

ITINERARY
LOUISIANA: YELLOW RAILS & CRAWFISH TAILS
October 31 – November 4, 2024



*One of the southern specialty birds we'll look for on this short tour is the rare Red-cockaded Woodpecker. We'll visit the piney woods of Kisatche National Forest to find them, and other birds such as the Brown-headed Nuthatch.
Photograph by participant Cindy Hamilton.*

We include here information for those interested in the 2024 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 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?



Yellow Rails are small and cryptic, but we'll have a chance to get some good looks at them. By timing our tour to the fall rice harvest, we'll be able to ride along with farmers on their combines, and watch Yellow Rails and other birds flush from the vegetation. Photograph by participant Andrew Kenny.

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 & WALKING:** 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 meeting around 6:00am (unless our tour overlaps the time change) at the hotel, 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 most nights. 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, but is usually front-related at this season.
- **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 when available (you will be given advanced warning if we spend a long period away from them); 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 and again in 2021). 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, Savannah, 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, large waders, 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” 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, Ike, and Laura 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 sights like this mixed flock of ibis (and one Great Egret) as we drive the roads of Cajun Country!
Photograph by guide Chris Benesh.*

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 if your flight is timed to meet them at the designated pickup time. If not, we recommend that you use Uber to transfer yourself to the hotel in Scott. We will meet this evening at 6:30 p.m. in the hotel lobby for our initial meet-and-greet and to go to dinner. 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 an active birder in his home state of New Jersey until he moved to Louisiana to pursue a master's 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 Peruvian avifauna landed Dan co-authorship on the 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. His favorite areas are in tropical Latin America (Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia), but on occasion he leads tours to other corners of the globe and of course near his home in Louisiana.

"Dan Lane is superior in all aspects as a guide—excellent recognition of bird sounds, patient in drawing birds in for views, able to relate to group members with relaxed courtesy and helpfulness. We rate Field Guides the highest." J.N. & E.H., Amazonian Ecuador: Sacha Lodge

Sam Wilson grew up in New Jersey and had his spark moment as a young adult visiting Hawk Mountain Sanctuary. On his first visit he witnessed an epic migration of 10,000 Broad-winged Hawks as they took to the skies over the Appalachian ridges. He was hooked, and his fascination with bird migration has only grown.

Sam spent four years working in Cape May, New Jersey, for New Jersey Audubon developing bird migration programs for school groups and families and leading group trips for Cape May Bird Observatory and New Jersey Young Birders Club. He enjoyed a stint in the Hawaiian Islands doing breeding bird surveys in the remote Alakai Swamp for the Kauai Forest Birds Recovery project (though his gear didn't recover!).

Eventually, wanderlust led him to Alaska, where he led backcountry trips focused on birds and wildlife in Denali National Park, as well as guided trips for birding festivals along the Kenai Peninsula and Copper River. He has since led group trips as a naturalist-guide in most regions of the country with a special focus on National Parks and Wilderness areas. Sam is an eBird reviewer in Alaska and contributor to both *Cape May Magazine* and ABA's *Birding* magazine. When not experimenting with flight photography, investigating nocturnal migration, or researching biodiversity hot spots, Sam enjoys backpacking, growing super-hot peppers, discovering new music, and creating experimental dishes (usually Asian cuisine). Sam and his wife, Margeaux, have spent months traveling around the world seeking out rare birds and wildlife. They currently reside in Anchorage, Alaska.

"Sam is an expert guide and one of the best spotters we've ever experienced. He was great to get us on hard-to-see birds. He worked well with all the participants and was knowledgeable about the birds and plants." A.D., Texas Coast Migration Spectacle

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

Financial Information

FEE: \$2225 from Lafayette

DEPOSIT: \$225 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: May 4, 2024

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$325

LIMIT: 14

All participants will be required to confirm they will have completed a full COVID vaccination course at least two weeks prior to the tour (which includes a booster for those eligible to have one). Note too, that many travel destinations may still require proof of vaccination for entry to bypass testing delays or quarantine, and that entry requirements for a destination can change at any time. Proof of a booster shot, too, may be a requirement for some travel destinations.

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Christine Boilard. Christine will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact 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. On Day 5 you may depart from Lafayette at any time. 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 \$2225 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 \$325. 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, please contact us at fieldguides.com/contact-us/. 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 \$225** per person, or see <https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/> for our Payment Options. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or **by May 4, 2024. We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 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 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (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 that 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 airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. 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, you acknowledge and agree that we will not issue a refund when cancellation occurs within 90 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 90 to 179 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 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.

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