

JANOVY II

Yellowlegs. John Janovy, Jr. 1980. St. Martin's Press, New York. 224 pages. \$9.95.

Between the covers of the *Prairie Naturalist* some months back, I wrote the following about John Janovy Jr.'s first book, *Keith County Journal*: "I for one am looking forward to the more polished books that will hopefully follow Janovy's *Journal*." Since that time, *Janovy II* has appeared in the bookstores. Its logo — *Yellowlegs*.

Although *Yellowlegs* intermittently recounts the life and death of an individual, banded lesser yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*), the book is not about a bird; it is about the author. *Yellowlegs* is divided into three sections describing different time periods during the author's one-year leave of absence from his normal duties at the University of Nebraska. Janovy specifically set aside this year "to become an ecologist." The proximate pathway to that ultimate goal was decided on by chance when Janovy became intrigued by the magical flash of the wings of a lesser yellowlegs flying over the waters of a prairie slough. The author's destiny was set. He would spend the next year following the movements of a ninety-gram "flying machine."

Janovy's journey through the year took him from Nebraska to Texas, and back again. He would have followed his banded bird to South America had it not been for the fact that his Ford Mustang did very poorly upon entering the Gulf of Mexico in the vicinity of Rockport, Texas. That's right, entering the Gulf of Mexico. If you find that hard to believe, wait until you read about the feather and the Oklahoma bartender.

Much of the content of *Yellowlegs* is reminiscent of Farley Mowat's "factual fiction," but the similarity ends there. Mechanically, the book is inconsistent and grammatically awkward in places. The man from Nebraska seems to have an abundance of creative ideas and some extraordinary philosophies, but many of his thoughts become engulfed in a quicksand of prose.

But no matter what I say about the technical shortcomings of *Yellowlegs*, I must admit that I have a soft spot in my literary heart for Janovy's writings simply because of my deep-seated feelings for the North American prairies. There is no question that Janovy has come to know and appreciate the prairies of this continent in a way that is rare among the ranks of writers whose stage is the world of nature. *Yellowlegs* does convey a genuine feeling of prairie, and for those of you who know meadowlark songs and billowing waves of grass, you should enjoy many passages in Janovy II.

Keith T. Killingbeck
Department of Botany
University of Rhode Island
Kingston, RI 02881