Review of:
[Third in a series on "naturalist-in" books.]

William Henry Hudson (1841-1922) was born in Argentina of American parents. His early years on the Pampa are marvelously and evocatively recounted in *Far Away and Long Ago*, written in his old age. At the age of 33, Hudson emigrated to England, where he remained the rest of his life. As far as I know, he never clearly explained this extraordinary move, except to note that he had always regarded England as the place where he belonged.

It is unfortunate that Hudson is best known in this hemisphere as the author of *Green Mansions* -- a pleasant enough read, but, after all, nothing more than a novel -- as he was a substantial and important nature writer, drawing on both his time in Argentina and his later years in England. Among his most highly-regarded books are *Idle Days in Patagonia* and *A Hind in Richmond Park*. In addition, he was a conservation propagandist and organizer, a major force in the organization of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

The *Naturalist in La Plata* treats the part of Argentina that Hudson knew best, the vast long-grass prairie known as the Pampa (or pampas). Although he does not say so, this book is plainly modeled on the first naturalist-in book of note, Gilbert White's *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*.

In 24 chapters, Hudson treats a variety of topics in animal life and the life of particular animals. The most substantially original of these is "Biography of the Vizcacha", an all-around natural history of the most characteristic mammal of the Pampa, the group-living rodent *Lagostomus maximus*. Others are about such things as mimicry and warning colouration, mosquitoes and other parasites, bumble bees, hummingbirds, and my personal favourite, "The Mephitic Skunk".

I believe it was Joseph Conrad who exclaimed that Hudson wrote as naturally "as the grass grows." Conrad had evidently not seen Hudson's notebooks, in which he laboriously crafted his writings through many drafts. However, the final result does, indeed, come across as almost effortless, with the result that this and other books will continue to be read with ease and pleasure as long as nature and English are appreciated.

References

Christopher K. Starr
Dep't of Life Sciences
University of the West Indies