras (including Lancetilla). In July, he arrived back home in Baltimore. After his time in Panama, Skutch began to understand that the tropics and birdwatching were becoming most precious to him. He received a new scholarship and in November 1929, on Professor Johnson's insistent advice, sailed to England and Germany, where he was to acquaint himself with aspects of European botanical science.

The entries below provide glimpses into Skutch's interests and state of mind after Panama (for an extended narrative about his actual residence in Panama, the reader should consult *The Imperative Call*). The first text makes clear that the tropical involvements had not diminished his fondness for nature in Baltimore County (Skutch also exemplifies his aesthetic and all-around approach to nature). The second passage highlights his quite systematic focus on ornithology and also confirms his ongoing concern with banana research (we learn about Skutch's constructive attitude towards manual labor as well; he would later build his own house at Los Cusingos!). The third entry shows his growing passion for the tropics and reveals his literary interests. In the last excerpt, we are confronted with a sad Skutch in Munich, who is reminiscing about Panama's splendors.

A Solitary Walk

I spent this beautiful, mild autumnal day in a solitary walk through the woods, going first along the bridle paths through Garrison Forest, and thence following down the deep, wooded valley of Jones' Falls as far as the Green Spring Valley Road.

Autumn has entered her second, more sombre mood. Two weeks ago our woods were aglow with a varied assemblage of colors which gladdened the eye. The hillsides were yellow with the foliage of tulip poplars and hickories, with here and there a patch of crimson where a lone sour gum stood. The oaks were still green, or clad in the subdued shades of red characteristic of their first change. Beneath the canopy of higher trees the dogwoods stood arrayed in their crimson foliage. In low, moist places the red

of the swamp maple was mixed with that of the sour gum, and the spice bushes beneath them were bedight with yellow. On the lawns and along the roadsides the cultivated Norway maples presented a splendid appearance in yellow and orange. The colors of the autumn leaves are seldom saturated, like those of flowers often are, so it is not easy to name them; but the blended shades of the foliage on a hillside, bright and cheerful in the mellow sunlight, yet not blatant or glaring, is extremely satisfying.

But now that is gone. Those leaves which affected the greatest gaiety in the face of death now strew the forest aisles, already mingling with the mould. Only the oaks, most sombre of our autumnal trees, still support a noteworthy mass of foliage, along with a few belated individuals of other kinds. As they are the last to become covered with the verdure of spring, so are they the last to reveal the naked limbs of winter. Now they impart its prevailing tone to the wooded landscape, a medley of russet and brown and mahogany, rarely a brighter tint. One hardly realizes what a predominant role they play in our woodlands, until the hand of autumn paints them in a different hue from all their fellows. Soon November's gusts will send their clinging foliage twirling down, joining the mould sere and dry, not with a flush of color like most other leaves. Still a remnant, on the saplings and on the lower and inner branches of the older trees, will cling fast despite the snows and gales of winter, the last sad vestige of the summer's green.

I ate my midday meal as I reclined on a bed of moss atop the gray gneiss cliff which rises above the Falls. As I was busy with my repast, so a couple of Golden-crowned Kinglets were absorbed in theirs, hopping from twig to twig with great alacrity, clinging in every position in order to pick small insects from the bark. Their note is the lowest and weakest of chirps, but to me it is an exquisite melody of the autumn woods. A Purple Finch, the first I have ever seen, perched for a moment in the bare gray limbs of the beech which rises above the top of the cliff. He had gone before I could focus my binoculars on him, but they caught him again in the branches of a nearby tree, and I saw enough to clinch the identification. Later in the afternoon I saw one of his kind feeding on the dry "cones" of the tulip poplar. He pulled a single samara from the fruit cluster, and with one deft bite of his thick bill cut out the seed from the larger end, allowing the empty wing to flutter leisurely to the ground. A Winter Wren, chickadees,

White-throated Sparrows, a Tufted Titmouse, juncoes, robins and a cardinal were also encountered.

As I forced my way through the undergrowth along the river bank, the westering sun, falling obliquely through the leafless trees, was reflected in a myriad gleams from the glossy upper surface of the leaves of the mountain laurel, which grows in profusion on the dry hillsides, and holds its rich green leaves throughout the winter. I was pleased to discover how the buds are protected. They are small and naked, and closely appressed to the stem above the axil of the leaf. They are not actually surrounded by the leaf-base, as is the sumach bud in summer, but the peliole at its base grows upward parallel to the stem, and is closely pressed against it, in such a manner that the bud is completely enclosed between the two. A bulge or cushion on the stem comes out to meet the petiole, and make the union more close. The terminal bud, lacking this protection, does not even survive the summer, and has already withered away. Next spring, one or more of the lateral buds must carry on the upward growth of the shrub, and so its axis becomes a sympodium.

Untitled & "Buds of *Kalmia latifolia*," *Journal*, Vol. 2, October 27, 1929

Nature Study after Panama

July, August and early September I occupied in the perusal of ornithological literature, preparatory to writing up an account of my observations on the birds of Panama. I read among others, Howard's *Territory in Bird Life*, Job's *The Sport of Bird Study*, Chapman's *Bird Study with a Camera* and *Camps and Cruises of an Ornithologist*, Finley's *American Birds*, portions of Bendire's life histories of American birds, William Beebe's *Two Bird-Lovers in Mexico*, *The Bird - Its Form and Function*, and *Tropical Wild Life in British Guiana*, Mrs. Gene Stratton-Porter's *Homing with the Birds*, Murphy's *Bird Islands of Peru*, liberal portions of Knowlton and Ridgway's *Birds of the World*, in addition to a number of shorter papers in the ornithological journals. I made a start on a proposed book on the natural history of Panama, and wrote a first draft of several chapters on birds, but finally decided that it would be inadvisable to attempt to publish anything on this subject until after a much longer acquaintance with the country. I finished a short paper on the nesting habits of the Tody-Flycatcher which I sent off to *The Auk*, but have not yet heard anything from its editor.

The remaining two months of my sojourn at home were occupied largely in preparing two technical papers on my work with the banana. The first "On the development and morphology of the leaf of the banana" and the second "On the unrolling of the leaf of the banana and some related plants, and their reactions to environmental aridity." I sent these off to the journals a few days before sailing, and of course have not yet received notice of their acceptance.

I spent much of my spare time this fall in painting some of the inside woodwork of our house. All of the rooms needed it badly, since practically no inside painting had been done since the house was built more than thirteen years ago. I painted the white woodwork in mother's room and my own, the hall upstairs, and the music room. In the pantry I painted all of the woodwork, and gave the walls a coat of white "Farbo." Since they are very rough, it was quite a task to work the whitewash into the plaster. Such work is a pleasant relief from purely intellectual occupations, it gives the mind an opportunity to relax while the arm is working. It keeps one in touch with the more humble occupations which are so necessary for our existence and comfort. The Talmudic law of the mediaeval Jews required that their rabbis each follow some useful trade, which must have formed a most wholesome balance to airy theological speculations.

From: Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 2, November 16, 1929

Readings While Sailing to Europe

I enjoyed the freedom to lounge around the ship in such old clothes as I chose to wear, instead of always having to appear in formal attire, as on a passenger vessel. I went into the pilot house when I wished, and down into the engine room, where the noise of the turbines was deafening. I went into the stoke-hold only once, and thank my fate I am not a stoker. I did much reading, usually closed in my tiny cabin, since in the general salon it was too difficult to avoid being drawn into a conversation at times when I preferred to read.

I perused Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*, a most remarkable story, and the *Conquest of Peru*, W. H. Hudson's *The Purple Land*, a delightful sketch of life on the pampas of Uruguay, H. W. Bates' *A Naturalist on the Amazons* (note from the editor: Skutch evidently refers here to *The Naturalist on the River Amazons*), and most of Conrad

Aiken's anthology of modern American poetry. There is hardly a poem in the whole collection to which I warm. Two selections from Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken" and "The Oven Bird," are pleasant but not inspired. Amy Lowell seems incapable of real poetic feeling, and does not even take the trouble to write good verse. Emily Dickinson is trivial. Edwin Arlington Robinson demands respect by the thoughtful content of his poems, but seems to be too much of a skeptic to rise to lyric heights. An out-and-out rebel like Shelley may be a great poet; but skepticism seems incompatible with poetic outbursts.

From: "SS Winona County" & "Reading on board," *Journal*, Vol. 2, November 16, 1929

Christmas Eve in Munich

Christmas Eve again, last year in Panama, and now in Germany. What a contrast between the two scenes! I vividly remember how I spent my last Christmas Eve. When I had finished writing some letters to the people at home, I left the broad verandah, and walked down the pathway past the blooming rosebush and the Bougainvilles vine in its full glory of blossoms, under the Seaforthia palms with their straight slender trunks and graceful, spreading crowns. I heard the gate swing back behind me as I set out along the tramway, through the pasture where the horses browsed or rested communing together in small groups. The moonlight filtered down through the branches and the fingered leaves of the noble Ceiba tree which towered up almost to the stars above me. A little way beyond lay the broad lagoon, once the proud channel of the Changuinola River, its unrippled waters reflecting the soft moonlight from their dark surface. On the far bank the light trunks and glistering leaves of the Inga trees which shaded the cacao plantation were dimly visible beyond the mist which hung over the water. Farther along the tramline I passed between the rude wooden camps of the black plantation laborers. It was late, almost midnight, and their noisy parties were breaking up with loud farewells, and many had already closed themselves in their little shacks for the night, with doors and window-shutters tightly shut, despite the balmy air. The overseers of the neighboring plantations were broaching a keg of beer in celebration of Christmas in the house of the local overseer behind the tall hibiscus hedge, and I could hear the strains of their raucous phonograph as I passed. When I turned to retrace my steps I met a friendly dog, who showed his affection by jumping up and wiping his

muddy paws on my clean white trousers, spoiling for the moment the happy frame of mind in which I found myself. It is all as vivid to me now as though it were this very night, despite the gap of three hundred and sixty-five days, and four thousand miles.

Tonight I sit in a cosy room in the basement of the Botanisches Institut, a vast and magnificent building entirely devoted to the science which I follow. Outside the window, almost on a level with my eye, the nobly planned garden sleeps under a mantle of snow which the day's thaw has torn into rents and shreds. There is no moon, but the stars near the Zenith have finally penetrated the mist, and Orion shines brightly over the grove of pine trees beyond the parterres. Off to the right a splendid collection of tropical plants is sheltered from December's frosts by a covering of glass, and off to the east the proud city, with its palaces and art galleries and museums, its houses and hotels, its rich and its poor with their passions and hopes and fears as in every other city under the sun, straddles the murmuring Isar. But I am an utter stranger here, alone among the multitudes, for their language is not mine, and I can not speak it. That is a bar to personal intercourse as effective as a thousand miles of ocean, and I feel more alone than amidst the jungles and plantations of Panama.

From: "Munich," *Journal*, Vol. 2, December 24, 1929

6 / First Days in Honduras

Having cut short his unhappy stay in Europe, Skutch returned to the United States in January 1930. He then became the recipient of yet another extension of his research fellowship in botany. This meant, on the one hand, that he was obliged to prolong the analysis of the banana. But, on the other hand, this grant also offered him a means of returning to Central America. He arranged matters such as to enable him to stay for several months at the United Fruit Company's Lancetilla Research Station in Honduras, not far from the city of Tela (at the research station, he met the eminent American botanist Dr. Wilson Popenoe, its director and originator). Officially, Skutch went over there to substantially extend his studies of the banana plant in an area where it grows abundantly. In his heart, however, he was already primordially focused on the Middle American region as a promised land for birdwatchers. The excerpts included here, which provide glimpses on what he was doing on his first days in Honduras, give direct expression to his real preferences (a tell-tale sign is the entry comprising a list of birds). Skutch clearly found himself surrounded by the imperative calls of the birds, which he could not set aside.

During his time in Honduras, Skutch watched the behavior of many more avian inhabitants (including Groove-billed Anis involved in cooperative breeding; see the next subsection) than those mentioned in the passages. However, the main purpose of the present section is simply to highlight the presence as such, in 1930, of Skutch's strong and irresistible ornithological inclinations (more "Honduras" texts on birds will be offered in Volume II). Another interesting point to note, as the excerpts make clear, is that Skutch´s store of previously acquired knowledge of nature and bird species in Maryland still regularly played a distinct interpretive role in the development of his early tropical observations and descriptions.

Warblers

I stood on a little sandy island in the Tela River, close beside a clump of large-leaved Calatheas and the tremendous arrow-shaped foliage of some Xanthosomas, near an open stretch where the clear waters of the stream sparkled as they rushed along their shallow, boulder-strewn course, and saw on the neighboring shore three birds which will soon be journeying to the land whence I have just arrived. The first was a Magnolia Warbler, which I had not seen for many a year, picking its meal among the tangled vegetation which lined the bark. The second was a Black-and-white Warbler, and the third a Yellow Warbler. The latter was one of the first birds I met upon my arrival. A

female flew up and plucked an insect off the screen while we were sitting on the porch. The species is very numerous and conspicuous hereabouts.

How cosmopolitan are these birds! Today they pluck moths among the branches and foliage of the trumpet tree, in a few weeks they will seek their meal among the sprays of the elm or the oak. And what is the advantage of the latter, that they should seek them at such hazards, and the fatigue of a long journey over land and water, when insects seem so superabundant here? One would almost impute his visit to northern regions to altruism, to help the farmer and the forester by devouring the insect pests which prey on his crops, in a climate where resident birds which perform this useful office are few.

"Migrant birds," *Journal*, Vol. 3, April 22, 1930

Catbirds and Wood-Peewee

Toward evening I saw several catbirds, and heard their nasal warning of "snake, snake," as I used to imagine they said when a small boy. Then I took their communication in good faith, and made haste to get clear of the tall grass which might conceal the dreaded reptile. One which perched on a trumpet tree had quite moulted his tail, and was getting a new suit of clothes for the long voyage he must shortly undertake. I heard the wood peewee but did not see him. Since others of his kind were in Maryland when I left, there must be a considerable interval between the departure of the earliest and the latest.

"Catbird," *Journal*, Vol. 3, April 22, 1930

List of Birds

List of birds tentatively identified on my first day in Honduras: Great-tailed Grackle (*Megaquiscalus major*), Red-headed Buzzard (*Cathartes aura*), Black-headed Buzzard (*Catharista urubu*), Groove-billed Ani (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*), Chestnut-backed Wren (*Pheugopedius maculipectus umbrinus*), Ground Dove (*Chamaepelia rufipennis*) very numerous, Green Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle americana isthmica*) female, Montezuma Oropendola (*Gymnostinops montezuma*), Rieffer's Hummingbird (*Amazilia t. tzacatl*), Hermit Hummingbird (*Phaetornis sp.),* Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica aestiva aestiva*), Black-

and white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*), Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*), Northern Tody Flycatcher (*Todirostrum cinereum finitimum*), Giraud's Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes similis superciliosus*), Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus guatemalensis*), Lichtenstein's Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus chloronotus*), Ghiesbrecht's Hawk (*Leucopternis ghiesbrechti*), Chacalaca or Gray-headed Guan (*Ortalis vetula plumbiceps*), Prevost's Cacique (*Amblycercus holosericeus*), Collared Araçari (*Pteroglossus torquatus*), Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*), Passerini's or Scarlet-backed Tanager (*Ramphocoelus passerinii*), Pauraque (*Nyctidromus albicollis*), Rail (*Creciscus ruber*) (Heard), Green Parrots, Blue-black Grassquit (*Volatinia jacarina*), Buff-throated Saltator (*Saltator magnoides*), Morellet's Seed-eater, White-collared Grassquit (= *Sporophila m. morelleti*). And a few others unnamed.

"List of birds seen first day in Honduras," *Journal*, Vol. 3, April 22, 1930

Avian Chorus

I awoke at five this morning, when the white clouds hung low over the hillside, and the first dim light filled the world to a symphony of bird music which filled the valley like a thing palpable. The leader and master-musician in this full-voiced choir was the Bonaparte's Thrush, hundreds of them all around us must have added their sweet notes to the song. Nearer at hand, in the grass outside my window, the tiny grassquits joined their canary-like notes to the general symphony. Farther afield the liquid gurgling of the oropendola sounded distinctly above the host of weaker voiced but more melodious minstrels. From away up on the wooded hillside the deep bass voices of the howling monkeys joined in the avian chorus.

"Bird chorus at dawn," *Journal*, Vol. 3, April 23, 1930

Along the Banks of the Tela River

This afternoon I made a little excursion along the banks of the Tela River below the experiment station. After penetrating a scrubby pasture overgrown with giant Calatheas, Heliconias and Cannas, which intervened between the tramline and the stream, I emerged on a low sandy shore, which gave way in places to accumulations of water-rounded stones. The river here runs with a swift current along the level floor of

the valley, and the still reaches are relieved by low, stony rapids. On the other side from where I stood was a clay bank, shoulder high, beyond which was the pasture overgrown with such rank weeds as might, from their appearance, occupy uncared pasture land anywhere in the eastern United States. Willows (*Salix humboldtiana*) lined the shores, with the same crooked trunks and narrow leaves which characterize willow trees almost everywhere. So long as I did not let my gaze fall upon the trumpet trees father from the shore, or the huge-leafed tropical verdure behind me, or the coconut which interarched its giant fronds with the fine spray of the willow, I could readily imagine myself standing beside the Gwynns Falls or the upper reaches of the Patapsco in many a familiar part of their courses. It seemed as though I had made a transit of fifteen hundred miles in as many paces.

The birds were for the most part in keeping with the northern atmosphere. The first which I glimpsed as I emerged from the thicket I had penetrated was a Spotted Sandpiper, tiltering along the sandy shore just as he does in his familiar summer haunts. He fled at my approach, but the white bars on the wings he spread in his retreat proclaimed his nationality sufficiently. A Grinnell's Waterthrush was feeding on the farther bank. Having assumed the sober livery and spotted breast of the sandpiper in preference to the gayer raiment characteristic of the warbler family, he has also adopted the mannerisms of the shore birds, ans tilts forward as he walks haltingly along the sandy beach for all the world like a sandpiper, which he so much resembles in plumage.

These birds are quite numerous now, and I have seen a number during the last week. A Maryland Yellowthroat paused for a moment to feed on a little island in the river. Several Yellow Warblers were in the scene, sometimes picking their meal from the foliage as the books say they should, occasionally making a dart on the wing for a fly or a moth, more like a kingbird than a warbler. A pair of Stout-billed Amazon Kingfishers patrolled up and down the stream, uttering the rattle characteristic of their whole family. While not quite authentic for a middle Atlantic water scene, they are sufficiently like our Belted Kingfisher in form and habits to maintain the illusion – if one is not too critical. The circumstance that the male bears the chestnut breast band which characterizes the female in our species need not weigh to heavily.

"The Tela River" & "Migrant birds – water thrush and sandpiper," *Journal*, Vol. 3, April 30, 1930

7 / Helpers at the Nest in Honduras

Skutch was one of the most influential watchers and interpreters of avian "helpers at the nest." Even before the real start (1932) of his career as a tropical ornithologist, he was already involved in observations of cooperative breeding. From the very beginning, sociality and proto-morality in birds came to the fore as key themes in Skutch's ornithological enterprise.

The present division comprises three entries, which reveal his early focus on helpers at the nest and show his immediate interest in the goodness of feathered creatures. The first two exerpts describe the cooperative behavior (feeding, defence) of a youngster in a family of Groove-billed Anis – consisting of Whiteface and Blackface (the parents), Johny (a first brood juvenile), and several second brood nestlings. The third passage celebrates the overall benevolence of the anis (toward their own family members; grasshoppers and lizards will doubtless see the anis as a highly malevolent species!)

Groove-billed Anis and Cooperative Breeding – i

Still mostly confined to my bed with a rankling sore on my right ankle, which will not yield to treatment, and makes it painful to stand or sit. Yesterday afternoon, however, I managed to limp and hop to the blind before Whiteface's nest, and spent an hour and a half watching the nestlings being fed. Whiteface worked hardest of all, and brought food, mostly grasshoppers to them ten times, while Blackface fed them only thrice. The young bird of the first brood flew up with a sizable lizard, which one of the nestlings swallowed head first. It was far too long to go down all at once, and although the little birds in the nest were entirely hidden from me by the rim, except when they stretched up to receive the food brought to them, for many minutes I watched the lizard's long tail, which stuck up above the nest and wiggled slowly from side to side. Finally it vanished. Possibly the youngster fed his younger brothers and sisters a second time, but the light was not good for distinguishing him by the smoothness of his bill, and the thickness of the foliage did not make it possible to be always sure of the absence of the paint marks which distinguish the adults. I have since learned to distinguish the three birds by their much frayed tails, which is very helpful. The youngster's is already in sorrier condition that his father's, and possibly even a little more worn than his mother's.

From: "Groove-billed Ani – young of first brood help feed second," *Journal*, Vol. 5, September 22, 1930

Groove-billed Anis and Cooperative Breeding – ii

This morning I again made my way painfully down to the blind. As I came up to the nest (my progress was to laborious to circle it) the youngster, whom I shall call Johny for short, was just as active as his father in protesting my approach. He flew up quite close to my head, uttering the angry *grrr-rr-rr* when he was nearest me. From his zeal in defending the nest I think he must be a male. During the hour and three-quarters I remained in the blind, Whiteface fed the nestlings ten times, Blackface six, Johny thrice. The food, as always, is principally grasshoppers, an occasional cockroach, yesterday a small spider as well as the lizard already mentioned.

From: "Groove-billed Ani – young of first brood help feed second," *Journal*, Vol. 5, September 22, 1930

Groove-billed Anis and Perfect Harmony

How I have enjoyed watching the simple life of this happy and affectionate family. Perfect harmony reigns between all; I am beginning to believe these birds incapable of a show of anger toward each other. Better such a life in the open fields, on a diet of cockroaches and grasshoppers, than life in a palace where the board groans under the cream and honey of the land, with the constant disagreements and bickerings which so often disfigure the conduct of the wealthy.

From: "Groove-billed Ani – some reflections on their family relations," *Journal*, Vol. 5, September 22, 1930

8 / Under the Spell of Tropical Birds

The birds may have kept Skutch happy, but at the Lancetilla Research Station his chief task was to undertake comprehensive explorations of the banana. He counted on somehow being able to stir up bits of fresh enthusiasm for further research on this plant, but soon discovered that his zeal for botanical analysis had simply vanished. Once again, it was not the case that Skutch had lost his enjoyment of living plants, but rather that mainstream botanical science, with its confined methodological principles, turned out to mean very little to him when confronted with the majesty and profusion of nature in the tropics.

In November 1930, Skutch left Lancetilla and travelled around. By mid-December, he reached Barro Colorado Island, where he stayed at the tropical research institute. For a number of weeks, he watched birds in the surrounding lowland forest, studying their avian sleeping habits in particular. At the institute, he met the influential American ornithologist Frank M. Chapman. Early spring 1931, Skutch arrived back in Baltimore, and, on professor Johnson's prompting, made his way to Cornell University (with much inner distress) to fill in the remaining months of his fellowship by improving his botanical skills at a laboratory. In August, after leaving Cornell, Skutch made an excursion along the Ohio River, together with a friend. During the first academic semester (autumn-winter 1931), he became an temporary instructor in botany at Johns Hopkins, replacing professor Johnson who was taking an absence of leave.

The selected entries give expression to Skutch's principal change of direction. After his second residence in central America, his heart was conclusively set on the comprehensive study of tropical birds in fields and plantations, at river banks and lake shores, in bushes and forests, and in the lowlands and the highlands. Several texts reveal the depth of his transformation as a naturalist in response to tropical experiences; one passage underlines his new sense of ornithological vocation, and another one tells about Skutch's decision to go to Cornell University, even though he already knew that he would not pursue a career in botany (this excerpt also contains a reference to the Great Depression – the social and economic context in which Skutch lived and worked until his 1932 departure for the tropics).

Feeble Interest in Botany

The rainy, dreary weather we have had since my arrival (and now, thank heaven, is breaking!) has not in the least been able to subdue the spirits of either the wood or the house wren, both of which pour out their gladness of living on the gloomiest of days. Oh that I might imbibe some of their exuberant cheerfulness, for my spirit is numb with melancholy and despair. Even the periods of intermittent sunshine which inspire bursts of impassioned song from Morellet's Seed-eater, else so silent, can not lift the

cloudiness from my heart. The rare, sweet melancholy notes of Vigors's Saltator, or the plaintive melody of the Blue-black Grosbeak are more in keeping with my mood. At about five in the afternoon, and again at dusk, I hear the catbirds in the bamboo walk, singing that medley of sweet and trivial notes that they use at home. One seems to imitate the whistles of the Black Cacigue, and in the song of another I think I detect the lilt of the Wood Trush, and it stabs my soul with a poignant memory of the far away and long ago.

I know not why, but the longer I remain here in the tropics, the more feeble the interest in botany, which first brought me here, becomes. I still stand reverent before the noble bole of giant tree, still warm to the graceful curve of the plumy frond of a palm, but the desire to know the names of the plants I see has all but disappeared. So, too, my curiosity concerning their internal structure has waned to the point of vanishing. The terminology and methods of the schools seem so distant, so ineffectual, in the tropical forest. It is only the birds which have kept me alive here. One needs no scientific training to love a warbled song, or to warm to the sight of a parent bird bravely defending its helpless nestlings. Yet I am committed to botanical research, and it leaves me dead and cold, I who two short years ago found the days too short for my interest. I managed to pull to completion the study of the anatomy of the banana rhizome, a task already set in time of greater enthusiasm, but to find another problem – there's the rub. It is almost too much to ask of one man to be both taskmaster and driven slave.

Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 7, February 3, 1931

No enthusiasm for Botanical Science

O, the damning doubts and the chilling irresolution which have swept over me at frequent intervals since I returned from my first Central American trip a year and a half ago. That summer I was uncertain and melancholy, and the unfortunate European trip which followed served to throw my mind into a state of still greater perplexity. I have never since then recovered the enthusiasm for botany which before then was mine. I completed at Lancetilla my studies of the rhizome of the banana, but it was not a work

of love as my previous researches have been – I did it merely because I was paid to, and breathed a sigh of relief when it was over.

How far distant, how ineffectual all our little scientific discussions and theories seem to one after a few weeks spent face to face with exuberant tropical nature, so far removed from the academic atmosphere in which our researches are born! My own little efforts to lift a corner of the veil seemed so pitifully inadequate to the vast undertaking, a voice stifled in the heavy atmosphere of the rain forest. I thought much of my native land, of the civilization which it represents, while wandering along the trails, and my thoughts were often far from happy. I could not help picturing modern civilization as a huge monster with limbs and frame of iron, which swallows up men, ideals, beauty, truth in the insatiable appetite for wealth, power and excitement. Of what use to such a civilization a few abstract truths about tropical plants; the only truths which it values, in the main, are technical discoveries which increase its power.

From: Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 7, March 7, 1931

From Regret to Tropical Birds

I have regretted ever since I began work under it that I accepted the National Research Fellowship. Had it not been for my mother's persuasion, the fact that my friends had interested themselves in securing it for me, and some coward misgivings of my own that my funds would not hold out, I never should have accepted it. I made my application last December, before my change of heart. I thought I had sufficient money to see me through the year, to carry out my own studies in my own way, and perhaps eke out my exchequer by doing a little collecting which Dr. Popenoe suggested. When I got back to Tela the second time, I doubted that I had enough resiliency to carry out the research on *Dracaena* under the difficult conditions encountered in carrying out anatomical work in the tropics with very inadequate facilities. I have returned to finish out my year with the council under the conditions they originally desired, at a laboratory in the States. How glad I shall be when my term is completed in July.

Should I ever voluntarily return to the tropics, it will be to study birds. These beautiful, shy creatures, leading their lives obscurely in the dim forests, impenetrable thickets and great marshes of the tropics powerfully influence my imagination. The nests of many apparently have never been seen by students; of very, very few do we

know much of their habits. I am not interested in collecting their skins – to know their proper names is enough – but would peep into their customs and habits of life, try to divine something of their sentiments. Perhaps in such studies lies some leaven for the iron materialism which chills our age. At any rate, I love the unspoiled aspects of nature, forests and rivers and mountains, and shall never long be happy separated from them. I would rather earn my daily bread by the humblest rural occupation than occupy the most envied professorship at a university in some great city.

I heard a Robin singing in the rain this afternoon, the first Robin's song of the season.

From: Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 7, March 7, 1931

An Unfortunate Year

I have been engaged for the past two weeks in the preparation of the results of my study of the banana rhizome for publication. Dr. Johnson thinks I should go to Cornell or to Harvard to complete this unfortunate year for which I hold the National Research Fellowship. He considers that I need the additional training, though since I now know I shall never put to use all the technical training I have so laboriously acquired, it seems futile to seek more. Were he not my teacher, who has long and patiently imparted to me the study he has made his life work, and I once an eager and not unapt pupil, I should tell him so bluntly, but I should heartily dislike to mar the sacredness of the relationship. I suppose I must accept what the fates hold in store until I am once again a free man.

At every street corner in the downtown districts is a member of the "army of the unemployed" selling apples at five cents each, to keep the wolves away from their doors. There must be so many that they seriously interfere with each other's trade. Meanwhile "Efficiency" remains the gospel of our age. How the gods must laugh when they see its cruel results, how the gospel defeats its own ends, wasting the day's labor of millions of men in this great effort that nothing shall be wasted!

Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 7, March 9, 1931

The Truths of Nature

Of late years my mind has been sorely perturbed by the uncertainty of our knowledge, the turmoil of conflicting scientific opinions, the overwhelming mass of data one must

assimilate before making an approach to truth, the doubt of the value of all our learned disquisitions at the long end. But in seeking abstract knowledge I have too long closed my eyes to the truths of nature which are visible to our naked eye, audible to the unaided ear. The world was made and peopled before I arrived upon the scene to grope blindly for the roots of the process. Whether acquired variations are heritable or not, whether light travels in a straight or a curved line, I have grasped facts greater than these, and at infinitely less expense than the verification of these demands. May the wonder and joy of the universe continue to exist after all its facts are catalogued and filed away in pigeon holes – these will never be so compressed as to fit in any pigeon hole.

What if theories fail, if experiments prove nothing; I have felt the freedom of the Frigate Bird soaring on quiescent wings in the rich sunlight above a broad and sandy strand; seen the nobility of the Ceiba tree as it spreads its mighty arms as in a benediction high above the green tree-tops of the rain forest, glimpsed the quick play of colors on the gorget of the hummingbird as he postures before his mate; gazed on the majesty of a noble volcanic cone silhouetted against the setting sun; grasped the warm hand of friendship. There was a period in the vanity of my youth when I valued these less than formal learning. I have paid deeply for my blindness. When earth's last plant is catalogued and labelled with a binomial, may there still be fragrance in the rose!

From: Untitled, *Thoughts*, Vol. 1, June 9, 1931

9 / An Ongoing Interest in Foliage

Though plants would never regain their former pre-eminent place, this section shows that Skutch's new focus on plumage (and the tropics) did not in any way signal a dwindling in his fundamental appreciation of the world of foliage as such (and of the nature of the North as well). The first entry articulates his response to the passion flower while on a trip along the Ohio River. In other excerpts, we see him enjoying the being of liverworts and skunk cabbage, some weeks before his 1932 departure for Central America. In one passage on Thoreau, he is concerned with the need for an "Audubon of the flowers."

Concerning plants, it is relevant to add that, for many years, Skutch would remain deeply involved with foliage in his capacity as a plant collector for natural history museums and botanical gardens, and that he did not hesitate to occasionally turn to the study of tropical trees and flowers (the vegetal realm regularly emerges in his nature books). It is also important to mention the prominent place reserved for foliage in his mature philosophy. For instance, in the context of his consideration of chlorophyll as the most beneficent earthly substance and photosynthesis as the basic good of the living world, on which all other constructive processes depend, Skutch insisted that our very existence essentially depends on the basic generosity of plants.

The Passion Flower

The day was exceedingly hot, and the sun beating down on the dusty roadway made walking almost a task, but I forgot about the heat when I discovered the large passion flower (*Passiflora incarnata*) clambering over the barbed-wire fence and the roadside weeds. Its great blossoms, 7.5 cm in diameter, are almost if not quite as large as the scarlet *P. vitifolia* I knew so well in the forests of Bocas del Toro province, and their colors much more varied and delicate, the white, spreading petals faintly tinged with purple, the long, abundant fringes of the crown white at the base, then banded with purple and white, passing into pale purple at the attentuate ends, the short inner bristles some shade between magenta and maroon. I could not decide just what to call it, but certainly not flesh-colored in the examples I saw. Hence one wonders why the name *incarnata*. The flower has a fragrance which we both agreed resembles that of the milkweed. I introduced Hatch to the edible fruit, our own substitute for the granadilla of the tropics. The arils surrounding the seeds which fill the interior cavity have a rather

tough-gelatinous consistency and a pleasant subacid flavor, but those we sampled were hardly mature. In a peach orchard across the road from the point where we first noticed them, we found many more, the vines clambering over the sandy soil. I stood long staring at the pretty blossoms, trying to fix their complex form and delicate shades of color indelibly upon my mind.

From: "The Ohio River - The passion flower," *Journal*, Vol. 8, September 10, 1931

Liverworts

If a man pass the whole of a long life in his own county, new and beautiful forms of life will continue to reward his search until his final year. I find unsuspected treasures of delicate loveliness on ground I have trodden many times before, never dreaming of their existence. I have devoted more time to the *Hepaticae* this winter than ever before, and been richly rewarded. H. shares my enthusiasm for these delicate plantlets. Winter days are no longer dull in the woods when, even with benumbed fingers, one can pick such treasures from the frozen soil.

From: "Hunting liverworts," *Journal*, Vol. 8, January 13, 1932

The Language of the Flowers

Thoreau writes in his journal for Feb. 6, 1852:

> The artificial system has been very properly called the dictionary, and the natural method, the grammar of the science of botany, by botanists themselves. But are we to have nothing but grammars and dictionaries of this literature? Are there no works written in the language of flowers? I asked a learned and accurate naturalist, who is at the same time the courteous guardian of a public library, to direct me to those works which contained the more popular account or biography of particular flowers from which the botanies I had met with appeared to draw sparingly, for I trusted that each flower had had many lovers and faithful describers in past times. But he informed me that I had read all, that no one was acquainted with them, that they were only catalogued like his books. (note of the editor: Skutch's citation of Thoreau deviates slightly from Thoreau's original text).

The book written in the language of flowers which T. sought has not yet been published. We still need some Audubon of the flowers to give us in colorful terms their life histories. Since Thoreau's day there have appeared many careful studies of individual species, of which F. L. Pickett's account of the jack-in-the-pulpit is an

outstanding example, but no one, to my knowledge, has attempted to collect such material into a book. And for the great majority of our native plants the information which should go into such a book has not yet appeared in any journal. But such a work must not be a compilation, only the writer who has studied his plants in the field could pour into it the beauty and freshness of woods and meadows which would be its breath of life.

"Thoughts on a biography of flowers," *Journal*, Vol. 8, January 26, 1932

Skunk Cabbage

The Skunk Cabbage is now in full bloom. Has no one extolled the elegance of its spathes? I fear I never fully appreciated them until today, and I take that as an indication that my sympathy with nature is yet increasing, that I am still developing new and more refined standards of appreciation.

They are no less varied than handsome, and appear at their best in low, moist woodland beside some purling brook, where they push up between the brown dead leaves, or perchance beside the bright emerald of a patch of delicate fern moss, or a little stand of gray-green *Sphagnum*, and the contrast of the green foliage sets off their deep rich tints. They bear the stains of the choicest hardwoods. Here is one beautifully streaked and mottled with cherry and green, inside and out, its polished surface showing every detail to perfection.

Close beside it stands another which is almost entirely green, with only scattered splashes of cherry. Another which I found was entirely of the richest mahogany, inside and out, so that at a little distance one might be led to believe that the hooded shell was carved from a block of that wood by a master hand, and polished with the utmost care. Each is a little woodland shrine, such as peasants erect in foreign lands whose offering is the golden pollen liberally shed – the year's first offering to the goddess of fertility – which contrasts beautifully with the deep tints of the smooth interior. Beside each spathe stands the foliage bud, the furled leaves already pushing up from the pointed extremities of the protecting scales, waiting for the first breath of spring to urge them on.

Unlike most people, I do not find the odor of the Skunk Cabbage offensive, but rather relish it for its strong, positive character. It is a wholesome, pungent, vital aroma, a fit symbol of the robust constitution of a plant which often sends up its flowers amid the winter's snow. How different from the sickly odors of corruption and decay!

"Skunk Cabbage in bloom," *Journal*, Vol. 8, January 28, 1932

Odor of *Conocephalum conicum*

I know of no fragrance more delicate and evanescent than that of the liverwort *Conocephalum conicum*. I commonly get it best when I first approach a stand of the plant on a moist, shady, muddy or stony stream-bank in the woods, or when I first lift a fragment of the mat from the ground. After the first inspiration, or at best the second, it is useless to try to experience it more, at least until quite an interval has passed. I may stoop down and press my nose against a luxuriant growth of the plant, but the fragrance will not repeat itself. It is too exquisite a sensation, suggestive of all the delicate beauty of mossy banks and shaded, dripping rocks overgrown with liverworts, long to endure. I gather up a handful of the plant and crush it between my fingers, and perceive a strong, spicy fragrance, not unpleasant, but very different from that which I desire to repeat. Yet perhaps it is caused by the same substance in excessive concentration, just as the faintest trace of formaldehyde is pleasantly aromatic, far different from the choking pungency of a full breath of the gas.

From: "Odor of the *Conocephalum conicum*," *Journal*, Vol. 8, January 28, 1932

10 / A Wandering Naturalist, 1932-1941

By January 1932 (then without an academic position, after Professor Johnson's return) Skutch had already firmly made up his mind to become an independent birdwatcher in Central America. His existential choice was based on various elements, imcluding a lack of interest in furthering an academic career in botanic science; irresistible desire to study tropical avian species; explicit awareness about the very minimal extent of scientific knowledge regarding the behavior and way of being of *living* birds in this region; and, consequently, a deep realization that it would be most worthy and fulfilling for him to follow the path of field ornithology in a tropical setting.

Between 1932 and 1941, Skutch lived mainly as a naturalist-traveller and plant collector in parts of Central America, including Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Panama. From 1935 onwards he predominantly resided in Costa Rica, especially in the area of El General. In 1939 he spent some time in Ecuador. Subsequently, he worked for a while as a botanist-curator in the Museo Nacional in San José, Costa Rica. After some months, he resigned from his position in San José to become a member of an American rubber expedition to South America. With the money earned through this expedition, Skutch finally had the means to buy a farm in Costa Rica.

For detailed (and more complete) accounts of Skutch between 1932 and 1941, the reader should certainly consult *A Naturalist in Costa Rica* (1971), *The Imperative Call* (1979), and several other books. In the present subsection just a miscellaneous series of passages has been retained, which aim to provide an overall sense of Skutch's ways and state of mind during these years.

Below one will find excerpts on certain of his wanderings, activities and travel plans in Central and South America; his three brief returns to the United States (including personal thoughts on his family); his plant collecting endeavors (living on some savings at first, Skutch subsequently sustained himself by gathering botanical speciments for natural history museums and botanical gardens); his views of birds (including Brown Jays as cooperative breeders, House Wrens in Rivas, and the Quetzal) and plants; his temporary job at the Museo Nacional; the early inclinations and attempts to find a homestead (by 1933 Skutch already had a clear image of his ideal home in tropical nature; one excerpt concerning this issue, "The ideal place," does not refer to an actual event, but, as a literary passage, it gives expression to his innermost vision; another excerpt shows that he was already seriously looking for a farm in 1934); difficulties of discovering a good spot for field study and plant collecting; his sense of feeling at ease in remote places; melancholy while moving to a new place; his disappointments, anticipations, experiences of illness; short musings; travel impressions of places; his attachments to Costa Rica and the area of El General in particular; and so forth. The last entry mentions Skutch's 1941 return to Costa Rica and his actual purchase of a farm.

Sailing to Guatemala

Sailed from New York on the United Fruit Company's SS "Santa Marta" for Puerto Barrios, Guatemala at noon on February 5th. My second voyage on the "Santa Marta"

since I returned from Jamaica in her in 1926. Our voyage was uneventful save for the birds and islands we sighted at sea. Herring and Ring-billed Gulls followed our ship south. At sunset on the 6th I counted between 50 and 60 gulls, mostly the ring bills, following the vessel. They remained abaft the ship, hoping that some final morsel might fall their way, until the light was so dim that their white bodies appeared black against the darkening sky.

From: "Voyage from New York to Guatemala," *Journal*, Vol. 8, February 5, 1932

Brown Jays and Cooperative Breeding

I spent three hours in my blind this morning, before the Brown Jays' nest in the willow tree. Despite the fact that the cries of the birds are often annoying to me, I find particular pleasure in watching them. It is a pretty drama of bird life enacted against a background of the light delicate spray of the willow tree, so much fresher and more vernal than the foliage of most tropical trees. Here I seem to witness the Golden Age in the development of an avian society – for although most birds seem to live in a golden age of light and joy, the Brown Jays have added the happiness of working unselfishly together to the more primitive joys of song and flight and parental devotion. The part taken by the young birds in caring for the nestlings seems to flow entirely from a spirit of helpfulness, they are not actuated by idea of gain or greed, and this, according to the poets, was the spirit which reigned in the Golden Age of man. Hence I call it the Golden Age in the development of the Brown Jays

From: "Brown Jay – their golden age," *Journal*, Vol. 11, May 29, 1932

Taking Quinine

The quinine which I am taking to cure an attack of malaria greatly increases my sensitivity to sharp and high-pitched sounds. The noise of the coconut fronds rustling in the breeze seems as sharp as the twittering of a flock of swifts, the calls of the anis sound sharp and metallic, while the shrill calls of the male sanates cut into my senses like a sharp knife. Possibly I can now hear sounds so high-pitched that at other times I am deaf to them.

"Effects of quinine on hearing," *Journal*, Vol. 11, June 19, 1932

Difficulties in Finding a Suitable Region

After having seen a fair amount of Central America, I am beginning to despair of finding a suitable region in which to build my tropical air-castle. The natives, who have little business with the outside world, penetrate into regions farther from the post office that I can afford to do, and they clear all level lands as they go, rarely even leaving a "woodlot" as we do at home. It is very difficult even to find a place to board within striking distance of the forest.

From: Letter to William R. Maxon, January 29, 1933

Birds and Plants

This morning our flock of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks was feeding on the ground in the pasture across the road, where some straw had been scattered. I counted twenty in all. With them was a single Red-eyed Cowbird, who flew up into the topmost twig of an oak tree and perched there a long while, at times spreading his cape until it stood like a black halo around his head.

I found something this morning which I did not know existed, a composite with much of the habit of growth of a strangling fig. The epiphyte was perched about eight feet above the ground in the trunk of an oak tree in the open woods. It was a large shrub or perhaps even may be called a small tree, for the largest of the wide-spreading branches was about twenty-five feet in length and slightly in excess of six inches in basal diameter. It had properly no trunk, for the principal branches arose directly above the roots. There were three of these of about six inches in diameter, and seven smaller ones. From the common meeting point of these branches a great number of roots encircled and closely embraced the trunk of the supporting tree. These were concrescent where they touched each other, in the manner of the roots of the figs, and formed a most complex anastomosing network.

"Rose-breasted Grosbeak," "Red-eyed Cowbird" & From: "A fig-like composite," *Journal*, Vol. 12, March 4, 1933

Person of Integrity

I would make no compromises with Fortune. Neither wealth nor knowledge nor love nor fame is worth the price of a betrayal of one's principles of conduct, and happiness is simply not to be bought by that coin. Perhaps to perform some great service to mankind

or to his country a man might without self-reproach make a compromise – but even to be crucified is not to compromise.

From: Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 12, March 12, 1933

Costa Rica as an Alternative to Guatemala

I have thought many times of your advice two years ago that I go to Costa Rica instead of Guatemala, and called myself all sorts of names for not taking it. This country is decidedly overpopulated, even second-rate forest is difficult to find at any altitude, save in the most inaccessible and unhealthful parts such as the Petén, and natural conditions have been effectively ruined. The government is very pesky, charging foreigners exorbitant visa and registration fees, and the customs regulations are such that it is most troublesome to obtain supplies or even books from abroad in case of need.

From: Letter to William R. Maxon, June 14, 1933

The Ideal Place

In the course of my long wanderings up and down the tropics, I had often dreamed of the ideal place in which to live and work in close contact with tropical nature, but never before had I come half so near seeing the realization of my dream. The first detail which took my eye, the central feature of the clearing, was the Oropendolas' tree, a towering, round-crowned giant, spared when its neighbors of the forest were felled, already burdened with scores of woven nests which hung from the terminal twigs like so many huge, gourd-shaped fruits. Even as I paused there, I could see the big birds, with chestnut bodies and yellow tails, flying between their nests and the surrounding forest, and at times the stirring liquid gurgle of the males floated down from amid the branches. It was the presence of this colony, my host informed me, which five years ago had determined him to buy out the original squatter and establish his homestead in this spot. The birds had returned every year to build their nests in the same tree.

The cottage itself stood on a little knoll, part of the first rise of ground toward the foot of the mountains, and so embowered among flowering shrubs and vines that, with its corrugated iron roof painted gray instead of the usual red, one looked twice before he noticed it. Here it commanded a view of the Oropendola colony from a level almost equal to that of the nests, and of the small plantation which surrounded it. Situated so

as to enjoy the first rays which the rising sun sent to the floor of the valley, it stood so close to the western rampart of the vale that now, at four in the afternoon, it was already half in the shadow of the heavily wooded mountain which rose steeply behind it. The ridge on the opposite side of the valley was lower and more gentle. A hundred yards upstream from the house the clearing ended abruptly at a towering wall of vine-enshrouded trees, which extended unbroken across the level ground from slope to slope and interlocked their lofty branches above the swift waters of the stream.

I stood many minutes lost in admiration of the lovely vale, marveling at the skillful fashion in which the comforts of a home and the softer charms of a cultivated landscape had been blended into the sublime but coldly impersonal beauty of primeval forest and mountain. My host and Claudio waited silently behind me until I turned enthusiastically to the former and tried to express my appreciation of the scene to which he had led me. Then we descended from the little rise in the trail and passed through an orchard of oranges, grapefruit, avocados, plantains and bananas, which gave way to a small vegetable garden on the gentle slope which led up to the house.

From: "The Orchid of Victory," August 1, 1933

Plans to Go to Costa Rica

I have been working on plans to go to Costa Rica, and if I do not go in January, still want to go in July or August of next year.

From: Letter to William R. Maxon, November 17, 1933

Desire to Settle Down

I came to Costa Rica with the idea of acquiring a little land, building a simple shelter, and settling down to study birds and to cultivate the soil, at least to the extent of supplying my own table with fruits and vegetables. I came to Pejivalle on the recommendation of Dr. Maxon, who spoke most favorably of the locality. It was easy to picture the kind of site in which I dreamed of living: beside a stream of pure water flowing through the forest, on level or gently sloping ground; it was difficult to find such a place. I devoted several days to the exploration of the valleys of the Pejivalle River and its branches, to a distance of about fifteen miles from Turrialba, and found all the valley lands cleared and occupied, while much of the steep slopes of the mountains

enclosing them had been shorn of its forest. With few exceptions, only the precipitous mountain slopes remain wooded. I did not succeed in discovering a site that I liked. Without much doubt there are broad, forested valleys in the mountains far from any settlement, but it would be expensive and difficult to carry in the materials necessary for the construction of even a very little house, and to bring home supplies – to go for the mail would be more than a day's journey. The natives of the country are more self-dependent than I can bring myself to be, even by the utmost simplification of the life to which I was accustomed in my childhood and youth; they need fewer things which they can not themselves create, they have fewer contacts with the outside world, hence they can affort to penetrate farther from store or post office than I – for I have not the means to hire someone else to run my errands.

It is the same story here as elsewhere in Central America, the cultivable lands are cleared outward from a settlement without leaving any stretches of forest or "woodlots" between the plantations and pastures. It is far easier to find woodland, on moderately level ground, within ten miles of Baltimore or Washington than within the same distance of Turrialba, which is hardly more than a village.

"Plans for settlement in Costa Rica," *Journal*, Vol. 16, February 3, 1934

Return to Baltimore

The plans for settling in the Estrella Valley did not work out as I had hoped they would. When I arrived at Suruy I found unforeseen obstacles and expenses, and began to fear I could not hold out long enough there to accomplish what I wanted to do. The days I spent at Suruy, Tuesday until Saturday, were days of agony, when I found myself torn between an intense desire to stay and study the birds and an attack of nostalgia which proved stronger still. I sailed from Limón on March 11 on the SS Veragua (a beautiful ship) and reached New York and Baltimore on March 18. The result of intense inward strife, of the resulting sense of failure and irremediable weakness of character, was almost two months of the most severe mental depression and anguish, of sleepless nights and empty days, during which I accomplished nothing. My health returning about the middle of May, I made some observations on the nesting of the Flicker, Towhee and Catbird, which I recorded in my loose-leaf file. This, with

gardening, reading and a little writing, and preparations for my forthcoming collecting trip in Guatemala, occupied my time until toward the end of June.

Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 16, 1934

Professor Oakes Ames

A fellow passenger on the SS Veragua last March was Professor Oakes Ames, supervisor of the Arnold Arboretum, for which I collected orchids and woody plants in Guatemala last year. He seemed very much interested in the orchids, in which he specializes, and told me that they suggested that I had hit upon a region with a distinctive and little known orchid flora. One of my collections was a new species of *Liparis* so different from its congeners that he named it *Liparis fantastica*. I pointed out that I had touched upon merely one edge of the extensive high plateau of northwestern Guatemala, which would probably be found to contain many additional things of interest. Professor Ames suggested that I might undertake an expedition into this country for the Arnold Arboretum.

As a result of this meeting, and subsequent correspondence, it has been arranged that I am to spend six months collecting for the Arnold Arboretum, in northwestern Guatemala, particularly in the departments of El Quiche, Huehuetenango and Quezaltenango, at a salary of $150 per month, with an allowance of $40 per month for travelling expenses. The latter is too little, but I set this figure on the basis of an expedition of ten or twelve months, which would have distributed the largest single expense, transportation to Guatemala, over a longer period.

"Plans for collecting in Guatemala," *Journal*, Vol. 16, 1934

Mexico

Since I found that it would cost very little more to reach western Guatemala by way of Vera Cruz, Mexico, than by Puerto Barrios, Guatemala, I decided to take the former route and see something of Mexico for the first time. I sailed from New York on June 27th, on the SS Orizaba of the Ward Line. The ship is of about 14,000 tons and the largest on which I have ever voyaged, and is crowded with tourists. I like the smaller

ships better. The voyage to Havana was uneventful, over an exceptionally smooth sea. We delayed only three hours in the port, then proceeded to Progreso, Yucatán.

"Voyage to Mexico," *Journal*, Vol. 16, 1934

Philosophical Discusssions in Guatemala

It rained on every afternoon while I remained at "Helvetia." Tea, in the English fashion, broke the monotony of the dark, dreary afternoon, and while partaking of the refreshment I managed to fall into arguments with Mrs. Davies – on such abstruse subjects as whether animals are conscious, and whether there is such a thing as "free will." My fair opponent took the negative on the first subject, and the affirmative on the second, and argued very well. I believe I almost managed to convince her that our apparently spontaneous decisions are not the result of chance or caprice, but are rigidly predetermined – that, all appearances to the contrary, we are not free to choose!

"Helvetia – rains and philosophical discussions," *Journal*, Vol. 17, october 11, 1934

The Life of a Botanical Collector

Perhaps not the least interesting feature in the life of a botanical collector is the variety of scene amid which he seeks his plants, and the contrast of the conditions under which he is obliged to live. And in few lands of equal size would it be possible to find greater variety and contrast than in Guatemala. From bare mountain summits and flowery alpine meadows to heavy tropical forest is but a short journey. In the matter of living conditions I have within a few weeks experienced equal extremes. I hope I shall never be forced to lodge in surroundings more uncomfortable and dirty than I found at Soloma; I hardly expect that my wanderings in search of plants will lead me to the place where I shall dwell in greater luxury, or in a more attractive environment, than I found at "Moca."

"Contrasts in a collector's life," *Journal*, Vol. 17, November 3, 1934

My First View of the Quetzal

A little later occurred the crowning event of the entire journey. From the great trees which rose above us on the left or uphill side of the trail a male Quetzal darted forth, just ahead of us, and went flying across the ravine to our right, to perch in some high

trees on the opposite side. Its green plumage appeared black against the sky; its flight was slightly undulatory, less than that of the smaller Trogons, and the long slender feathers of its train, carrying out the rythm of its course, rippled gracefully behind. Before I had time to recover from the surprise and delight of this sudden and unexpected meeting, a second male Quetzal, equally magnificent, followed after the first. This one perched for a moment on an exposed branch on the far side of the ravine, where I had a fleeting glimpse of him through my field glasses. (This was at an altitude of 4600ft). These are the first and only living Quetzals I have ever seen. Would that they were the first in any condition, and I had never defiled my sight by looking upon the hideous stuffed effigies which ignorant men set up in their drawing rooms with the mistaken notion that they are ornamental.

From: "Across the Cerro Putul – my first view of the Quetzal," *Journal*, Vol. 18, November 25, 1934

A Melancholy Train of Thought

As we neared the top of the ridge, the ascent became more gentle. The trail wound along the summit, rising and falling by turns, at an elevation of about four thousand feet above sea level, before at length leading down to the Rio Copón. We passed through beautiful forest, in which the Vera Paz Solitaires sang, and other sweet minstrels which I did not recognize. A melancholy train of thought, which had been growing upon me for the last three days, here weighed upon me more than ever. Here in the midst of unspoiled nature, with a thousand interesting and beautiful things all around me, I was obliged to hurry onward, with no time for observation or enjoyment, with my senses dulled by the fatigue of the journey and my attention claimed by the uneven, muddy trail, that I might arrive by evening at a place where I could satisfy my need of food and find a lodging for the night. And the place where I should encounter these necessities of life would, more likely than not, be in the midst of a great clearing, where nature had been despoiled, and man lived amid filth and ugliness. Alas! Though there remains in most of us a longing for the freedom of the forest, our bodies have become so softened by centuries of coddling that we can not return to them without at least a mule-load of luggage.

"Melancholy reflections," *Journal*, Vol. 18, November 27, 1934

A Decent Place or Disappointment?

The light was failing when we rode into a wide pasture and beheld the white-walled farmhouse of Chailá on a rise of ground ahead. As we drew nearer my mind was busy trying to picture what kind of welcome I would find there. Would it be a decent place in which to live and work, or would my long journey end in disappointment, as so many of my life's longer journeys have ended?

From: "Across the Zona Reyna – the journey ends," *Journal*, Vol. 18, November 27, 1934

Exceedingly disappointed in Chailá

I was exceedingly disappointed in Chailá. I was told that I should find here "virgin country." Actually hardly a stick of forest growth remained in the valley, and the bushy abandoned clearings extended far up the slopes of the enclosing ridges. The cultivation at Chailá consisted of a small coffee plantation, possibly fifty acres, a grove of cacao of about the same size, some patashte, and the shifting milpas of the Indians. The cultivated areas, even including the pastures, could not have amounted to a twentieth of the vast wilderness of second-growth in which they were embedded and lost.

There was indeed forest on the upper slopes of the long ridge behind the house (the one which we had crossed on the last day´s journey), and on a steep slope just across the river, which was much closer. But there was no trail through the second-growth to the distant forest on the ridge (other than the path which led six or eight miles up the valley before ascending to the wooded upper slopes), and there was no boat at hand for crossing the Rio Copón, which was too shallow and rocky to swim and too deep and swift to ford.

At the end I found myself marooned in a sea of uninteresting second-growth, after having passed for three days through magnificent forest. With time I might have secured a cayuca in which to cross the river, or had a trail cut up to the forest on the ridge, but my quarters were so miserable that I did not care to remain that long.

From: "The Finca Chailá – a disappointment," *Journal*, Vol. 18, November 30, 1934

The Highlands of Guatemala

To those who dwell in the temperate zones and know the tropics only through the medium of books and pictures, their mention calls up visions of palm-fringed shores, of

lush, luxuriant forests teeming with gorgeous birds and butterflies, of hot days and balmy nights. It was of such tropical regions that I read as a boy, and it became my youthful ambition to see at first hand some of their wonders. At length my dreams came true, and I made two long visits to the Caribbean lowlands of Central America, in Panama and Honduras. But when I had become somewhat familiar with the general characteristics and natural productions of the lowlands, I began to feel an increasing curiosity about the high regions of the interior, upon whose outlying mountains I had so often gazed while residing in the coast lands, but which I knew only from hearsay and books – and a flying trip to Guatemala City, between ships.

When I had been many months in the lowlands of Honduras, I decided that I would be benefitted by a breath of mountain air, and I arranged to visit a farm in the highlands of Guatemala, a mile and a half above the level of the sea. The estate was in a region of great scenic beauty and unusual interest to the naturalist; a month's sojourn there served only to whet my appetite for a longer experience of it. Two years later the longed-for opportunity arose, and I was able to realize my desire to pass a full year and to follow the sequence of the seasons in this tropical region so different from the tropics of romance and legend.

From: "Introduction," *A Vernal Mountain*, 1935

San Isidro del General - i

After flying for perhaps fifteen minutes over forest interrupted only by the white threads of slender mountain torrents, clearings again began to appear in the valleys. Then we of a sudden passed from the mountains to a vast, nearly level, mountain-walled valley, the valley of El General. A fleecy blanket of mist covered over a large portion of the plain, including the aviation field, and the pilot could not see to make a landing. We circled around and around for about fifteen minutes, sometimes diving through fringes of the blanket of cloud, but more often zooming over portions of the plain which were clear of fog, but where there was no landing field. Beneath us were long strips of forest, broken by more extensive clearings, which were chiefly devoted to pasturage. Here and there were little huts with roofs of cane leaves, and before most of these was a little knot of men, women and children who looked up at the circling

airplane. After a time the fog lifted, and we glided gently down onto the level landing field of San Isidro del General.

From: "San José to San Isidro del General by plane – the landing field covered by fog," *Journal*, Vol. 20, November 28, 1935

San Isidro del General - ii

San Isidro del General is a most unattractive place – despite its attractive setting. There are eight butcher shops, but no place which offers a night's lodging to the traveller! A Jamaican negro who has been many years in the country keeps a comedor, where one may eat rice and beans seated on a stool without any back, before a table of rough boards without any cloth, in a room with an earthen floor and walls papered with selected sheets from the *Saturday Evening Post* and the San José dailies.

From: "San Isidro del General – a squalid town," *Journal*, Vol. 20, November 28, 1935

Juan Schroeder

This afternoon Don Otto introduced me to Don Juan Schroeder, the Jefe Politico of the Cantón of Perez Zeledón, which includes this region. While in Guatemala, the Jefe Politico has charge of a Departemento, the corresponding political division here in Costa Rica, the Provincia, is administered by a Gobernador, while the Jefe Politico has charge of a much smaller division, the Cantón, which has no exact equivalent in Guatemala, but corresponds roughly to the Municipalidad. Both the Gobernator and the Jefe Politico are appointed by the president of the republic. Don Juan's father was an American, born in Wisconsin, who came to Costa Rica as a youth, married here, and never returned to the States.

I told Don Juan that I needed a man to assist me and intended to build a rancho in which to live. He suggested that I should be more likely to find a good mozo in Rivas than in San Isidro. He was preparing to visit Rivas this afternoon, and suggested that I accompany him.

Untitled & From: "Rivas," *Journal*, Vol. 20, November 29, 1935

Rivas – i

Rivas is a straggling settlement spread out along the valley of a rushing mountain stream, the Rio Buena Vista. It could hardly be called even a village, the houses are too

scattered, but in the portion where the dwellings are nearest together there is a very modest and somewhat ruinous church and a small and severely plain school. There is neither store, post office nor telegraph office.

From: Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 20, November 30, 1935

Rivas – ii

I took into my employ, at forty colones per month, with food, a young ladino named José Barrantes, and with him went out to explore a portion of the forest which presses closely upon the cleared and bushy lands of the valley. Don Juan suggests that I rehabilitate a rancho belonging to him, in the center of Rivas, which has a roof of cane leaves but no walls.

"I employ an assistant," *Journal*, Vol. 20, November 30, 1935

Canán

I went this morning with José to Canán, a district in which there are a few huts in clearings carved out of the forest, in the valley of the Rio Chirripó. The trail led across the forested ridge on the eastern side of the valley of Rivas, then down into the valley of the Chirripó. The crest of the ridge, where the trail crosses it, is at an altitude of 3800 feet. The Chirripó is larger than the Buena Vista, a clear mountain torrent which rushes with an irrestistible current down a narrow channel cluttered with huge boulders, sending up a mighty roar. As everywhere in the tropics, the amount of cleared land in the valley, now overgrown with bushes, is all out of proportion to the actual cultivation and to the population which it supports, but there remains plenty of forest.

From: "Canán," *Journal*, Vol. 20, December 1, 1935

Settling in Rivas

I had wanted to see Canán, and what it offered, in order to decide whether this or Rivas would be the more favorable locality in which to establish my headquarters. Canán is twice as far from San Isidro, which in itself offers no attractions, but is the nearest point where one can mail a letter, purchase supplies, or ship off specimens. Life will be simpler in Rivas, and it will be easier to make excursions in various directions. Hence I

have decided to make headquarters there, and to rehabilitate the rancho which Don Juan offered.

From: "I decide to settle in Rivas," *Journal*, Vol. 20, December 2, 1935

Back to Collecting Plants

Rain this morning. Began to collect plants this afternoon, for the first time in ten months. The first day since last January that I have done anything to yield an income, although it will probably be several months before I can collect the fees. Meanwhile the funds have been running low.

"Begin to collect," *Journal*, Vol. 20, December 9, 1935

At Home in the Wilderness

I discovered, some months ago, that I have entirely lost the sense of remoteness. When I was younger, and lived on the outskirts of a great city, which I was obliged to visit almost every day in order to attend the university, an excursion of ten or twenty miles into the country gave me a pleasant sense of aloofness, of remoteness from the busy world with its imperious round of activities, its bustle and its noises. It was at bottom, perhaps, no more than a feeling of contrast between my habitual surroundings and those more sequestered ones into which I had escaped. But now, although I settle in a place as entirely aloof and isolated from the current of the world's affairs as this, I have no feeling of being remote from things. I am here and the forests are here and my work is here, I have escaped from nothing that oppressed me; there is little sense of change from the other places in which I have lived of late, although here I enjoy fewer material comforts. Even a week's sojourn in San José, while I made preparations for the journey, could not revive in me that feeling of remoteness when the swift flight of the airplane put so many high mountains between me and its noisy streets – although I did breathe more freely when I left them. I have come to feel truly at home in the wilderness, and hence it does not seem remote from anything which really counts.

"Lost sense of remoteness," *Journal*, Vol. 20, December 10, 1935

Collecting and Drying Plants

I went collecting again this morning, with José as assistant. He is a good helper and finds many things while I arrange those already found. The procuring and arranging of six specimens of each species is a time-consuming business, and makes the collecting go very slowly. We collected only eleven species, and did not get more than half a mile from our starting point; yet, with a number of ferns of which a single specimen occupies two or three sheets, the drier is working to full capacity tonight.

"Slow collecting,"*Journal*, Vol. 20, December 11, 1935

A Hen's Egg

Returning to the rancho soon after noon, I found that the tops of the conjugated cardboard driers, hanging upright in the press, had been scratched into shreds. A newly-laid egg, resting in the folds of the cloth apron which surrounds the press to keep in the heat, on the side where it hung against the wall, revealed the author of the mischief – one of the neighbors' hens.

From: "Mischievous hen," *Journal*, Vol. 20, December 11, 1935

My Table

The table stands in front of a long bench, built against the wall of the room. Here I sit, at the end nearest the kitchen, the source of supply, to eat my meals in solitary grandeur off a corner of the table. The table must also serve as writing table and work table. When the unruly winds blow up the valley and carry away the papers in which I am arranging the plants, the table must be moved into the room. Thus in my simple mode of life everything must serve multiple purposes, and everything (except the attached bench and shelves) must be mobile.

From: "My rancho – the table," *Journal*, Vol. 20, January 26, 1936

No Oppressive Heat

The weather is becoming warmer, the nights are milder and the days less fresh. The early mornings are still chilly, but the middle hours of the day are distinctly warm. The natives complain of the heat, but most of them do not know what heat really is. I, who have lived through North American summers in the middle latitudes, and resided for

several years in the tropical lowlands, do not find the heat oppressive, although the sun is daily acquiring force.

From: "Warmer weather," *Journal*, Vol. 20, January 30, 1936

Forest Clearing

Since the first of the year (many of the volteados were actually begun in December) the men have been felling the forest for their plantings, and at intervals through the mornings, when chiefly they work, we have heard the crash of great trees falling on the distant slopes. Before cutting down the tall trees, the laborers cut away all the underbrush with their machetes, which makes the forest look most inviting and park-like, with longer vistas beneath the trees than one ordinarily enjoys in tropical forest, and attractive glades through which one can wander without fighting his way against brushes and vines.

But this idyllic state of the forest is of short duration; soon the big trees are attacked and overturned, and the noble woods are reduced to a scene of chaos and ruin. The tangle and confusion of prostrate trunks, splintered branches and intertwined vines is so great that it requires great effort and a certain amount of ingenuity to make one's way across them. Only by walking along the horizontal trunks, clean and branchless, and jumping from one to another of them, is it possible to make much progress. If one leaves these slender causeways, he sinks from waist-to-head deep in such a litter of branches, twigs, vines and leaves that it is quite impossible to move either forwards or backwards.

"Clearing the forest," *Journal*, Vol. 20, February 4, 1936

Fallen trees and Flower Collecting

I have visited a number of these volteados (from voltear, to upset or overturn), as the areas of fallen forest are called, in the hope of finding flowers of some of the taller trees, which are usually most difficult to procure. But the results of my searches have in general been disappointing, and I have found very few specimens, although some of these are of plants which I would not otherwise have been likely to collect. The trees are almost invariably thrown down the steep slopes, and the tall and heavy ones descend with such a terrific impact that the crowns are completely shattered, and frequently it is

difficult to find half a dozen flowering twiglets in good condition among the branches of a considerable tree.

Moreover, it is the usual practice to leave one or more smaller trees standing in the descending path of a great one, so that the latter will overwhelm them and save the laborer the work of cutting them separately down. This adds greatly to the confusion and the havoc wrought upon the falling trees. Even when one finds flowers among the wreck, everything is so confused, with one tree lying above another, their branches often intertangled, that it is often difficult to determine whether these flowers belong to a vine, or an epiphytic bush, or a large tree, or a small one.

"Few specimens found among the fallen trees" & "Difficulty of finding source of flowers," *Journal*, Vol. 20, February 4, 1936

House Wrens in Rivas

The House Wren's eggs in the gourd hatched today. The young birds of the first brood sleep tonight in the gourd with their mother and their new-born brothers and sisters. The first two entered without incident, but as the third flew into the orange tree it was pursued by the father, who apparently desired to drive it away. But the young bird eluded its father and slipped into the gourd without much trouble. The father sang just once on his favorite perch before the entrance, then flew to the gourd and went in – the first time I have ever seen him do so at the hour of retiring. I judge that his motive was to evict the youngster, but he was unsuccessful and soon emerged to cling to the sill.

While he clung there he pecked at one of the occupants, evidently the youngster to whom he objected, who had come to the doorway to peck back at the father. The latter soon retired to his favorite perch in front of the gourd, where he remained in silence for many minutes, while the twilight became very dim. He seemed to be too angry and perplexed for song. At length he flew across to the roof where he sleeps, but in a minute he returned to his perch in front of the gourd. He went again to the roof, but almost immediately returned a second time to his favorite perch in the orange tree. Apparently the situation distressed him so greatly that he could not sleep, for it was well past his usual bed-time. Finally, in the deepening dusk, he flew a third time to the roof, where in angry silence he ensconced himself for the night among the leaves of the thatch.

From: "Costa Rican House Wren," *Journal*, Vol. 21, June 26, 1936

To See the World

I should indeed be greatly disappointed if I could not go to Ecuador, or possibly one of the neighboring countries, within a year or so. So long as I must wander I want to see the world.

From: Letter to William R. Maxon, November 29, 1936

Sad departure

He who leads a wanderer´s life must bind his heart about with triple bands of bronze. And if he pause in one place long enough to form attachments, his heart must be encased in still stronger armor. Today I took leave of Rivas, and it was a sad departure. Since I left the home of my boyhood, I have not in ten roving years resided so long in one spot. It was hard to say goodbye to the birds over which I have watched continuously for so long a time, especially the House Wrens and Woodpeckers, and to give adiós to Don Juan Schroeder, who has befriended me so greatly since my first arrival in El General.

From: "Departure from El General," *Journal*, Vol. 27, June 17, 1937

Packing and Selling

Yesterday was a fevered day, for I was obliged to pack and to sell my household equipment at the same time. The neighbors flocked in during the afternoon to buy my tableware, cooking utensils, and various odds and ends which it seemed better to sell than to carry with me. Although a great variety of small articles was scattered over the rancho, and I could not watch everybody at once, so far as I know, nothing was stolen. This speaks well for their honesty. For shameless liars, as most of them are, my neighbors in Rivas are scrupulously honest in matters of property.

"Departure from El General – I sell my household effects" & "Honesty of my neighbors," *Journal*, Vol. 27, June 17, 1937

Vara Blanca

On my visit to Vara Blanca last week, I looked at an unoccupied house belonging to Señor Wilhelm Peters, situated upon his farm "Montaña Azul," two or three miles north of the hamlet. The owner is a German of forty years' residence in Costa Rica, who lives on his coffee plantation, "Rio Virilla," situated beside the river of that name close

by San José, along the road to Heredia. Here he has a fine residence and a large beneficio for coffee, and his farm in Vara Blanca is only a plaything on the side. Indeed, "Montaña Azul" in itself could never have built or support the little house which stands upon it, and which from the first, I surmised, was built as a summer retreat by a man who had other sources of income.

I made two visits to Señor Peters at "Rio Virilla," and arranged to lease the house at Vara Blanca for a period of three months at a rent of 35 colones per month. The lease is subject to extension if agreeable to both parties to the contract, or to termination at the expiration of one's month's notice served by either party.

From: "Montaña Azul" & "I lease a house," *Journal*, Vol. 28, July 8, 1937

Homesickness

Today I unpacked, and was very homesick for Rivas and my little rancho there. With all the changes of residence that I have made during the last ten years, I always suffer nostalgia for the last place in which I have resided for any considerable period. This species of mental depression usually does not manifest itself so long as I am travelling about, but only after I have settled down again in a place where I contemplate making a lengthy sojourn. I think that the prospect of passing a long time in a strange environment helps to bring on the attack of despondency. The soul, which is irrational, does not at once respond when the mind assures it that, within a couple of weeks, the new locality will have ceased to be strange and unfamiliar. The soul, all the affections of man, clings desperately to the known and the tried; only the intellect is adventuresome.

"Homesickness," *Journal*, Vol. 28, July 10, 1937

Vivid Recollections

The sky cleared during the night, and the air became very cold. At dawn the thermometer in the hallway stood at 12˚C. The day was beautifully fair and, for a change, quite without rain. There was something in the quality of the sunlight, the temper of the air, that brought back vivid recollections of the Sierra de Tecpán, memories pleasant in themselves, but tinged with the sadness of the passing years. Alas, there is that in the life of every man, the most blessed and the most wretched, at

one and the same time to drown the bravest soul with tears, and to burst the coldest heart with gladness.

"A beautiful day," *Journal*, Vol. 28, July 14, 1937

Bird Songs in the Mountain Forests

At this season, few of the birds here sing with frequency. By far the most tuneful are the Gray-crowned Wood Wrens (*Henicorhina leucophrys*), which are exceedingly abundant. Their song is quite different from that of their relatives (*H. prostheleuca*) of the lowland forests, and lacks the latter's exquisite, sharply cut purity of note and phrase. It is more of a rambling type, with a clear, tinkling quality, and pleasant to hear. Sounding at all hours from out the cloud-wreathed, dripping forests, from constant association it soon seems to become the vocal expression of these mountain forests themselves.

"Gray-crowned Wood Wren – song," *Journal*, Vol 28, July 14, 1937

Quetzals – i

Two mornings past I saw a female Quetzal, then a male Quetzal, cling upright in front of a large round hole at the very top of a tall, massive and much decayed trunk which stands at the edge of the forest at the lower end of the pasture.

From: "Quetzal – preparing to nest," *Journal*, Vol. 29, April 6, 1938

Quetzals – ii

When the Quetzal noticed me beneath him, he flew forth from the hole. I did not deem it prudent to return later in the day. This morning at six o'clock I saw the female enter the hole, but at ten it was unoccupied. Apparently the birds have not yet begun to incubate.

For years I have dreamed of studying the nest-life of the Quetzal. Is this the substance of my dream, still above any possibility of laying my hands upon it, but not above the range of my field-glasses?

"Quetzal – a dream come true?," *Journal*, Vol. 29, April 6, 1938

Quetzals – iii

While the male Quetzal is a gloriously lovely bird, I do not admire the attire of his mate. She seems to wear a damaged garment which he has cast off, from which the color has badly faded, especially from the headpiece, while the plumes of the train have been broken off short of the tip of the tail. I much prefer the dress of the female trogons who make no pretentions to resemble their more splendid mates, but dress in soft tones of brown or gray, beautiful after their own sober fashion.

"Quetzal – I do not admire the female's attire," *Journal*, Vol. 29, April 6, 1938

Baltimore

Late tonight I arrived at the home of my boyhood, after an absence of four years and three months. I found the family all well, my parents looking very little older, my older brother and sister scarcely changed, but Raphael, whom I left as a boy of sixteen, greatly altered and more mature.

From: "Arrival in Baltimore," *Journal*, Vol. 31, September 25, 1938

Autumn Walk in Maryland

This has been a beautiful autumn, mild and dry. The trees have, one after another, displayed gloriously their bright autumnal tints for the last six weeks. Yesterday morning I noticed the first heavy frost. This morning I set forth for a long walk, visiting some of my familiar haunts of long ago; the Falls by McDonogh, Red Run and Gold Hill. Now that the tulip-poplars have shed their bright yellow foliage, the colors of the landscape are more subdued than a few weeks ago, but there is still plenty of color: yellow, orange and light red of the red maples, deep red of dogwood, dull yellow of chestnut oak, deep maroon-red of scarlet oak, russet of black oak. Although the sun shone brightly and the day was warm, a thin haze covered the landscape, imparting a murky aspect to the sky near the horizon, softening the outlines and subduing the colors of the distant hills, overspreading them with a tinge of melancholy, as the passage of time dims and blurs and suffuses with a tincture of sadness our brightest memories of long ago.

From:"A beautiful autumn," *Journal*, Vol. 31, November 2, 1938

Return to Costa Rica and Some Personal Thoughts

I embarked today on the SS Quiriguá in New York, to return to Costa Rica.

It was good to be with my family again after an absence of more than four years, and a pleasure to brouse about in a well-stocked library; but otherwise my journey to the States was a failure. I had hoped to find publishers for some of the books, stories and articles I had written during my three years in Costa Rica; but not a single composition, long or short, was accepted for publication. *A vernal Mountain*, *Singing-Wren* and *The Feathered Altar* were all rejected by the publishing houses to which I submitted them; and all of my shorter writings that I sent to periodical publications were returned. Either I do not know how to write, or else my own interests are so divergent from those of the public at large that I fail to make an appeal to them.

It was sad to see the house in which we grew up falling into ruin for lack of money to paint and repair it. The weather-boards were splitting and warping for lack of a covering of paint; the plaster was falling from the inner walls as a result of the moisture which penetrated; radiators which burst during the cold weather were not replaced; the cellar steps which I put up fifteen years ago have rotted away beyond repair. No one is certain just how long the family will remain at 3509 Clark's Lane. Mother earns $1500 per year for her work as director of the Volunteer Bureau of the Associated Jewish Charities; father earns occasional fees for appraisals of objects of art and household effects, but hardly more than enough to keep himself going down town; the fifteen dollars a week which Raphael earns selling paint go for his clothes, meals away from home, and the upkeep of the automobile which he needs for his work; mother's sisters contribute the remainder of the sum necessary to keep the household going, and they desire the family to move into a smaller and more modest dwelling.

All of the subscribers to my earlier collections of Costa Rican plants have signified their willingness to buy additional material. The Arnold Arboretum, Kew, The Missouri Botanical Gardens, The New York Botanical Gardens, the Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet in Stockholm, have each subscribed to a thousand specimens more of Costa Rican plants. Oakes Ames will continue to take orchids, S.F. Blake Compositae, A.A. Bartlett aroids and palms, and in addition Alston at the British Museum has subscribed to a set

of ferns. The preparation of these specimens will keep me busy for the better part of a year, at very least.

"Return to Costa Rica," *Journal*, Vol. 31, December 10, 1938

Return to El General

On the seventeenth we landed at Limón after a pleasant but uneventful voyage, with a stop of twenty-eight hours in Habana de Cuba. We came the same day to Cartago, and the following morning paid a visit to Mr. Lankester at Las Cóncavas. After a day in San José, attending to a multitude of small matters, we came by this morning's airoplane to San Isidro. Juan Schroeder met me at the landing field; he has sold his farm in Rivas and moved with his family into a new house of two stories fronting the plaza of San Isidro, the building of which is still in progress. We walked up to Rivas to get my horse Bayon. I found him in the pasture and he neighed the moment I came into view. He is in excellent condition, and stronger than ever. The cabin in Rivas which used to be mine was sold by Don Juan to Claudio Elizondo, the carpenter who fixed it up for me when I first arrived. He lives there with his family.

From: "To San Isidro," *Journal*, Vol. 31, December 20, 1938

On Convalescence

I am at last beginning to move about more freely, although the pain in my shoulder and back continues, especially at night. So sweet and flattering to us are the sensations of returning health after a protracted sickness, of the regained use of a limb after a period when it is useless, that I hold it worth a fair amount of pain and discomfort to be able to experience them. Convalescence bears a certain resemblance to adolescence: both are periods during which we feel our strength and mental powers daily increasing. Convalescence takes us back again to that period of youth when life is full of promise of greater things – alas! how often to remain unfulfilled!

"Thoughts on convalescence," *Journal*, Vol. 31, March 27, 1939

Decision to go to Ecuador

I have decided at last to make my long-projected visit to Ecuador, and have engaged passage on the "Cuzco," which sails tomorrow from Puntaneras to Guayaquil.

"I engage passage for Guayaquil," *Journal*, Vol. 33, July 4, 1939

Museo Nacional

When I went a few days ago to bid adiós to Don Juvenal Valerio, the director of the Museo Nacional, he offered me the position of curator of the botanical section, from which Alberto Brenes is soon to retire. He wished me to begin at once; but Don Alberto, reluctant to quit the post he has held for so many years, although he has already reached the age when he should retire on pension, claimed he could not possibly finish the work he has now on hand, before the end of the year. So he will continue until January, when I am to return to take up the duties of the position. I am glad that Don Alberto will continue for six months more, for having set my mind on the journey to Ecuador, I should be very sorry to abandon it.

The salary is only two hundred colones a month, which is far less that I can earn by collecting, when conditions are favorable and I work hard. Accordingly, I accepted the position with the provision that, when collecting for the Museo Nacional, I could make as many duplicates as I desired, and sell them on my own account to my old clients. The first set will of course go to the Museo. This arrangement should, I believe, work to the advantage of both contracting parties.

"An appointment in the Museo Nacional," *Journal*, Vol. 33, July 4, 1939

Travels in Ecuador

I had intended to keep a detailed record of my journeys as I had done in other countries; but my travels by rail and automobile, in search of a locality in which to settle for a few months, were frequently so long and fatigueing, and their results so discouraging, that this journal was neglected. After wandering about for a month, I heard in Baños of the house in which I now live, and came here by mule, arriving on the tenth. Since my time in this country is so short, I decided not to build a rancho or set

up housekeeping for myself, as I had intended to do before I accepted the position for which I must return to Costa Rica in January.

From: "Wanderings in Ecuador," *Journal*, Vol. 33, August 18, 1939

Rainy Dawn in Ecuador

To me, there is nothing more dreary and discouraging than a rainy dawn; no amount of afternoon sunshine will quite atone for it. How much better is the Central American climate, where, especially on the Pacific slope, morning rains are infrequent, even at seasons where the floodgates of the heavens are thrown wide open early every afternoon.

"Showers at dawn are frequent," *Journal*, Vol. 33, September 25, 1939

Habits and Climatic Differences

One great difference I have noticed between the people of Ecuador and those of Central America is that the latter are more consistently early risers. If a Costa Rican peasant has work to perform, or a journey to make, he habitually begins at daybreak; while the Ecuadorean is likely to dawdle away half the morning, or even, for no good reason, not begin his journey until noon. May not the differences in the daily distribution of the rainfall account for these so different national traits?

"Habits of the people influenced by climatic differences," *Journal*, Vol. 33, September 25, 1939

Independence of Mind and Spirit

It occurs to me that a decade ago I applied to the National Research Council for a fellowship to study the same subject, the social nesting habits of the anis. I did not receive the fellowship, and in retrospect I am not sorry. I have since studied more kinds of birds than I ever dreamed of studying then, and have kept my independence of mind and spirit, have not been forced to do lip-service to the largely meaningless shibboleths of the schools. It has been hard travelling at times – little money, less encouragement – but everyone who has ever advanced a few steps beyond the crowd has gone alone.

"Reflections," *Journal*, Vol. 35, May 20, 1940

Few Things

I had never before resided so long in one place with so little in the way of furnishings and utensils, as here by the Rio Antonio. One rough table, two little stools, a folding cot for me and a hard wooden bed for Efraim, was all our furniture. We did not even have ample shelves for keeping specimens, equipment and clothes, as in previous years. Since I had not at any time been sure how much longer I could stay, I did not wish to spend much money for improvements and furnishings.

The worst part of such a life was that toward the end I suffered a good deal from insomnia. One's body grows weary of sitting on a hard wooden stool before the mind is tired enough for sound sleep. As a result, I often went to bed too early, and could not sleep through the night. A good book, an easy chair and a good light do much to prevent insomnia; but here I possessed neither a chair nor a good light; and long before my departure I had read the few books I brought with me.

Food became very difficult to procure in May and June. There was almost nothing to be had locally, not even plantains after Don Juan sold his farm across the river. In San Isidro there was little variety to be had, and all very dear. Rice cost thirty-five céntimos the pound, potatoes twenty-five céntimos. Considering how little the people here earn, these are excessively high prices. In June we came to depend much upon the tender young leaves of the jaboncillo (*Phytolacca rivinoides*) for our greens. Fortunately we had an unfailing supply of this in the new clearing behind the house.

Still, although the physical details of life were not too comfortable, I regretted the necessity to return to San José. The valley of the Pacuar is so beautiful that I did not wish to leave it, and I should have liked to remain to complete my studies of the nests of the gnatcatchers and the antpittas, who built a second nest after abandoning their first.

From: "Departure from Santa Rosa," *Journal*, Vol. 35, June 19, 1940

Joining a Rubber Expedition in South America

When in Washington in October, 1938, I visited Mr. B.Y. Morrison, chief of the Division of Plant Exploration and Introduction of the United States Department of Agriculture, who told me of plans for conducting a survey of areas in tropical America suitable for rubber production. He suggested the possibility of giving me employment on such a

survey, should it actually be undertaken. But the work was contingent upon the action of Congress in voting the necessary funds; and a year and a half passed without anything being done about it.

In June of this year I received a letter from Mr. Morrison, asking whether I would still consider employment by the Department of Agriculture on its proposed survey, and what salary I would expect. I replied that I should want at least $225 per month for working in the hot and frequently unhealthful regions where Brazilian rubber grows. Then, on July 8th, I received a cablegram from Washington, offering me employment for approximately six months, at a salary of $250 per month, with travel expenses paid by the government.

My work was to be in Peru, Ecuador and Colombia, and to begin on the sixteenth of the same month – a week later. I was not at all eager to return so soon to South America, for I had wandered about so much during the last two years that I was quite weary of travel, and would have preferred to remain quietly in Costa Rica. But the prospect of earning seven times as much as I was receiving at the Museo Nacional in San José, and of doubling my small capital within half a year, was too attractive to be resisted. Accordingly, I immediately dispatched a radiogram to Washington, signifying my acceptance.

"Plans for a rubber survey" & "I accept the position," *Journal*, Vol. 36, August 9, 1940

Shipping Specimens

While I awaited detailed instructions from Washington, I set about to arrange and pack for shipment all the specimens of plants that I had collected at Pejivalle, Turrialba and El General during the first half of the year. Luckily I had, since my return from El General, nearly completed writing the labels for these; now it was necessary to arrange the specimens in order, put in the labels, make up and pack the sets. In this work, I was ably assisted by Señorita Vitalia Sáenz, helper in the herbarium, who had worked with Don Alberto Brenes for several years before I succeeded him.

In a week we had the duplicate sets of plants packed up and ready for shipment; the first set was the property of the Museo Nacional. This collection was distributed to the National Herbarium in Washington (for identification), the Arnold Arboretum, New York Botanical Garden, Missouri Botanical Garden, and Field Museum in Chicago. The

Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet in Stockhold, Sweden, which had been purchasing my specimens since I began to collect in Costa Rica, had cancelled its subscription after the invasion of Norway by Germany. The Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew had sent word that they would continue to purchase my specimens, but these must be shipped at my own risk as to loss in transit. I resolved to hold the set for Kew until after the British victory.

"Preparations for my departure," *Journal*, Vol. 36, August 9, 1940

Resigning from the Museo Nacional

I was obliged to resign my position as Encargado de la Sección Botánica del Museo Nacional, for Don Juvenal Valerio, the director, said that he could not hold it open for me for six months. Since I had held this position only a little more than half a year, most of which time I had passed in the field, I could hardly expect to be granted so long an absence.

"I resign my position at the Museo Nacional, *Journal*, Vol. 36, August 9, 1940

Delay in Lima

We have been delayed in Lima an entire week, waiting for the Peruvian officials, who have been assigned to accompany us, to complete the arrangements for our first excursion over the Andes to the forests on the eastern foothills. The local government has promised to take care of all our expenses on our journeys through the country, and it seems to be taking a long time to make the necessary money available. This delay has not been pleasant, for not knowing just when we would set forth, we have been living from day to day, making no plans to utilize our time.

"Delay in Lima," *Journal*, Vol. 36, August 25, 1940

Off at Last

This morning at last, after nearly a fortnight of delays, we set forth for the forests beyond the Andes.

From: "Off at last," Journal, Vol. 36, August 27, 1940

No Time for Writing in the Journal

Because of the rapidity of our journeys, the impossibility of making thorough studies in any locality, the lack of solitude and quiet in the evenings, and frequently even of a place to write, I fell so far behind in this journal that I finally ceased to keep it

From: Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 36, 1940

United States / Costa Rica

Jan. 5, 7 p.m. leave Buenaventura, by "Santa Lucia." Jan. 14, 8 a.m. arrive New York, one day late, because of two days of heavy seas and adverse winds, which obliged us to proceed at half-speed. 11 a.m. leave New York, by automobile, with Maxwell Cone who had come to meet me. 7 p.m. arrive 2210 Crest Road, Mount Washington, Baltimore, where my parents now live, and see my family for the first time since December 10, 1938. Jan. 15 to Feb. 7 lived with my sister, Mrs John Poe Tyler, at 22 West Chase Street, Baltimore, and commuted daily to Washington to work on reports in the Department of Agriculture building. Feb. 7, 4.30 p.m. began annual leave, with pay. Went to live with my parents at 2210 Crest Road. Feb. 13 went to Washington for the day, for a conference with a representative of the Firestone Rubber Company, regarding the possibilities of developing rubber plantations in South America. Feb. 21, 2.07 a.m. leave Baltimore by B. & O.R.R. 8.08 a.m. arrive New York. Lunch with Philip Vaudrin of the Oxford University Press. 4 p.m. leave New York on SS "Jamaica," United Fruit Company. Feb. 28, 8 a.m. arrive Puerto Limón, Costa Rica. 10.50 a.m. leave Limón, by train. 4.30 p.m. arrive San José. End of service with U.S.D.A. March 2 visit to the Lankesters at "Las Cóncavas." March 5, 6 a.m. leave San José, by aeroplane. 7.15 a.m. arrive San Isidro del General. March 9 rode to Volcán with Juan Schroeder, on Bayon. March 12 rode from Volcán to Rio Peñas Blancas, by the new trail through the forest. March 13 visited farm of Chico Mora, beside the Rio Peña Blanca, returned to San Isidro. March 15 revisited Chico Mora's farm. March 22 signed contract with Francisco Mora Quirós, to purchase his farm at Quizarrá, beside the Rio Peña Blanca, as soon as title is completed. Price: 5000 colones. March 24 went with Don Otto Brautigam to survey the farm. It mesures 53 hectares. April 4 left San Isidro by aeroplane, spent night

with the Goodes on Dominica Farm near Turrialba. April 5 arrived at Reynolds′ farm, Pejivalle.

"Arrival in U.S.A." & "Return to Costa Rica," *Journal*, Vol. 36, 1941

11 / At Los Cusingos

In March 1941, Skutch reached a contractual agreement to buy a farm in southern Costa Rica, in El General Valley. This purchase, which took several more months to be finalized legally, was a dream come true. He had already been hoping for a number of years to find a reasonably remote site in the neighborhood of unspoiled rainforest and beside a river – a steady place where he could feel at peace, be self-sufficient, watch birds, write books, grow his own crops, and live in harmony with domestic animals and the nature around him. Now, he had stumbled upon such a place. Naming his site Los Cusingos, he would principally reside there for rest of his life (save, of course, for the intermittent travels).

This chapter contains personal impressions and autobiographical statements relating to Skutch's first years as a homesteading naturalist at Los Cusingos. There are excerpts about a variety of concrete things and events, such as domestic animals, Indian remains, naming the farm, the arrival of books from Baltimore (Clark's Lane), his deep appreciation of the river and the forest ("Nature in and around Los Cusingos" is one of the most important pieces as it presents the main reason for his attachment to this particular location), feeling at home, farming, seeing things grow, birds in the yard, and his sense of contentment.

However, it did not take long for Skutch to discover that total perfection is not of this world. After some time, he began to notice certain flaws in his surroundings. Various passages will inform the reader about negative events, such as hogs destroying the crops, neighbors trying to outsmart him dishonestly, cockroaches and other pests, runaway fires, domestic animals becoming sick or dying, and so forth. Adversity was an unavoidable part of Skutch's life as a tropical homesteader.

It is important to underline that Skutch's more pessimistic comments may not capture the tone of his overall existence at Los Cusingos exactly. As he later remarked: "Some of these entries give too dark a picture of my melancholy or discontent" (Supplementary note, February, 1989, added to *Thoughts*, Vol. 2). Hence, the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle, between the good and the bad. This, in fact, is the reasoned message included in one excerpt, "The palace of nature." Whatever the actual darkness of Skutch´s experiences at Los Cusingos, in April 1950 he married Pamela Lankester (a daughter of the English-born naturalist Charles Lankester). This undoubtedly changed things for the better. She cured his obvious loneliness and was also able to develop constructive relations with the neighbors. In Skutch's words: "She has improved our 'public relations' by becoming friendly with the neighbors, especially the women, with whom she gossips. I have been more aloof from the neighbors because we have so few common interests. Pamela has made life better in many ways ..." (Postscript, December 13, 1987, added to *Thoughts*, Vol. 2).

A Brilliant Morning

A brilliant morning, with intense blue sky, somewhat warm. How the earth sparkles, like a precious gem, when the atmosphere is so pure that it is perfectly clear and transparent quite to the horizon, although this be miles distant. It tinges one´s whole spiritual outlook with a sense of cleanliness and purity, makes him feel that this old world is still pristine and undefiled by unseemly events.

"Brilliant atmosphere," *Journal*, Vol. 36, February 15, 1942

Books

A few weeks ago I bought some cedrela boards cut by Otto Brautigam's newly installed circular saw in San Isidro – the first rotary saw in El General. Spanish cedar is beautiful wood to work with – soft and straight-grained and clean – and one appreciates its tractability after doing carpentry with some of the temperamental, cross-grained woods that grow in these forests. This afternoon I finished sandpapering my bookshelves, and began to unpack my books. I had not seen them on their shelves since the fall of 1938, my last visit to the old house on Clark's Lane. But there they are again, the old familiar faces – or rather backs – looking down at me as I write, with the sound of the rushing Peňa Blanca in my ears, and the great forest stretching away dimly in the moonlight. They have come by automobile, railroad train, steamer, train again, mule cart in San José, then aeroplane over mountains and forests, and finally ox-cart, for nine miles over rocky roads. Now they keep me company as I work at my table, as they did years ago when I was a student, in my quiet garret-study on Clark's Lane. Thus has a little bit of culture invaded the wilderness; thus is a man united with his old friends after years of absence.

"I unpack my books," *Journal*, Vol. 36, February 23, 1942

A Name For the Farm

After toying with a number of names, I have about decided to call this farm "Los Cusingos," which is the local name for Frantzius's Araçari. The bird is abundant here, and with its huge bright red bill and habit of travelling in flocks, as conspicuous a winged creature as these forests contain. Then, too, it is a bird endemic to this section of

the country and adjacent Panama – a sort of local curiosity, so to speak. And the name "Cusingo" is sufficiently euphonious. I should prefer to name my farm after the Black-chinned Jacamar, which is not rare in the forest, for this charming bird is more attractive to me than the araçaris. But the jacamar has, so far as I can learn, no popular name in Costa Rica; and an English name would only be lamentably mispronounced. There are four kinds of trogons on the farm, and I should name the place for them, as a second choice, but for the same reason that makes "jacamar" inacceptable as a first choice – lack of a Costa Rican name. This lamentable paucity of names for the birds, and lack of attractive names for the trees, greatly limits my range of choice. Considering attractiveness of the name itself, and of the creature for which it stands, "Los Cusingos" seems about the best I can do.

"I name my farm Los Cusingos" & "Lack of local names of birds," *Journal*, Vol. 36, March 2, 1942

Farm Work

I have not been able to devote so much time to the birds these last two months as I should like. The farm makes large demands upon my time. I hire labour for the heavy work; but supervision and planning require many hours; and there seem always to be a score of little odd jobs, for which the hired labour does not suffice. In short, there never seem to be enough hands to do all the work. When I collected plants, the heavy work was in the dry season, and during April and May I could devote my time almost wholly to the birds. But on a farm here March, April and May are very busy months, with sowing to be done, and then the first weedings.

But it is very satisfying to watch the growth of all the things I planted myself. The rice field was my special care. I planted it in the half-acre which I gave last year to Leopoldo Mora for his tobacco-patch on condition that he return it to me, after he had completed the harvest of his tobacco, clean and ready for planting. This agreement worked well for both of us, for it gave me, after our failure to burn the bottom-land where the beans had been planted, the best-prepared little field on the whole farm. It is in the midst of the tall weedy growth that sprang up in last year's milpa. It slopes gently down to a little rivulet, dry during the nearly rainless months, but now flowing gaily enough. The soil is red in the higher part of the field, but nearly black in the

almost level portion nearest the brook. It is deep, soft and friable, never caking despite all the rain.

"Farm work," *Journal*, Vol. 36, May 14, 1942

Indian Remains

Here where I now dwell, the Indians dwelt before me. A broken rock with a concave upper surface lying in the yard, where now I give my horses salt and bananas, is the lower part of a tumbador, once used by them for breaking the grains of maize to prepare chicha. We can scarcely dig a hole in the yard without encountering fragments of their pottery. In the pasture on the flat top of the ridge behind the house they rest, in deep graves whose presence is indicated by stones lying on the surface. Yet they had vanished long before the present inhabitants settled this region. When I first visited Quizarrá, the heavy forest was broken only by clearings whose newness was plainly attested by the great charred trunks which littered them. Why the aborigines vanished, no one seems to know.

"Indian remains," *Thoughts*, Vol. 1, May 17, 1942

Indian Predecessors

This morning was beautifully clear, with a bright sun rising into the bluest of skies, and the high crests of the Cordillera standing up sharp and distinct to the north and east. It occurred to me to wonder whether the Indians who were here before me loved that wide and lofty panorama as much as I; whether the never-silent river was as musical in their ears; whether they bore the same deep affection for the forest, or looked upon it merely as a source of game for their clay pots. If they loved these things more than I, then it is a pity that I have succeeded them to this heritage. But if mountains and river and forest mean more to me than they did to them, then it is right and good that I am here in their stead.

"A question," *Thoughts*, Vol. 1, May 17, 1942

Nature In and Around Los Cusingos

The most valuable spiritual asset of this farm is the Peñas Blancas River, which, for a distance of nearly a mile, forms its eastern boundary. A great torrent of cold, clear

water, gathered from the forested slopes and cool heights of the Cordillera, rushes impetuously down the wide bed strewn with huge boulders, roaring and singing in the highest spirits as it journeys gleefully toward the sea. Day and night it continues the journey and its untiring, boisterous song, which now increases in volume with the heavy afternoon deluges of this season, now grows softer as the freshet subsides during the night. But I wake and sleep with that ceaseless sound always in my ears.

There is something contagious in the high good spirits of the river, in its joyous journeying, the dance of sunbeams on the glittering rapids, the snowy whiteness of its most boulder-littered reaches. For spiritual ailments, it is more efficacious than all the homilies of the philosophers, and all the subtle analyses of the psychologists. Sometimes, I walk beside the river in a sombre mood – overtired, or discouraged by the bad turns of the farm, or disgusted by the pettiness and bickerings of my neighbors, or feeling isolated and lonely. But before I have sauntered many paces by the river's brink, beneath the spreading, orchid-laden riverwood trees, I surprise myself humming a tune, as though in accompaniment to the ever-singing waters. I have caught something of the happy abandonment of the rushing torrent, shouting merrily as it hastens to fling itself to dispersion and dissolution in the vast, silent expanse of the ocean. I am soon in a happier mood.

Sometimes, while gazing upon a clear mountain stream, or a waterfall upon some remote mountainside, I have wished that I might turn the flood of pure water through my mind, to wash away all unhappy memories, all old spiritual sores, all fears of the future, all lusts and hates and half-truths, and leave me clean and pure as a pebble of quartz cleansed by centuries of washing and abrasion in its bed. But somehow, in some mystic, symbolic fashion, the river effects something of this beneficent cleansing without the actual physical contact of its waters.

I love the forest even more than the river, but its effect upon me is quite different. It does not often make me hum. It brings me consolation in my less happy moods without making me light-hearted, as the river does. Its stately grandeur throws me into a religious, reverential mood; the slender, lofty trunks of palms and branching trees lift my thoughts upward toward the skies, at the same time filling me with humility and awe, a sense of my nothingness in the face of the vast forces which have created it. The forest is the magnificent cathedral in which I worship the mystic, unknown forces of

creation – and the Great Tinamou is the organist whose deep, full, harmonious notes fill all its dimly lighted aisles and form the rich background for all the smaller voices of the avian choir.

The forest is the cathedral in which I worship; and like all the great cathedrals, it was hundreds of years in the making. Possibly the Indians once cleared the land on which it stands; but they must have abandoned cultivation here centuries ago.

The forest is my garden, with grander plants, and more varied plants, and an infinitely greater variety of birds than ever adorned the artificial garden of monarch or nobleman or millionaire. I must have thousands of palm trees – chontas and palmitos and many lesser kinds – for any one of which, to have it growing in his park or conservatory, a rich man would pay hundreds of dollars. Why should I not count myself opulent? And there are no weeds in my garden, for everything that grows in it was planted by the same careful gardener, and the ranker growths are kept in check by the dominant trees. Sometimes the farm frightens me, with the unceasing expense and care of keeping a bit of coffee or sugar-cane or pasture in proper order. But the forest never costs me a centavo of outlay, yet it is always, except where man has interfered, in good order, and a delight to behold. The very fallen trees and rotting trunks give it an aspect of venerable age which is part of its character, and the young saplings growing up lustily in the gaps left by the fallen giants are proof of its exhaustless vitality.

Finally, the forest is my museum, filled not with dry bones and stuffed skins and sapless foliage, but with a vast array of living, growing specimens. Were I to live here a hundred years, I could not exhaust its riches.

"The Peñas Blancas River" (etc.), *Thoughts*, Vol. 1, May 31, 1942

A Dying Bird

Yesterday afternoon, on my way to the river for a bath, I came within an inch of stepping upon a female Cherrie's Tanager. She was lying in the grass, and fluttered aside just in time to avoid being crushed. Since she could not fly, I picked her up for an examination. She was an adult in very bright plumage, with a bright orange breast. While no external lesion was evident, she could not fly, nor make coordinated movements of her wings, but only flutter in a helpless fashion. Her tail was held always a little to one side. She seemed to suffer from partial paralysis. Yet she caught my

thumb in her bill, and held so tightly that I was obliged to insert a twig between the mandibles to effect my release. I brought her to the house, and placed her in a box for safe keeping. This morning she was dead, as I knew she would be. I buried her beneath my little rose bush.

From: "Cherrie's Tanager - a dying bird," *Journal*, Vol. 36, June 11, 1942

Calm and Repose in the Forest

In the forest I find a sense of calm and repose for which I sometimes seek in vain in the cleared and cultivated parts of the farm. For the acres altered by the hand of man, from the dooryard to the farthest confines of the pastures and the sown fields, constantly remind me of things to be done. Here a fruit-tree must be pruned, here a fence mended, here the pasture cleaned, here the cane weeded. Such suggestions to useful effort, while salutory to a certain degree, are inimical to a restful, contemplative mood. The forest, on the contrary, rarely suggests anything to be done. It was there in all its glory long ages before I came upon the scene, and its maintenance in all its grandeur depends upon no puny effort of mine – save only to protect it from trespassers insensible to its majesty.

"Calm and repose in the forest," *Thoughts*, vol. 1, August 23, 1942

The Harvest In

The chief crops of the year, the maize, rice and beans, have been harvested and stored. The sugar-cane is producing more than when I took over this farm; the pastures are in good condition. I have this month acquired the neighboring farm down the valley, more for the sake of the great extent of forest it contains than for any profit it may bring me. My little dwelling is nearing completion, and I have made much furniture for it. The shrubbery, ornamental and fruit trees I planted in the yard are beginning to grow. And while making these improvements and investments, I still have managed to preserve a substantial part of the capital I brought with me last year. Yet I have found time this year to study the birds, and to write a little; not as much as in past years when I could give myself more wholly to my studies, yet to a satisfying degree.

At such a time, one is apt to feel contented with his accomplishments, a contentment spiced perhaps with a pinch of pride. Doubtless it is right and good that

we should experience these periods of satisfaction with our material accomplishments, provided always that we never quite lose sight of their smallness, whether on a cosmic or a human scale, and we never utterly forget the perilous and insecure foundation upon which all material prosperity rests. Under his own roof, with his own land and trees, his own animals and stored grains and growing crops about him, one feels somewhat sheltered from the cold vacuity of the interstellar spaces, and even from the violent agitations which convulse our world today. He can go about his work with an unhurried deliberation, a sense of ample time for its accomplishment, for which the unrooted wanderer, without home and with no backlog against the future, yearns in vain.

From: "The harvest in," *Thoughts*, Vol. 1, September 16, 1942

Domestic Animals

At first, the thought of keeping domestic animals was repugnant to me. I loved liberty too passionately to look with complacency upon an ox under the yoke, or a horse under a load. But if we regard them as beings with feelings, rights, necessities and duties even as ourselves – not as unprivileged slaves – then their use assumes a different aspect. They are only working for a living, even as we all must work. My horses and oxen earn their food with far less labor than the farm-hands or myself. They grow fat and sleek, and very particular as to what they eat. If I relaxed my vigilance to keep the pastures clean, they would before long be covered with bushes and trees, and these herbivorous animals would be starved out. It is only just that they give me something for the work and expense their food costs me. The just master will not demand too much work from his animals in return for their food and keep, which is the equivalent of hiring his laborers at too low a wage. I wonder if Bayon, the most intelligent of my animals, ever perceives the relationship between the work that he does and the lush pasturage, the salt, bananas, and corn that he enjoys.

Viewed biologically, the relationship between man and his domestic animals may be either that of symbiosis or of helotism. My horses live better with my care than if I were to neglect them; with their aid I reach my destination more swiftly and easily than I possibly could alone. Thus the association works to our mutual advantage. But were I

to work them with insufficient food and rest, until they became poor, woebegone creatures, then the association between us would become helotism. The raising of animals for slaughter is pure helotism. May helotism never enter this farm.

"Domestic animals," *Thoughts*, Vol. 1, September 16, 1942

Cordial Invitation

The Groove-billed Ani is still a rare bird in all parts of El General known to me. Early in the year, I found three on the lower part of Los Cusingos. On April 26th, I found my first El General nest of the species, in an orange tree in a neglected pasture on the farm next below. There were four eggs in the nest, and I saw only two adults in its vicinity. But this nesting was unsuccessful, for on May 2nd the nest was empty. Thereafter, the anis disappeared.

In July, or possibly August, I found a flock of about eight, in the pasture below the canefield; but they soon vanished, and I saw them only once. This morning, for the first time, I met anis in the vicinity of the house. They were above the creek that flows by the trapiche; and I counted seven or eight. Doubtless this is the same flock that I saw two months ago. They crossed the public road to Hector Arias's farm, then circled back to my pasture behind the house where I last saw them. I cordially invite them to nest in my orange tree next year, and promise to do everything in my power to protect them from all enemies.

"Groove-billed Ani – a flock at Los Cusingos," *Journal*, Vol. 37, October 2, 1942

Leaf-cutting Ants

From time to time I am obliged to dig out and destroy a nest of the leaf-cutting Atta ants that has been established among the crops. Fortunately, they are not so abundant and troublesome here as on the Caribbean slope of Costa Rica at this same altitude. I am reluctant to destroy them, for they are agriculturalists like myself, and as such I have a kindly feeling toward them. They raise fungi, while I grow maize, beans, sugar-cane and rice. It would seem that there would be room for both of us here, but the trouble is that they do not hesitate to cut up the leaves of my crop plants to make a mulch for their fungus-beds. Yet if we could only understand each other, we might work with mutual advantage. One kind of leaf seems as good as another to them, and

they could help me greatly by confining their leaf-cutting operations to the weeds and leaving the crop plants alone. In return for keeping the weeds down, I would undertake to provide them with the sunny spots they prefer for their nests, free of rent. But how am I to broach the proposition to them? When men who are endowed with means of exchanging ideas can find no better means of arranging their differences than the killing fury of war, I suppose that war with the sompopa ants is the only answer.

"Leaf-cutting ants," *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, November 25, 1942

Neighbors and Trespassing Pigs

Today a neighbor complained to me that another neighbor´s pigs had ruined his beans. The injured party is unusually long-suffering about such matters; he would rather submit to a loss than start a quarrel. I suppose that I should have commended his Christian meekness. On the contrary, I told him that it was unjust to submit to such injustice. I was thinking of the long struggle I have had to keep my property free of trespassing pigs which, contrary to the law and to neighborly consideration, are allowed to roam where they will and root out the crops that others have sweated to make grow; I meant that it was unfair of Abel, whom I have helped in a number of ways, not to help me by insisting that the neighbors treat us fairly and in accordance with the law.

From: "Injustice of submitting to injustice," *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, December 2, 1942

Guitarrón Wasps

Two days ago the wasp colony, having prospered and increased on my wall, began to lay the foundations of an annex which would extend the nest upward. The portion of the swarm which seceded settled on the pillar at the corner of the front porch, where they were even less welcome that on the wall. I tried to make them depart by brushing them off with a long strip of wood, while I stood within the nearly closed window-shutters; but all to no avail. I tried brushing them off before daylight in the morning, when they were torpid with cold, but with the same negative results. So I was obliged to have recourse to fire; and making a torch by tying a bit of rag to the end of a long pole and soaking it in kerosene, I applied the flame to the wasp swarm during the small hours of the morning. This made them nearly all take wing with a loud buzzing. Most

dropped to the ground, some with their wings so badly singed that they could no longer fly. These were given the coup de grâce with my boots after daybreak; but all the able-winged survivors returned to the same place on the post to continue with their building. It was necessary to make repeated applications of the flame, for so long as any survived they continued stubbornly to build in the same location, although there is no end of trees – their natural habitat – where they might have built their nest. I had exactly the same experience with a much larger swarm that soon afterward started a nest outside my bedroom window. This insensibility to danger and to pain, this inability to heed a warning, made me the less reluctant to destroy them. No bird that I know would continue to build its nest in a spot where it had been discouraged in this manner. The wasps behaved like grass, which grows up in the same spot no matter how often it has been cut down. Perhaps they are no more sentient than grass.

From: "Guitarrón wasps," *Journal*, vol. 37, January 5, 1943

Yellow-crowned Euphonia

Last year, a pair of Yellow-crowned Euphonias, the first I had seen on the farm, was discovered on May 5, building a nest in a calabash tree in front of the house. Their brood of two departed the nest on June 24, and soon afterward the family vanished from the neighborhood.

On April 12, at the edge of the forest on the ridge behind the house, I heard a Yellow-crowned Euphonia for the first time this year. On April 21, and again the following day, I heard the bird for the first time at the house. This afternoon, I watched a pair of these euphonias apparently seeking a nest-site in the sparsely branched calabash trees at the edge of the high bank in front of the house, in one of which they nested last year. They worked over the mossy boughs, investigating the crotches and nooks among the roots of epiphytes, and the points where the stiff leaves are bunched together. The male carried a tuft of moss in his bill. I could not make sure that they had selected the position of their nest before they flew off. I hope that I shall again have them as neighbors this year!

"Yellow-crowned Euphonia - return to Los Cusingos," *Journal*, Vol. 37, May 10, 1943

Fair Contentment

Two years ago, when I bought this farm and built this house, I supposed that I could not dwell here contentedly in solitude. True, I had lived so for many years, and in many diverse situations, but always as a traveller in a camp, never as one settled in his home. When at last I acquired a house and landed property, I felt that I must have a mistress for the house and an heir to the estate. But it was not to be so. And yet I have dwelt here in fair contentment, and alone. I have become attached to the land, the trees, the river, the domestic animals, the very routine in which I live. These have bound my affections, if not entirely filled them. I have been absorbed in my studies, both afield and at my writing-table, and with the management of our few simple agricultural operations. I have no thought of leaving here.

The routine life, if it lack the thrills and high exhilaration which the adventurer so frequently experiences, is yet spared many of the disappointments, sudden reverses of fortune and periods of distress which assail the adventurous existence. Settled in his home, one journeys along the road of life with fewer bumps and jolts. As one grows older, he should be settled.

"Contentment," *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, August 8, 1943

Looking for a Rifle

I wonder whether there is any possibility of finding a rifle in these times? I have decided that I must either equip myself with something to shoot pigs or abandon the farm. I've passed the point of expostulating with the neighbors – besides, I no longer speak to my nearest neighbor, the worst offender, since he brazenly cheated me out of forty cajuelas of maize he owed for land rent.

From: Letter to Charles Lankester, October 3, 1943

Feeling at Home

It is now nearly two years since I have left this farm for more than a single night. I have found here the spiritual calm and contentment that for many years I never knew for long. The dozen years or so I spent in wandering was a wonderful experience for a naturalist. What opportunities I enjoyed to become familiar with varied forms of life,

with contrasting environments! I trust that I made the best of my opportunities within my strength and means. But through it all there was a void in my heart, a need for attachment, for the feeling that there was one spot that I might call home. Here I am at home. Things we daily meet acquire significance for us if for no other reason than the repetition of their impact upon our consciousness. They take on a relatedness to ourself which is the essence of the feeling of home. It is the lack of any fixed relation to ourselves of the objects we meet in a strange environment that makes us feel sad and lost. In this respect the naturalist is more fortunate than the majority of men, for natural objects always bear an important relation to himself. It is the human, the artificial, element in his surroundings that is often strange and antipathetic to him. Had I not been a naturalist, I should never have endured to live a hundred miles from my birthplace. But now I have travelled enough for my ends. I wish to spare myself the repetition of the anguish that each of my oft-repeated changes of residence caused me. I ask of Providence only one thing: that I be permitted to pass my remaining years here on my farm in humble obscurity, earning – as I have earned – enough for my simple needs.

For those of us whose organism is low-powered, who have no surplus of strength or energy, it is grateful to lead a life in which we can eliminate waste and practice small economics. To make every object serve its intended purpose, to use each tool and garment until it is quite worn-out, to reduce our lives to the limit of simplicity, to allow ourselves no unnecessary noise and bustle, makes us feel that we are conserving our small stock of energy for the contemplation of the eternal truths.

Untitled, *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, November 12, 1943

Contentedness

A correspondent raises the question of whether I am contented here. To live contentedly in any spot we must have, in addition of a reasonable degree of physical comfort and absence of bodily ills that we might attribute to purely local or climatic influences, the strong conviction that whatever good may be in store for us, will find us as soon where we are as in another spot. For most of us are so constituted that we must ever be seeking that which appears most desirable to us. If we feel that wealth is the

highest good, we shall not be able to live contentedly in a locality where there is no prospect of making money. If fame and the praise of our compeers is necessary to our happiness, we shall not be happy in solitude. If we believe that marriage is essential to our well-being, we shall not be content to abide long in a situation where there is no chance of finding a wife.

As to myself, I do not know what blessings I might expect, that are not as likely to reach me here as in another spot. A greater amount of companionship, conversation with cultivated intellects, the affection of a family, access to a greater variety of books than I have within my reach here – all three things are very fine in their way; but at times we must buy them too dearly. Some of us are not geared for the turmoil of present-day society. I have copied out and posted up in my study a sentiment from Amiel: "He who asks of life nothing but the improvement of his own nature, and a continuous moral progress toward inward contentment and religious submission, is less liable than anyone else to miss and waste life." This goal I believe I can attain here as well – if not better – than in another place. For me, inward contentment is difficult of attainment except in close communion with nature, and amid surroundings of natural beauty. For the rest, the soul – mine at least – requires tranquillity in order to expand; it is like a banana-plant, which growing in a windy situation has its leaves torn to shreds, and fails to reach its full perfection of form.

Perhaps it is well for us that we do not at once reach the conviction that the blessings of heaven are as likely to find us where we are as in another spot. For youth, the golden land is ever over the hills and far away. So youth sets out to travel, enlarges its store of images and ideas, gains experience, and comes in the end to accept the truth we have set down here.

"Contentedness," *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, November 27, 1943

Coatis and Neighbors' Hogs

The coatis have been have been doing so much damage to the maize on the farm that I suppose that were I a prudent farmer I should shoot them in self-defence. But they are so simpáticos, and the maize in the milk must be so delicious to them after the dry, unpalatable berries upon which at times they must subsist! Fortunately, I have no gun – although I wish I had one for the neighbors' hogs, which are far more detrimental to the

farm, and are neither clean, attractive nor free, but fatten on my land and my crops to fill someone else's purse. Still, without the means of killing the pisotes, I need not argue with myself whether or not I should do so.

"Coatimundi - damage to maize," *Journal*, Vol. 38, February 9, 1944

A Runaway Blaze

This year I decided to sow maize on the stony but very fertile playa – the lowest level beside the river – on land that was cut over two years ago, but would not burn because of the early rains. The thicket soon grew up again, and after two years was tall and very dense, with masses of vines encumbering the young trees and bushes, but clean beneath and free from noxious weeds. With five peones we cut down the thicket during the first week of February. I wished to have it all worked as nearly as possible at the same time, so that it would dry and burn uniformly. After two sunny weeks it was ready to burn, and early on the afternoon of the 18th I set fire, beneath a hot sun. The fire passed over the entire worked area, leaving the ground clean and in excellent condition for sowing with the first rains of March.

The fire, in fact, did more than was expected of it. I knew that the standing thicket would not burn, but I did not make sufficient allowance for the highly inflammable qualities of the calinguero grass (*Melinis minutiflora*) in a neighboring field, an old pasture that has been abandoned for two years, and was covered over with this troublesome grass in high and impenetrable stand. There was also calinguero in tongues and patches on the high steep slope at the back of the field, leading up to the higher terrace. The blaze worked up this slope through the grass and bracken fern, then along the bank to the north, and down into the head of the old pasture. It was hopeless to try to stop it in this densely matted grass, from waist-high to head-high, through which a man can hardly move. What a high blaze it made, what a loud, continuous crackling, as the green stems seethed and exploded in the intense heat produced by the combustion of the old, dry blades! After a period of spectacular, noisy pyrotechnics, the fire would work more slowly through a patch where there was more green vegetation of other sorts, to flame up with loud crepitation in the next area of almost pure calinguero. Dense clouds of smoke filled the air.

As I looked on from a distance, I wondered whether the runaway blaze was ever going to stop. I did not exult in the spectacle, as Thoreau when he inadvertently started a forest fire. I was too thoroughly disgusted with my own carelessness, and too much concerned over possible consequences to the farm to entertain elated or exultant sentiments. To feel at once responsible for an event and impotent to control it is dreadfully harassing. It is at the same time terrifying and humiliating to be made aware, in so unequivocal a fashion, that our power falls short of our responsibility. I wondered how a Hitler must feel, to have set a world on fire, and be unable to control the universal conflagration. Probably not so badly as, for an hour, I felt about my own little blaze; for it is a theory of mine that the great noisemakers of history attain their nefarious eminence by virtue of their deficiencies no less than of their endowments; that their genius for organization, military strategy, or swaying the mob, is balanced by a huge blind spot in the moral retina and a thick callosity over the heart.

While I was musing so, and wondering whether the fire would travel all the way to the sugar-cane – whose dry leaves would burn briskly in this dry weather – it reached a swampy depression, where the greener vegetation resisted its heat, and so came to a natural halt. When the smoke had cleared away, I entered the scene of the conflagration and found several acres of blackened ground which, with very little labor, could be made clean enough for sowing with maize. It was only necessary to cut and stack for burning the scattered charred stems of the small trees and bushes that had grown up among the grass. Perhaps, after all, my runaway fire will prove to have been a blessing in disguise.

"A runaway fire," *Journal*, Vol. 38, February 24, 1944

Coffee in Flower

From time to time since the beginning of the year, a few or a number of our coffee bushes have flowered. But last Friday (the 4th) all the bushes in the plantation were covered with buds almost ready to expand, while a few of the most advanced were already partly open, exposing the stigmas. Saturday morning many had opened. But the grand flowering was on Sunday, when every bush, almost every slender branch, was arrayed in snowy blossoms. What a glorious sight it was! Approaching the plantation, one was greeted by an exquisitely delicate fragrance; yet once in the midst of

the bushes, one only at intervals became aware of it. I believe that all the still atmosphere among the bushes was saturated with this etherial aroma; but my nose, coarse instrument that it is, could not remain for many seconds attuned to so subtle an essence.

I carried out a stool and sat among the coffee bushes to read. Rarely a hummingbird – Rieffer's or the little Dusky Hermit – would poise before the coffee blossoms. But there were far too few hummingbirds to pollinate the myriad flowers even in this little plantation of less than an acre in extent. I believe that this work was accomplished chiefly by the pollen-gathering melipone bees, which buzzed through the plantation in countless numbers, and a bewildering variety of kinds. The anthers began to shed their pollen quite generally around eight o'clock; and soon the little harvesters had their femoral baskets full. Although the anthers of the flowers that had opened on the preceding day were already discolored, the stigmas appeared to be still fresh and receptive. By the afternoon the harvest was in and few bees were to be found in the plantation.

On Monday morning the white blossoms that still covered over the branches were nearly all discolored with brown; yet the plantation was still as fragrant as on the preceding day. Now the flowers have all fallen, except a very few belated ones. The withering flowers have a peculiar, not unpleasant odor.

From: "Coffee in flower," *Journal*, Vol. 38, March 8, 1944

Sickness and Death Among the Domestic Animals

We begin each year with the intention to avoid those evils that last year destroyed our peace of mind; yet each year brings its own peculiar woes. Last year I had most unpleasant dealings with those who rented my land to sow maize and then refused to fulfil their promises. This year, because a burnt child dreads fire, I rented scarcely any land. But this year fate has dealt most harshly with me in the matter of my animals. There has been continual sickness and even death among them. First it was my horse Bayon, who in February seemed on the point of death, although he recovered. Then the colt was sick. Then in May my pretty heifer Jo suddenly sickened and died most horribly in four days of morriña de cabeza, whatever that may be in the language of science. Today her mother, Pandora, my only cow, died of the same malady, after four

days of sickness. Last month Diamond the ox was sick of apparently the same thing, but happily recovered.

"Sickness and death among the domestic animals," *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, July 4, 1944

Ill at Ease

Of late I have been discouraged and ill at ease. Things have not worked out here as I had hoped they would – things never do fulfil our hopes in detail, yet at times they coincide with the rough outline of our expectations. The Pan American Highway, according to the original announcement, would be completed from the United States to the Canal Zone in 1942. Now, with 1944 half over, it is still creeping slowly over El Cerro de la Muerte, and has done little to break the isolation of this valley. The aviation service is not so good as it was a few years ago. For two and a half years I have dwelt here almost like a hermit. I have been away from the farm a single night; I have had visitors, of those whose conversation is stimulating, only about once a year. I like solitude, but even in that I like moderation.

I bury myself in my studies; only in them do I find relief and some measure of happiness.

"Discontent," *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, July 4, 1944

Neighbors and Matthew Arnold

So I live here with not a single person within miles upon whose goodwill or friendly interest I can count. It is not a comfortable nor pleasant situation, especially when one owns property and livestock which make him vulnerable in many points. For my neighbors are envious of me; and I have broken off relations with some of them because they shamelessly cheated me. Because I wear shoes, sleep between sheets, sit down to a table to eat my meals, dedicate myself to studies instead of endlessly chasing colones, keep a little cash on hand instead of investing my last cent in livestock and then having to borrow, they believe that I am immensely wealthy. At times I feel myself in the position of a man who lives in an armed camp surrounded by savages who only await a moment of carelessness on his part to rob him of his scalp and his property

Perhaps there is no better measure of success in life than our ability to bind another soul to ourselves by bonds of love and mutual interest, proving thereby that we have

the liberality to give and the generosity to take. If we fail in this, no other success can matter very much. I fear that I have miserably failed – or if I have succeeded, it has been only with my horse.

Later – When I fall into the mood in which the foregoing paragraphs were written, nothing comforts me so much as the poetry of Matthew Arnold. For example:

> Or, if not quite alone, yet they
> Which touch thee are unmating things –
> Ocean and clouds and night and day;
> Lorn autumns and triumphant springs;
> And life, and others' joy and pain,
> And love, if love, of happier men.

From boyhood on, Arnold has been one of my favorite poets – which proves that I was prematurely old and over-thoughtful for my years.

From: "Dealings with my neighbors," *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, July 11, 1944

A Palace of Nature

Soon after coming to this farm and building a house, I read again Tennyson´s "Palace of Art," and of a sudden it appeared to me, in my first loneliness in the new environment, that I too had prepared for myself a palace, if not of art then of nature, to delight myself in solitude with the wild beauty of mountain and river, the color and fragrance of flowers, the grace and song of birds. And a great fear came over me that, like the poet, I should in the midst of my lonely splendor be assailed by hideous phantasms that would destroy my peace of mind and wither my delight in the beauteous forms about me. But as the years speed by, it has proved otherwise. My palace has not been so purely the abode of peace and delight that I too confidently imagined I should find it, yet it has not turned out to be the crumbling tomb filled with loathesome shapes and hollow mockeries. For taking the longer view of human life, I have learned that the most magnificent palace that art or nature can raise, no less than the austere cell of the monk or the hermit´s rude and barren cavern, may be the stern school in which we discipline our soul for its long march into eternity.

"The palace of art," *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, January 17, 1945

Pueblo pequeño, infierno grande

The more intimately I know the neighbors who surround me, the more they fill me with loathing and disgust, almost to the point of nauseation. Theirs is a huge stupidity thinly covered by a mean and cat-like cunning. Avarice, hate and envy are the principal components of their nature ("Pueblo pequeño, infierno grande" – Costa Rican proverb).

From: "My neighbors,"*Thoughts*, Vol. 2, January 18, 1945

Books versus Gnawing Cockroaches

In this climate, the preservation of books from the attacks of insects is a perplexing problem. Perhaps the best method is to put them all in jackets of heavy brown wrapping paper, although this causes mildew and discoloration of the bindings in damp weather. Since it was not practicable to bring closed bookcases here, I have most of my books on open shelves of cedar. Because I like to look upon their old familiar faces, I decided to wrap then in transparent cellophane instead of paper. But before I completed the wrapping, the Scotch cellulose tape that I had brought for fastening the cellophane lost its adhesive qualities, and it was impossible to procure anything else that would serve, except surgical adhesive tape, which at that time was too expensive. Besides, the cockroaches slowly gnaw away the edges of the cellophane in order to attack the binding.

The majority of the books I varnished, at least on the back. But slowly the insatiable cockroaches are gnawing through the varnish to reach the sizing in the cloth bindings, so disfiguring the books. Only a very thick coating of varnish affords protection, and then the books stick together, or to the paper if it becomes necessary to pack them for a journey. So the bindings of the books are little by little losing their color and their lettering. But so far, the pages themselves have suffered no damage at all. The thought remains intact, only the outer husk bear the scars of time and wear. If the same can be said of ourselves, we should be satisfied.

"My books," *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, January 18, 1945

Restless Days

These bright, dry days of January and February are the hardest of all the year for me to live through. From March through June the birds are in song and nesting, and provide companionship, entertainment, and material for study. The wet months of the second half of the year drive me to my books and my writing. But these beautiful clear days, with the bluest of skies and an abundance of blossoms, beckon me to come forth – to what? There is a loveliness that I would share with someone – but I am quite alone. Up in the north rise peaks to be scaled; between them are deep valleys to be explored – valleys seldom or never entered by man. But I am no longer equal to such strenuous exertion; my physical organism, like that of my father before me, has early begun its decline. Besides, I have not so much confidence in my neighbors that I care to leave the house and farm quite alone. Collecting plants, which formerly occupied my days at this season, is not in order now because of wartime difficulties in disposing of the specimens. So I live through restless days and at evenfall am ashamed of how little I have accomplished. The birds, too, seem to be ill at ease at this season; at no other time of the year are they quieter and less active. Amiel, somewhere in his journal, admits that bright, warm weather fills him with melancholy and unrest.

"Unrest in bright weather," *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, February 4, 1945

El General Looking Like Hell

I found El General looking like hell – I use the term not blasphemously but as literally descriptive. As soon as we dropped down on the Pacific side of the Cerro de la Muerte, the air became murky with acrid smoke, and it has been that way ever since. The sun rises like a red-hot cannon ball into a leaden sky and sets the same way – when it can be seen at all. Throughout the day the air is full of smoke, and scarcely any stars shine by night. The roads are deep in dust, and the pastures drier than I have ever seen them before. What a contrast with the beautifully green Caribbean slope! By the time the highway is completed to El General, it will no longer be worth coming to see. What with fires set to clean land for planting, those carelessly allowed to spread out of bounds, and those set wantonly or maliciously, an amazing area has been burnt over. Runaway fires burnt over several acres that I was letting grow up in Breñon. Also the

horses got into the bananas and did considerable damage. I was lucky to find my house still standing!

From: Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Lankester, March 9, 1945

Inevitable Burden of the Years

Why am I so often ill at ease and discontended with my lot? Is it not because I foolishly imagine that my life might be more beautiful, more stimulating intellectually, more tranquil in spirit, than human existence well can be, except for brief periods? Only the may-fly, that lives for a single day, can pass its existence wholly in the sunshine. Those of us who live longer must reconcile ourselves to periods of darkness and storm. Was it not Seneca who expressed the wish that his whole life might pass as a single perfect day? But alas, neither a year nor a month nor a week can remain always at the level of its best hour. Only in small things and brief things can we find perfection. To live long is to know much dullness, and ugliness and sorrow. Let me strengthen my spirit to bear the inevitable burden of the years

"Discontent," *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, May 28, 1945

Discontentedness

My life of late has been going at a crippled pace. As usual when I fall into these ill-omened moods – which have been all too frequent during my adult years – I can not tell for certain whether some physiological derangement is the cause of mental depression, or the reverse. Even my studies of the birds, for which I live from year to year, have not gone so well this season, nor so completely engaged my faculties to the exclusion of petty worries, as in past years. I have written scarcely half so much in my journal as I had written by this date last year; I have found correspondingly fewer nests, and most have been prematurely destroyed.

A farm such as this is the source of innumerable small worries – animals sick or dying or breaking out of the pastures, fires in the dry season, troubles with labor and with bad neighbors who can not or will not keep their pigs at home, or still their own malicious tongues, or who try to push back the boundaries of the farm. My worries are perhaps small compared with those of a man who is managing a big business, or even a large farm. But then my situation here is such that I find it more difficult to escape

temporarily from them. Except when the birds sing – which is rarely now – I hear no music. I tried in vain to obtain a phonograph last time I was in San José – they are not manufactured during these war years – and a radio, even if available, would be too expensive to operate without electric current. I have no conversation, except briefly at long intervals, no opportunity to attend the theater. In short, I have no buffers against the onslaughts of life. True, I have nature, and my books, and a very great comfort they are. But these are pensive amusements. They rather reinforce than dissipate a tendency to too prolonged brooding. They do not help a man to forget himself so completely as the more convivial entertainments. They rarely cause the self-abandon of a hearty laughter.

A farm – especially one so isolated as this – without a family is a body without a heart. Unless there are the possibilities of making a good income, and one is interested in making money for its own sake, there is small incentive to produce. The first year, when I had a tiny and moderately successful vegetable garden, I gave most of the vegetables away. Unless one is more of a philanthropist than myself, he will find scant satisfaction in operating a farm for the benefit of his laborers, who seem to become more dissatisfied, and more ungrateful, the more you do for them. Although I have known bachelor managers of large estates, which have a complicated organization and earn enough to allow the head men to live in great style, I have never known a single man to make a success – even the success of contented living – with a subsistence farm such as this. I am sure that except for my interest in nature I should never have survived here as long as I have.

"Written in melancholy," *Thoughts,* Vol. 2, June 7, 1945

Hates and Animosities

This neighborhood where I dwell is as full of hates and animosities as our modern atmosphere of radio waves. A majority of the neighbors bear grudges, or worse, against the others; some have openly threatened violence, or even put this threat timidly into execution. Few of the local residents spare good words for their neighbors. It appears that of all the Ten Commandments, "Love thy neighbor as thyself" is the most difficult to obey – especially in a backwoods community of scarcely literate men.

From: "In fairness to our competitors," *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, June 7, 1945

Pest Plagues

Other pests have increased alarmingly this year. Leaf-cutting Atta ants, which when I first came here were relatively scarce and innocuous, are now building their nests everywhere. During the dry season, when the creek that flows by the house was very low the Attas from a large nest in a thicket on the far side crossed to this side and defoliated two orange trees, as well as some shrubbery. First they made a bridge of a thick Entada vine festooning between trees on opposite shores of the narrow waterway, and when this was severed they crossed on the rocks, beneath which the stream then flowed in a reduced trickle. Now another colony of Attas is establishing a far-reaching labyrinthine nest beside the river at the edge of the lower pasture, amid rocks which make it almost impossible to reach and destroy them.

For the past two months, scorpions have been more numerous in the house than ever before. I have killed dozens of them on the walls. Cockroaches have become more rare, possibly because the scorpions capture and eat them.

Another plague is a big black ant which crawls over the floors by night and eats all sorts of dead insects. If they find a mouse in a trap, they will pick the flesh from the bones. By day they hide away in drawers, boxes and other dark crannies, where when possible they make a nest of tiny fragments they bite from paper or cardboard, or rice husks, or similar dry debris. They practice domestic sanitation, depositing all their excrements in one particular corner of their abode. Often they get into the food cupboard, which is not as well closed as it might be, and they have even made their nests in my cedarwood chest among my manuscripts and photographs. In this climate, with its extremes of dryness and humidity that cause wood to swell and contract strongly, it is impossible to make any wooden container quite close enough to keep out the insect plagues, and one's treasures are always exposed to their depredations.

From: "Atta ants increase" (etc.), *Journal*, Vol. 40, July 1, 1945

12 / Career Assessments

During the first few years as a homesteading naturalist, Skutch also began to reflect upon the state of his career. This chapter offers several relevant entries drawn from *Thoughts*. In the first text (written in the first months of his actual residence at Los Cusingos), Skutch expresses sadness at not being able to find a publisher for his writings and refers to his sense of failure. In a second entry, he shows that he was aware that there was no hope of an "official career." In the last passage, he sketches a negative picture of his vocational situation, but also states that, in fact, he has chosen the lesser of two evils.

The three autobiographical reflections below clearly convey a sense of sadness and frustration. It is good to note, however, that between 1945 and 1954 there were some significant positive developments. In 1946 Skutch's ornithological work began to be recognized more officially. That year, he was elected a Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union, and also received a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1947 he was made an honorary member of the British Ornithologists' Union. In 1950 he was awarded the eminent Brewster Medal (AOU). In 1954, finally, his first tome on Central American birds appeared in print.

A Decade of Wandering

Since I opened this book with a single long entry, a decade and more have slipped into eternity. A decade of wanderings which have taken me into every country between Mexico and Peru; but of long sojourns, too, mostly in wild, unfrequented spots, close to nature; a decade of unwearying observation of nature's children, particularly the birds, of ceaseless questioning of what lies beyond the veil of visible phenomena; a decade of increasing financial perplexity, of wondering where I should turn next and what I should do for economic salvation – ending in the purchase, last year, of this farm at the edge of the wilderness.

Judged by all practical, worldly standards, it has been a decade of failure, of wasted efforts and aims unfulfilled. True, I have seen more of the majestic sights of nature than falls to the share of the average man. I have crossed the snowy Andes and travelled far upon the stupendous flood of the Amazon; I have peered into the fiery throats of volcanoes and travelled long days through primeval forests. And in the field of natural history, I have carried my studies of the life histories of birds to a point far beyond my most sanguine dreams of ten years ago; I have brought to light more new species of plants than I then had any intention of collecting.

But in dedicating myself to the study of nature, I also committed myself to making my discoveries available to others. In this last I have lamentably failed; my books without exception remain unpublished, only a few short articles on birds have seen the light in scientific periodicals, chiefly *The Auk*. So I have lived, perforce, an unbalanced life, taking much in, giving little out; bursting with what I would share freely with others; condemned to silence and solitude and isolation both spiritual and physical. Such a life is not healthy; the channels of the mind should flow freely in an unclogged stream, and our intellectual income should be balanced by a free outlet of ideas.

It seems that wherever my life touches that of other men it is foredoomed to failure and frustration. In the solitude of the wilderness I uncover – to me – momentous secrets of nature, or I dream – to me – glorious dreams. But when I come to proclaim my discoveries to others, to narrate my dreams, they fall unheard and die away in empty echoes. So, too, has it been with my hope of finding my life's companion, of seeing children, which I love, about me. More than half of life's allotted span has slipped past me, and I find myself as solitary as ever.

"A decade of wandering" & "An unbalanced life," *Thoughts*, Vol. 1, January 30, 1942

The Importance of Finding One's Own Soul

As I look in retrospect upon the restlessness, the melancholy, the inability to find rest or peace in my work, that came over me in my middle twenties, I believe it was caused in large measure by vain groping for some deep underlying significance of the studies in which I was engaged. All about me I saw my colleagues absorbed in their work, intent upon winning scientific reputation, upon gaining professional advancement with its worldy rewards, upon uncovering facts merely because they were facts, or merely, as one professor put it, because laboratory work was good fun. At twenty-five, my singleness of purpose was such that I cared far less for reputation than for understanding. The sheltered life I had led left me in ignorance of the intensity of the struggle to win a position which would enable a man to live, hence I thought little of advancement. Facts, although they must be discovered and tested by unemotional processes of inductive logic, seemed to me to need to be viewed emotionally if they were to take on significance for anything beyond purely technical purposes; and this most of my colleagues denied. Sometimes scientific research seemed to be "good fun"

and at other times not depending largely upon the surroundings in which it was undertaken. And always I looked for some transcendental meaning in what I did; yet I could hardly even formulate to myself what it was I sought, and none with whom I talked could help me. Before I could formulate even tentative principles to guide my course, I had drifted so far that I had ruined what had once been the prospect of a successful career. But perhaps it is more important to find one's own soul than to win success in the conventional sense.

From: "Study of the birds," *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, June 8, 1944

Patterns of Life

The life of a man, like that of any other creature, should follow an established pattern. To live involves such manifold adjustments on every side, that there is scant hope that any single organism, in the course of its own brief existence, can develop a radically new and successful pattern of life. The pattern of life of any species, whether animal or plant, has been developed with imperceptile slowness, and is the result of an infinite number of experiments in living (mostly unsuccessful) made by countless individuals in the course of many generations. Each new individual must fit, with slight room for individual variation, the pattern of life of its species, or else succumb.

So with men, there is the pattern of life of the farmer, the business man, the professor, the lawyer, and so forth. In each epoch and community, this pattern is fairly constant within rather narrow limits. Each man is most likely to lead a successful and contented life if he pattern it after that of his predecessors and his colleagues in the same calling, with only minor variations in accordance with his individual peculiarities of taste and temperament. If he depart radically from the accepted pattern, he is likely to be confronted with endless perplexities, to lose the respect of his colleagues and the confidence of his clients, to embark upon a lonely and futile career.

But what pattern of life have I followed? For a number of years I was a freelance botanical collector. While I have known numerous men who have collected objects of natural history for limited periods under the auspices of an institution, it was not until I went to Educador, in 1939, that I made the acquaintance of another independent collector; and his story, as I heard it by chance in Lima a year later, was both astounding and tragic. As a collector, how could I follow a pattern of life, without

having known another in the same profession? Besides, I lack sufficient physical hardihood to make a successful collector, and have always been too sensitive to my surroundings. A natural-history collector should have an iron constitution, a high degree of adaptability as to people, surroundings and customs, great spiritual detachment. This is especially true if he collect in a foreign country, above all in the tropics. For myself, when I collected regularly I was tired half the time, and often poignantly unhappy amid the surroundings in which I was forced to dwell.

I have been a freelance naturalist, although I know none other. And now I live on a farm amid people alien to me in language, customs, and aspirations. I do not know any other man whose mode of life even remotely resembles my own. In so far as my life has a pattern, it is one of my own making, and as such is a crude, makeshift affair as compared with those patterns of life worn smooth and polished by the experience of many men through successive generations.

Why have I disregarded common prudence and followed a life for which I knew no precedent? In part because of an unhappy episode in my academic career, in part because of a long and mostly unavailing search for values, but chiefly from my great love of the birds, and desire to penetrate the secrets of their life. Still, I believe that had I been gifted with a little more ability, I might have been successful in my endeavor to earn a living by writing about nature and the birds. Had I a little less originality of thought, I should have been content to follow a beaten path, an established pattern of life, and doubtless have made a solid if prosaic reputation for myself. My early botanical work held great promise. But I have fallen between two chairs – into an abyss that yawns black and seemingly bottomless. But courage! One can not fall forever. Besides, I share the fate of many men far greater than myself. For whoever has ideals and aspirations not accepted in his time and country is inevitably doomed. If he follows them he is doomed to isolation, misunderstanding, often calumny and even torture and death. If he is a renegade to his ideals, he is doomed to remorse, despair, a sense of frustration and futility. Perhaps, after all, I have chosen the lesser of two evils. And in writing these pages I have somewhat eased my mind, and proved once more that sorrow takes up the pen sooner than joy.

"Patterns of life," *Thoughts*, Vol. 2, June 7, 1945

13 / Guggenheim Fellowship

It is quite appropriate to end the present selections with entries relating to the first months of Skutch's 1946-1947 Guggenheim Fellowship.

First, it is always good to end on a positive note. Given Skutch's sadness and doubts about the state of his career (previous chapter), obtaining a prestigious research grant was to him indubitably an important event. It meant that his unique endeavors in tropical field ornithology were finally being recognized by a renowned American scientific institution. Moreover, as a part of the fellowship, Skutch stayed for a while in the United States again. There he met a number of notable bird scientists (and some other important figures), at the annual meeting of the AOU and elsewhere. More than ever before, he was now able to personally interact with distinguished members of the ornithological community. And, not to forget, the financial support provided by the Guggenheim Foundation must have been most welcome as such. It was actually the very first time that Skutch received research money for studying avian species; his previous scientific grants were specifically given to him for botanical investigations.

Secondly, Skutch's time as a Guggenheim Fellow also shows his deep ties to Los Cusingos and tropical nature. As the last passage makes clear, he soon wished to go back to his homestead. This is indeed what happened, after he received official permission from the office of the Guggenheim Foundation. Skutch's quite early return (initially, he was supposed to stay many more months in the States) confirms that Los Cusingos and Costa Rica had become very essential to his well-being.

Guggenheim Fellowship

Last April I received notice of my appointment to a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship, for the purpose of preparing for publication my studies of the Central American Birds. Dr. Josselyn Van Tyne invited me to come to the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, where he offered me facilities for work, and the probability of publishing my manuscript. It was difficult for me to decide to leave the farm for a long period, but when I recalled the years of effort that I had devoted to my studies of the birds, and my early determination to publish my work, I decided to make the sacrifice of neglecting my property and going to live in a strange place in order to accomplish this purpose. Besides, after living among the forests of southern Costa Rica for four and a half years, interrupted by only two short visits to the center of the country, I felt that a change of atmosphere would be beneficial to me, although I should

not otherwise have chosen to go so far nor remain so long. For a little vacation, I should have preferred a short visit to Guatemala.

"Awarded a Fellowship" & From: "Departure from Los Cusingos," *Journal*, Vol. 41, July 7, 1946

Travel by Air

To go from Costa Rica to the United States in a single day is too abrupt a change. A sea voyage lasting several days softens the transition from country to country and prepares the traveller's mind for the change. But to travel by air is to suffer the shock of the strong contrasts between one land and another.

From: "San José to New Orleans by air," *Journal*, Vol. 41, July 12, 1946

Staying with Josselyn Van Tyne

I slept in the Hotel St. Charles in New Orleans the night of my arrival, suffering much from the heat after the pleasant coolness of San José. Next morning at 8.20 I left for Chicago by the Illinois Central Railway. Travelling all day and all night, I reached Chicago this morning, and changed to a train of the New York Central Railroad that took me into Ann Arbor early this afternoon. I found Dr. Van Tyne awaiting me at the station. He took me to his house, where I passed the night.

"To Ann Arbor, Michigan," *Journal*, Vol. 41, July 14, 1946

Ornithological Research at Ann Arbor

From mid-July until yesterday, I worked in the Museum of Zoology of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. The bird division has an excellent library, including the profusely illustrated monographs of Gould, Sharpe, Sclater, Seebohm, Malherbe and others, many of them huge tomes not easy to move about. There are also complete or nearly complete sets of the principal ornithological journals, the *Ibis*, *Auk*, *Journal für Ornithologie*, *Wilson Bulletin*, *Condor*, etc. The skin collection contains a fairly complete representation of the birds of tropical America, especially Central America, and a scattering from the Old World. Some of the series of neotropical species are distressingly large.

My first task was to check the identifications of the birds of which I shall treat in my book, and to learn the most recently accepted scientific names – a tedious and unproductive task. I also attempted to provide each species with a distinctive and

attractive English name – Ridgway and Hellmayr had provided names for each subspecies treated by them, but in many instances had no name for the species as a whole, resulting in a confusing and unsatisfactory array of English names for some of the more variable species. Although it had not been my original intention, I extended this task of giving English names to include practically all of the birds I had studied in Central America. Time and again my powers of invention were sorely taxed; sometimes I could hit upon no name for the species that did not seem to apply just as well to some related species. Sometimes the difficulty in naming arose from the circumstance that Hellmayr had included birds of very different aspect in a single polymorphic species. However, I feel that I have improved, if not perfected, the naming of Central American birds in English.

While at Ann Arbor I also read as widely as I could, especially on the habits of both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres. I was surprised by the absence of satisfactory accounts of the nesting of some of our most common North American birds, including all tanagers, orioles, and most vireos, including the Red-eyed Vireo.

"Work at Ann Arbor," *Journal*, Vol. 41, September 1, 1946

Edwin S. George Reserve

I paid two visits to the Edwin S. George Reserve of the University of Michigan, situated near Pinckney, about twenty miles from Ann Arbor. The 1300-acre tract, completely enclosed with a high mesh fence surmounted by barbed wire strands, is set aside for studies of wildlife. About half the area is covered with moderately tall second-growth woods of oak and hickory remarkably devoid of undergrowth – like most of the woodland I saw in southern Michigan; the rest is open fields, so sterile that the vegetation is only knee-high or less, although I was told that these fields have not been cultivated for years. There is a good deal of marshland and a few small open ponds. Deer abound; they are shot in winter to prevent their exhausting the forage. On the Reserve is a small laboratory with sleeping accommodations for four in double-decker bunks, and the director's cottage.

My first visit was for three days, the second for a week, spent largely working on my manuscript. These provided a pleasant change from an urban life; and Mrs. Camburn's home cooking relieved the hunger that grew out of my bohemian life in town. At the

Reserve I met George S. Sutton; Alfred Brandt, his student; F.N. Hamerstrom & the director, his wife Frances and their children Alan and Elva; and Lawrence Camburn, the caretaker.

"The George Reserve," *Journal*, Vol. 41, September 1, 1946.

To Urbana

I spent Sunday with the Hamerstroms on the George Reserve, and today came with them in their automobile to Urbana, Illinois, to attend the annual meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union. Alfred Brandt made the fourth member of our automobile party. We stopped off in northern Illinois, near the Kankakee Marshes, to botanize a little. Here beside a little-used byroad I made the acquaintance of *Eryngium yuccifolium*, the "button snakeroot," and saw some fine species of *Gerardia*. We left the Reserve at about eight o'clock in the morning and arrived in Urbana after nightfall.

"To Urbana," *Journal*, Vol. 41, September 2, 1946

Annual Gathering of the A.O.U.

The indoor meetings of the A.O.U. continued from the morning of September 3 until noon today. To me, the highlight of the meetings was the reproduction of the voices of Panamanian birds by Arthur A. Allen and Peter Kellog. Sitting in the auditorium, I heard, very clearly reproduced and perfectly recognizable, the sounds of birds which I knew in their native forests thousands of miles away. I even learned – what I had long suspected – that the loud, full, reiterated, explosive note, which I had often heard on moonlight nights in southern Costa Rica, was the call of the Spectacled Owl, *Pulsatrix perspicillata* – the oropopo of El General. In the auditorium I heard two, evidently male and female, calling back and forth just as I used to hear them on bright March nights beside the Rio Pacuar, back in 1940. I also heard the Crested Guan, the Great Rufous Motmot, Swainson's Toucan, and other familiar birds of Barro Colorado Island. Dr. Allen also had some beautiful colored motion pictures of birds in Panama and Labrador.

I was elected a Fellow of the A.O.U., in recognition of my publications on Central American birds. At the meeting I met Alden Miller, Joseph Hickey, Jean Delacour, S. Charles Kendeigh, Herbert Stoddard and other ornithologists I knew only through their

writings. I also renewed acquaintance with Alexander Wetmore, James Chapin and Ernst Mayr.

"A.O.U. meeting," *Journal*, Vol. 41, September 5, 1946

Going Farther West

I had not expected to go farther west than Illinois, but this morning the Hamerstroms introduced me to Leonard W. Wing, and Wing invited me to accompany him to Pullman, Washington, where he teaches ornithology and game management. He had bought a new car in Michigan and was taking it home. So on the spur of the moment, and with only a few hours for preparation, I decided to take a two-thousand-mile automobile journey and see the western two-thirds of the United States. I have never been west of the Mississippi. We left Urbana at 2 p.m. for Chicago.

"I decide to go west," *Journal*, Vol. 41, September 5, 1946

Margaret Morse Nice

Before leaving Costa Rica I received a letter from Mrs. Margaret M. Nice inviting me to visit her in Chicago before or after attending the A.O.U. meeting. She thought that we might together write a paper on the comparative life histories of the wrens. Wing took me yesterday evening to her home in south Chicago and I spent the night there. Several years ago she suffered a severe heart attack – according to her husband, from overwork – and although somewhat improved, she still must spend most of her time lying down. She lay on a couch all the time while we talked together, mostly about birds. Despite poor health, she is still intellectually alert, eager to work – she still turns out endless reviews of ornithological papers – and full of projects. Her two volumes on the life history of the Song Sparrow and other Passerines are unique of their kind, a record of long-continued, intensive fieldwork, and a scholarly review and summation of much of the extensive literature of bird behavior.

"A visit to Mrs. Nice," *Journal*, Vol. 41, September 6, 1946

Paul Standley and Julian Steyermark

I met Wing and his brother George at the Illinois Central Railroad Station at 9.30 this morning. At noon we left Chicago and came to Madison, Wisconsin. While waiting to

leave the city, I called on Paul Standley and Julian Steyermark at the Field Museum (now the Chicago Museum of Natural History). They gave me the first two volumes of their *Flora of Guatemala*.

Untitled, *Journal*, Vol. 41, September 6, 1946

Aldo Leopold and John Emlen

The campus of the University of Wisconsin is beautifully situated on low hills rising beside Lake Mendota. This morning I called on Aldo Leopold, professor of game management, and renewed acquaintance with John Emlen, associate professor of zoology, whom I knew sixteen years ago at Lancetilla, while he was still a college boy.

From: "Madison, Wisconsin," *Journal*, Vol. 41, September 7, 1946

Travel in the Old Days

Arrived in Baltimore at 8.20 a.m., after a three-day trip across the continent. My whole journey, west and east, was taken too rapidly to see the country. In the old days when we travelled more slowly we did not go so far in a day, but we saw a great deal more. Now, by railroad, automobile and aeroplane, we rush over the face of the earth at such terrific speed that we retain only the vaguest notions of the nature of the country over which we skim.

"Arrival in Baltimore," *Journal*, Vol. 41, September 18, 1946

Request to Return to Costa Rica

After working here for a month and talking things over with Dr. Van Tyne, I am able to form a clearer view of the task before me than was possible before I left Costa Rica, and am writing of what I have accomplished and what I would like to do, in the hope that the latter will meet with the approval of the Foundation.

During the past year in Costa Rica I had been working fairly steadily on my manuscript, and before coming North had nearly completed the first draft of the life histories of most of the passerine birds I had studied – more than enough to fill a substantial volume. The chief thing that needed to be done on these life histories was to check on the classification and nomenclature of the birds treated, and this was the part I

was least able to do on the farm. Since my arrival here I have been working hard at this and have now about finished the task. I also have had a typist at work copying manuscript. In another two months I expect to have the volume on song-birds, containing about one-third of all my material on life histories, completed or nearly so. Dr. Van Tyne thinks that the prospects of having this published by the Museum of Zoology are good, but the matter is not definitely settled.

I should like to return in the late fall to Costa Rica and work there on my second volume, on the flycatchers and related families. Now that I have the nomenclature in shape, I can do this better there than here, where living is exceedingly expensive and none too comfortable. With what I can save by living in Costa Rica, I can buy the principal books that I need. These will be extremely useful for work in future years.

From: Letter to Dr. Henry Allen Moe (John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation), August 10, 1946

On the Editor:

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