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A NATURALIST ON A TROPICAL FARM
Alexander Skutch, illustrated by Dana Gardner. University of California Press, \$12.95 ISBN 0-520-03802-9
Botanist and authority on Central American birds, Skutch settled on a farm in western Costa Rica some 40 years ago. "Los Cusingas," at an altitude of 2500 feet, was remote, with a diversity of habitats that included an unspoiled forest. Skutch introduces us to the tropical seasons and the changes they bring to both plant and animal life. He describes his farmland, crops and harvest; his domestic animals; agoutis and other small native mammals. But his real interest and chief pleasure lay in observation of the abundant bird-life—hummingbirds among his banana plants, life cycles of woodpeckers and puffbirds. A bicolored antbird followed him on his rambles for more than a year, seizing insects that were disturbed by his cane. In contrast to his farm, Skutch takes us to the Caribbean side of Costa Rica and a different climate with different fauna and flora. It's all a marvelous cross-section of exotic wildlife, enhanced by Skutch's philosophic commentary. [March]