

ITINERARY
LOUISIANA: YELLOW RAILS & CRAWFISH TAILS
A Special Tour for Maine Audubon
October 24 – 28, 2019



Our tour coincides with the annual Yellow Rails and Rice Festival in southwestern Louisiana. In addition to seeing rails in the fields, the festival features a banding station, where we have been able to get up-close views of rails, including this impressive King Rail. Photograph by guide Cory Gregory.

We include here information for those interested in the 2019 Field Guides Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our web site)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a reference list
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen

To an outsider, the name Louisiana brings to mind deep, dank cypress swamps, alligators, crazy Mardi Gras celebrations, and (of course) Cajun and Creole cooking. The real Cajun country is mostly found in the southwestern part of the state, and it is here that we plan to concentrate our efforts.

Cajun country is one of the primary rice-growing regions of the US and it is where many prairie and taiga pothole-breeding birds spend their winter: ducks, geese, ibis, bitterns, Sedge Wrens, LeConte's Sparrows, blackbirds, and, perhaps the most secretive of them all, Yellow Rails. These species can be found across much of the Southeast, but because of the rice harvesting schedule of Cajun farmers, the chance of seeing them here is perhaps better than

anywhere else—as the rice combines collect the *lagniappe* (extra) autumn crop, they flush the birds that are otherwise buried deep in marshy grass. We will spend time watching for these species along the dirt roads that crisscross the rice country. This region is very birdy and in addition to the marsh birds, any hedgerow may have lingering or vagrant migrants, wintering sparrows, or some other surprise!

In the course of our long weekend, we will also spend time birding along the coastal marshes, beaches, and *cheniers* (tree islands) for late seasonal migrants and wintering species, as well as some time in nearby pine woods that are home to such southeastern specialties as Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Bachman's Sparrow, and possibly wintering Henslow's Sparrow. And of course, don't forget your appetite: Louisiana is rightly known for its tasty cuisine and we will make a point of sampling some of it: jambalaya, gumbo, etouffe, blackened redfish, boudin, and po'boys are some of the mouth-watering offerings for which the region is famous! So why don't y'all come on down and visit?



*We'll visit the pineywoods of central Louisiana, where we'll seek out the elusive Bachman's Sparrow.
Photograph by guide Eric Hynes.*

About the Physical Requirements & Pace: Most of our birding will be on roadsides, with only brief walks (about a mile in virtually all cases) on dirt trails in pine woods or coastal *cheniers* (tree islands). If you choose, you may be able to ride in the rice combine (harvesting machine) beside the driver to see the rails from above. Those of us on the ground can track down rails that have taken refuge in the cut sections of the field by walking into the muddy stubble in rubber boots. To search for Henslow's and Bachman's sparrows, we will have to walk off-trail through boggy and sandy pinewoods. Here, one has to step over logs and grass tussocks and wearing hiking boots will be helpful. Having a folding stool for some of the birding may be helpful during the tour. This is Louisiana, so there are virtually no hills (or even rocks!). We will be based near the town of Lafayette, which is on the eastern edge of the Cajun country but is considered the cultural (and culinary) center of the region, and we may be driving up to two or three hours to reach some of our farthest birding destinations.

In late October and early November, Louisiana's climate is downright pleasant. Typically, days are warm, sometimes reaching temperatures up to 80 degrees F, but if a cold front has passed recently, overnight temperatures can fall into the 40's. Be sure to bring clothes for both extremes, as well as rain gear. Insects normally are not a problem at this season (although mosquitoes can be an issue in the coastal salt marshes), but there are occasional chiggers and ticks (far fewer ticks than in the Northeast, however!), so having some form of insect repellent is recommended.

If you are uncertain about whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with your guide.

About the Birding Areas



Rice Country—The main focus of our tour is the rice country of southwestern Louisiana—formerly a coastal wet prairie (complete with nesting Prairie Chickens and Whooping Cranes... sadly, the former is now locally extirpated, but there is a brand new program to get the latter established within the state again—we saw a pair in 2013). Today, the area is a maze of dirt roads and bayous that intersect the extensive rice-farming region. We will be here for the second rice harvest (the first is in August), so we should be able to watch as combines spiral inward on the paddies, flushing up various marsh birds hiding within: Sora, Virginia, King, and Yellow rails, American Bitterns, Sedge and Marsh wrens, Savanna, LeConte’s, Swamp, and Song sparrows, and blackbirds. Equally entertaining are the hoards of waders (especially daredevil Cattle Egrets) that follow the combines to grasp fleeing grasshoppers and frogs or settle on recently harvested fields to scavenge for newly exposed prey items.

Already-harvested fields in the rice country can be filled with shorebirds or waterfowl, and everywhere there are raptors! One of the more interesting birding “chores” here is sorting through the Red-tailed Hawks to see what forms they represent, as nearly all can be found in SW Louisiana in the winter. Sparrows,

warblers, and late or vagrant migrants are possible in nearly any hedgerow here, so stopping periodically to pish can be rewarding.

Pine Woods—Another habitat of interest unique to the Southeast is Longleaf and Loblolly pine woodland and savanna. This declining habitat is present in fragmented patches to the north of the coastal marshes and rice country. Kisatchie National Forest is one of the few sites where Red-cockaded Woodpeckers linger in the state, and this is also a good place to search for two sparrows which are pine woods specialists: Bachman’s and Henslow’s (both are difficult, Henslow’s particularly so). Brown-headed Nuthatches, Pine Warblers, and Carolina Chickadees are other southeastern “specialties” which are easy to see here as well.

Louisiana Coast—Finally, there are coastal habitats, including *cheniers*, or “oak islands,” which provide yet another birding habitat. The beaches of Cameron Parish are often great for gulls, shorebirds, herons, ducks, and other waterbirds. Saltmarshes provide habitat for Seaside and Nelson’s sparrows, as well as Marsh and Sedge wrens, and various rails. The *cheniers* may hold lingering migrants and vagrants. Unfortunately, recent hurricanes (Rita and Ike, particularly) have ravaged the western Louisiana coast, and access to some coastal sites may not be as easy as it once was. Your guide will have to determine how much coastal access we’ll have in advance of the tour.

Itinerary for Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails

Day 1, Thu. To Lafayette. If you’re flying into Lafayette, please plan to take a taxi to the hotel (if your arrival doesn’t overlap with one of the guides’ shuttles from there). We will meet this evening for dinner in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. If your arrival is later than this, please check at the hotel desk for a note from your guide about our departure time in the morning. Night near Lafayette.

Days 2-4, Fri-Sun. Birding Cajun country. We will be visiting sites as the weather and rice harvesting schedules dictate. Usually the harvesters begin once the dew has dried, so early mornings will be spent visiting other habitats. Views of Yellow Rails can be fleeting, so chances are we’ll need to follow several combines to be sure everyone has seen

a rail well! Time spent birding in the coastal and pine woods habitats will depend on our success with the rail. Nights near Lafayette.

Day 5, Mon. Departure for home. You may schedule your departure for any time today (plan to take a taxi to the airport if your departure doesn't overlap with one of the guides' shuttles there).



The Roseate Spoonbill is a specialty of the coastal marshes of the southern US, including the southwestern corner of Louisiana. Photograph by guide Cory Gregory.

About Your Guides

Dan Lane was barely out of diapers when his love for birds manifested itself. He was an active birder in his home state of New Jersey until he graduated from college in 1995 and moved to Louisiana to pursue a Master's Degree studying Neotropical birds at Louisiana State University. By 1999, he'd received his degree and participated in three LSU expeditions to Peru and Ecuador, discovering a new species of bird (Scarlet-banded Barbet) along the way. His increasing experience with the Peruvian avifauna, coupled with having the luck of being "in the right place at the right time," landed Dan coauthorship on the recently published *Birds of Peru*—alongside his childhood heroes Ted Parker and John O'Neill. Meanwhile, his continuing fieldwork has resulted in uncovering additional new species to science (although writing these up, sadly, takes far more time than finding the birds, and Dan's way behind schedule).

Dan's interests in birds also include illustration, bird vocalizations, and bird biogeography and evolution. He's pleased to be working with Field Guides and enjoys the friendship and fun the Field Guides family provides. His favorite areas are largely in tropical Latin America, but on occasion he has led tours to other corners of the globe and of course (somewhat) regularly birds near his home in Louisiana.

*"It was a pleasure to travel with **Dan**, who knew every back road and bird spot, and shared his local knowledge so well."*

A. S.; Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails

Doug Hitchcox, a Maine native, grew up in Hollis and graduated from the University of Maine in 2011. Throughout college Doug worked at Scarborough Marsh Audubon Center and was hired as Maine Audubon's staff naturalist in the summer of 2013, a long time "dream job." In his free time, Doug volunteers as one of Maine's eBird reviewers, is the owner and moderator of the 'Maine-birds' listserv and serves as York County Audubon board member and member of the Maine Bird Records Committee.

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/guides> for Dan's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

Financial Information

FEE: \$1675 from Lafayette

DEPOSIT: \$175 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: June 26, 2019

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$300

LIMIT: 14

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Sharon Mackie. Sharon will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: Please plan to arrive in Lafayette in time to join the group in the hotel lobby at the Holiday Inn Express at 6:30 p.m. on Day 1 for our first dinner together at 7:00 p.m. On Day 5 you may depart from Lafayette at any time. Field Guides is a full-service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees.

Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.

LUGGAGE: Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The **tour fee** is \$1675 for one person in double occupancy from Lafayette. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 4, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 5, all ground transportation, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Lafayette, airport taxes, airport transfers, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, visa fees, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is \$300. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR LIMITS: Our limits are firm and we don't exceed the limit by one to accommodate a couple when only one space remains open. However, on occasion, we will send along a guide in training on a tour. In these cases, one seat in the van or bus will be taken by the guide in training. Our guides will have a rotation system within the vehicle so that clients share the inconvenience equally. We hope this minor inconvenience will be more than offset by the advantages of having another guide along.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, complete the Registration/Release and Indemnity form and return it with a **deposit of \$175** per person. If registering by phone, a deposit must be received within fourteen days, or the space will

be released. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or **by June 26, 2019**. **We will bill you for the final payment at either 120 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.** Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 120 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 119 and 70 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable.

This policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour fees (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of the insurance is not refundable so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airlines restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer any refund when cancellation occurs within 70 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 70 to 119 days prior to departure (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive from us a brochure regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, 24-hour accident protection, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance when making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights), pre-existing conditions are covered. The CSA brochure includes a contact number; you may also purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/travelinsurance.html> and clicking the link to CSA. Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the reverse side of the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. Field Guides Incorporated accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated

reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.
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