Friend of Walt Whitman, companion to Theodore Roosevelt, and friendly rival of John Muir, John Burroughs is seldom read today. But in the last decades of the 19th century, his prolific nature essays helped spawn the Nature Study movement and made him an international celebrity. In 1875 Henry James praised his real genius for natural history and called him a more humorous, more available, and more sociable Thoreau. In this illustrated biography, Edward Kanze sketches the trajectory of Burroughs's long career, from his childhood on a farm in the Catskills to his decades in retirement along the Hudson River. As early as 1871, when his first book of nature essays was published, Burroughs was acclaimed as an American Gilbert White, the pioneering British naturalist and author of The Natural History of Selborne. Readers were charmed by Burroughs's enthusiastic accounts of ordinary walks made extraordinary by keen observation. By the late 1880s, when his first collection of nature essays for children was published, he was one of America's most popular interpreters of the natural world. He kept writing until 1921, when he died at the age of 84. Edward Kanze, a naturalist and writer, has written an engaging narrative that nevertheless leaves the reader hungry for more information. The photographs, though pleasant, are sometimes tangential: mourning doves reminded Burroughs of their extinct relations, the passenger pigeons, reads one caption. The biography may succeed as an introduction to Burroughs's life, but in the end one wishes for more of the master's own prose and a better sense of its social context. --Pete Holloran

John Burroughs, the naturalist and philosopher, was a best-seller in his day (the late 19th century and early 20th), a Thoreau without rough edges and politics. If he has enjoyed a revival in recent years it is probably due to Ed Kanze's stunningly written and attractively presented biography, "The World of John Burroughs," published by Abrams in 1993, and now out of print. The good news: Sierra Club Books has come out with this paperback version. Some of Burroughs is dated today, and as Kanze notes, he published some mediocre essays along with the good stuff. But much of Burroughs' nature writings are brilliant in their painstaking observation and solid prose: "Most persons think the bee gets honey from the flowers, but she does not: honey is a product of the bee; it is the nectar of the flowers with the bee added. What the bee gets from the flower is sweet water: this she puts through a process of her own and
imparts to it her own quality."Kanze, like a good conversationalist, leads the reader gently through Burroughs' life and writings. Burroughs was a real 19th-century figure: He consorted with the literary likes of John Muir and William Dean Howells and in later life was a favorite of Teddy Roosevelt and Henry Ford -- not to mention the Vassar girls who visited him at his rustic Hudson Valley hideaway, Slabsides. (Burroughs' private life was, in a word, difficult, and Kanze is unstinting in dealing with the birth of his one -- illegitimate -- child.) It is not surprising that Kanze is a naturalist himself and has been a museum curator. The book has the feel of a nature walk or a good museum exhibit, in which a subject not readily familiar to the reader becomes fascinating with the help of a terrific guide. There are well-chosen historical photographs and the luminous nature photography of the author, each photo chosen for its relevance to one or another passage from Burroughs' work. Particularly moving are the photos of Burroughs in Slabsides; paired with Kanze's own color photos of the house's preserved interior. You find your eye traveling back and forth from the old photo to the new, to see the same fireplace stone here, the unpeeled birch desk there.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
The World of John Burroughs by Edward Kanze - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!