

2052 A NATURALIST ON A TROPICAL FARM, Alexander Skutch For over forty years ornithologist Alexander Skutch and his wife have operated a subsistence farm in a remote valley in Costa Rica. They have tried to live harmoniously with the land and its wild denizens, to be no less naturalists for being farmers, and they have succeeded.

In his preface Skutch outlines the problem and the solution which the book will document. "The naturalist who undertakes to farm, or the farmer who becomes deeply interested in wild nature, will often be perplexed and face difficult decisions. This is especially true if he farms in the midst of, or beside, tropical rain forest, with its vast diversity of plants and animals, some of which may harm his crops. To compensate for his often distressing dilemmas, his farm most probably will include areas of both wilderness and cultivation and will support a greater variety of living things than either forest or plantation alone would shelter. If he lives perceptively, his experiences will deepen his understanding of the problems confronting conservationists in an over-populated world, and perhaps also bring more acute awareness of both the glory and the tragedy of life on an exceptionally favored planet that stubbornly persists in producing more living creatures than it can support."

He begins by recapitulating the story told in his earlier book, *A Naturalist in Costa Rica*, about how he came there and built his farm. Next, to show how the seasons on a tropical farm bring change to all that lives there, Skutch takes us through a year on his farm. "Then I recount certain memorable experiences... stories of the most engaging birds with which I have long been intimate [the hermit hummingbirds, speckled tanager, the golden-naped woodpecker, the antbird, the wood-rail, the puffbird, to name a few], of certain quadrupeds that live close to me [armadillos, agoutis, white-faced monkeys], of trees, flowers and insects, of domestic animals [Skutch holds some surprising views on man's obligations to these animals], of fishes that swim in rocky pools on the farm."

To acquaint readers with a broader spectrum of Costa Rican wildlife, Skutch also describes a farm in a very different part of the country.

All told, this is a rich and varied offering for the naturalist or the farmer, and for everyone with an interest in Central America. Handsome block prints illustrate an altogether attractive book. 397 pages. Illustrations. Index. University of California, 1980. Hardcover. \$16.95