

ITINERARY

LOUISIANA: YELLOW RAILS & CRAWFISH TAILS

October 29 – November 2, 2026



One of our objectives on this tour is to find and see as many species of rail as possible. The King Rail is the largest that we'll find, and we're liable to get good views of them in the rice fields. Photograph by participant Andrew Kenny.

We include here information for those interested in the 2026 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* (coastal 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, and secretive Bachman'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: gumbo, étouffé, corn and crab bisque, blackened catfish, 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?



The rare Red-cockaded Woodpecker is a specialty of the southeastern long-leaf pine forests. We'll visit Kisatchie National Forest to seek this bird, and others, including Bachman's Sparrow. Photograph by guide Sam Wilson .

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 pinewoods 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 will require walking through muddy stubble, but you can opt to stay on the drier levies. **Rubber boots are essential for this tour!**
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** In the rice fields, when the combines are actively harvesting, there will be dust; face masks are recommended. Encounters with mosquitoes, deer flies, chiggers and ticks are possible, though the latter two are typically not much of an issue. 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, having breakfast there, then driving to our birding first destination of the morning. The drive time will vary depending on the day, with the longest drives being those to the piney woods and the Gulf coast. Drinks and snacks will be available, and we will make bathroom stops at several points in the morning as availability allows. 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 at this time of year; daytime highs average in the 70's-80's. If a cold front comes through, overnight temps may drop into the 50's or (less likely) 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 North American varieties 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. Nearby are some National Wildlife Refuges that provide marsh habitat for wintering ducks and other waterbirds and, if we have time, these can be productive too.

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, terns, shorebirds, herons, ducks, and other waterbirds. Saltmarshes provide habitat for Seaside and Nelson's sparrows, as well as Marsh and Sedge wrens, and Clapper 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 have to be patient and wait for the rails to appear as the combines sweep across the fields.
Rice fields are an interesting habitat, though, and we should see many different kinds of birds.
Photograph by participant Robert Mead.*

Itinerary for Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails

Day 1, Thu. To Lafayette. If you're flying into Lafayette around the predetermined pickup time, you will be retrieved by one of our Guides. If not, please plan to make your own way 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. Yellow Rail is our primary target, so our luck with it will determine how we will structure the remainder of our birding outings. We will be visiting sites as the weather and rice harvesting schedules dictate. Usually the rice 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 in Scott, Louisiana.

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

Alex Sundvall is a proud Minnesota native and has truly loved birds all his life. At the young age of five, he took a field trip with his kindergarten class to their local Nature Center and learned all about birds. At the end of the trip, the class got to watch staff release a Dark-eyed Junco they had been rehabilitating, and from that moment he was hooked! With the help of his very supportive and encouraging parents, he learned everything he could about birds and birding. Even as a child, whenever anyone asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up, he would always reply: "I'm going to be an ornithologist!"

This love of birds and nature has followed him throughout his life. He graduated from the University of Minnesota's College of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resource Sciences with a degree in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology with a double minor in Forest Ecosystem Management and Conservation; and Environmental Sciences, Policy, and Management. In 2016, Alex received the Young Birder Award from the Minnesota Ornithologists Union, and he has served as an alternate on his State's Bird Records Committee.

Growing up in Minnesota, Alex developed a passion for studying bird migration. In the past he has worked as both a Counter and Count Interpreter at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory in Duluth, MN. Even now, in his free time he'll often drive somewhere, post up for the day, and just count migrating birds as they pass by.

In recent years, Alex has led numerous tours across the US and beyond -- from the deserts and sky islands of the Southwest to the hallowed shores of Attu, Alaska, and everything in between. He loves teaching people about birds and showing them all that nature has to offer!

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

Financial Information

FEE: \$2325 from Lafayette

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$325

DEPOSIT: \$225 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: May 2, 2026

LIMIT: 14

Alex was so delightful and kind. He was thoughtful and charming to everyone! He is smart AND accomplished; Field Guides is lucky to have him." J.M., Texas's Big Bend & Hill Country

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Maria Zaslavskaya. Maria 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: This tour begins and ends in Lafayette, Louisiana (LFT).

Arrival: Lafayette by the evening of **October 29**, in time for a 6:30 PM meeting at the hotel lobby.

Departure: Lafayette on **November 2** at any time.

Please wait to purchase airline tickets until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate. At that time, we'll be glad to assist with your flight arrangements at no service fee.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The tour fee is \$2325 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 the tour, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The single supplement is \$325 for those requesting a single room. 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.

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.

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 electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please send your deposit of \$225 per person, 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 2, 2026.** 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.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and full 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 full tour fee is non-refundable, which would include the full deposit if the final payment has not yet been paid. 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 purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to protect your investment in case of injury or illness to you or an immediate family member before or during a trip. Because we must remit early and substantial deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer refunds for cancellations outside of our Cancellation Policy. If a participant is unable to join or continue a tour due to illness, all related expenses will be their responsibility, and no refunds can be issued for missed days. Please wait to purchase insurance until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate, as most policies are non-refundable.

For full details, visit our Trip Cancellation Insurance page at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/>.

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.

03/25 DFL; 2/25peg; 2/26mz, peg