

ITINERARY

**LOUISIANA: YELLOW RAILS & CRAWFISH TAILS**

*Tour I: October 28-November 1, 2021*

*Tour II: November 4-8, 2021*



*Our tour coincides with the annual Yellow Rails and Rice Festival in southwestern Louisiana, where participants can ride through the rice fields on the harvesters or in 4x4's, as this recent group is doing. Yellow Rails occasionally flush very close to the vehicles, leading to wonderful reactions from participants! Photograph by guide Doug Hitchcox.*

*We include here information for those interested in the 2021 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

*These additional materials will be made available to those who register for the tour:*

- 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 and other forest birds.  
Photograph by guide Cory Gregory.*

**All participants will be required to confirm they will have completed a full COVID vaccination course at least two weeks prior to the tour** (if you are getting a two-dose vaccine, this means you must receive your second dose two weeks prior to departure). Having a vaccinated group will greatly diminish but not eliminate the possibility of the group and individual participants being adversely affected by COVID-19. **We are requiring all of our staff guides to be vaccinated.** Note too that many travel destinations are or soon will be requiring proof of vaccination for entry to bypass testing delays or quarantine, and that entry requirements for a destination can change at any time.

*We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.*

### **Physical requirements of this tour**

- **TRAILS:** We will bird mostly from roadsides, although we may make several brief walks on dirt trails in the piney woods and coastal *cheniers*. Searching for some of the sparrows will involve going off-trail into sandy conditions, where you'll need to step over hummocks and logs. Looking for rails in the rice fields may require walking through muddy stubble, but you may opt to stay on the drier levies. **Rubber boots are essential for this tour!**
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** If you choose to ride the combines through the rice fields, there will be dust, and the ride may be bumpy and loud (ear protection, goggles, and face masks are supplied). Encounters with mosquitoes, chiggers and ticks are possible. In the pine woods, should we go off-road, beware of logs, pits, and briars. Restaurants may provide high cholesterol. Fire ants are always a menace.

- **PACE:** This is a fairly laid-back tour. We will be having breakfast around 6:00am at the hotel the first two mornings, but Sunday will have us departing and having a breakfast stop on the way to birding to get us into the field earlier. Lunch will be between 11:30am and 1pm with more birding in the afternoon. If we are far enough from Lafayette, we may stop for dinner on our return, but we will enjoy Cajun eating three of the four nights (most Cajun restaurants are closed on Sunday). We should have you back to your rooms by about 9:30pm.
- **ELEVATION:** Louisiana is more or less at sea-level, with no pronounced changes in elevation.
- **WEATHER:** Weather should be pleasant; daytimes highs average in the 70's-80's. If a cold front comes through, overnight temps may drop into the 40's. Rain is always possible.
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** Bathroom stops at indoor restrooms will be made regularly; comfort stops in nature are also possible, should the need arise.
- **OPTING OUT:** Since we are staying multiple days in the same lodging, participants can easily opt to sit out a day, but we will not return to the hotel before late afternoon at the earliest on any day.

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" 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.



*We'll see many flocks, from mixed groups of wading birds such as this, to immense flocks of blackbirds and wintering geese.  
Photograph by guide Eric Hynes.*

## Itinerary for Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails

**Day 1, Thu. To Lafayette.** If you’re flying into Lafayette you will be picked up at the airport by either one of our Guides or the or the ALG Executive Charter Car Service. We will book your transfer based on your arrival time. 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).

### 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 co-authorship on the recently published *Birds*

*“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*

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.

**Cory Gregory** started learning birds on flashcards at the age of three, but it wasn't until the ripe age of ten that things started to get more serious. Since then he has traveled to Central and South America, Australia, and all 50 states to try to get his fill of birding (and it hasn't worked yet!).

Cory earned a B.S. in zoology in Michigan, where he also worked for Whitefish Point Bird Observatory for several seasons. He then ventured to Iowa State University, where he earned a M.S. studying Long-billed Curlews in Nebraska. As an avid shorebird ecologist, he has handled more than 2000 shorebirds of more than 30 species.

After finishing school, Cory worked for several organizations as a shorebird ecologist and guided on St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs of Alaska for the 2014 and 2015 seasons. It was on St. Paul that his dream of stumbling on a first North American record was finally fulfilled. Cory is currently based out of Missouri where, when not on tour, he pursues his interest in birds, butterflies, and dragonflies with abandon.

Cory has co-led Field Guides groups to Arizona, Alaska, Oregon, Cape May, Texas, Peru, and Australia and has a busy and wide-ranging schedule coming up for 2020 --from the US and Canada, to Mexico, Costa Rica, and Australia.

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for complete tour schedules for Dan and Cory; just click on their photos.

*"Cory is a wonderful guide. He is very skilled and knowledgeable, but manages to be calm and patient as he responds to all our questions and repetitions. The itinerary was carefully and thoughtfully planned, allowing us to experience so much of Oregon and its birds." D.M.; Oregon*

## Financial Information

**FEE:** \$2050 from Lafayette

**DEPOSIT:** \$200 per person

**FINAL PAYMENT DUE:** Tour I: June 30, 2021; Tour II: July 7, 2021

**SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional):** \$300

**LIMIT:** 14

**Special Note: Tour fees may be subject to change due to the global economic effects of COVID-19.**

We have published the itinerary and price for this tour with the understanding that during these uncertain times we are likely to encounter unforeseen changes. Travel and hospitality companies all over the world have been adversely affected by the pandemic, and there is no guarantee that all of the lodging and transportation we have booked for this tour will still be available at the time of departure. We hope to maintain our services as indicated in our itinerary as well as our published tour fee. However, if changes are required we will make every effort to maintain the quality of the itinerary as it is published with the most appropriate substitutions available. Should any necessary changes result in an increase in service rates to us, we reserve the right to pass on those increases in fees to the tour participant.

## 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 6:00 p.m. on Day 1 for our first dinner together at 6:30 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 \$2050 for one person in double occupancy\* from Lafayette. It includes transfer to the hotel from the airport and back, 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. 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).

\*If you have a trusted friend, relative, or significant other with whom you wish to share a room on tour, please let us know and your tour manager will make that assignment. However, due to recommendations from the CDC, Field Guides is not currently pairing roommates who do not know each other, and the single supplement will apply if you do not have a roommate. As of this writing (March 31, 2021), we are reviewing these CDC recommendations carefully and often and will let you know if that changes.

**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, please [contact our office](#). Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our new electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please mail your **deposit of \$200** per person, or see our Payment Options at <https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/>. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or **by June 30, 2021(Tour I); July 7, 2021(Tour II)**. **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.**

Please note that if you are traveling on a tour **outside your country of domicile** (for example, outside the US for US residents), we will require **proof of travel insurance**. 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.

Field Guides reserves the right 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. If you are traveling on a tour **outside your country of domicile** (for example, outside the US for US residents), we will **require proof of travel insurance**. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, you acknowledge and agree that we will not issue a 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 information from us 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, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance prior to, or within 24 hours of making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights and in some cases, other arrangements), pre-existing conditions are covered. You may purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/> and clicking the link to CSA. The CSA webpage also includes a contact number.

**Currently we are unable to offer CSA insurance policies to residents of New York and Hawaii.** We have had clients provide positive feedback after acquiring insurance thru InsureMyTrip (<https://www.insuremytrip.com/>) in the past, and would suggest that company as an alternative. When purchasing insurance with a company other than CSA, you will want to understand whether the timing of your purchase will affect coverage before paying your first deposit. Insurance purchase requirements can vary from company to company, and such requirements could limit your options if you do not look into this until making your final payment for your tour. Please let us know if you have any questions about this.

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. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible 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.

NCP 7/2020

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