



Field Guides Tour Report

Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails 2012

Nov 1, 2012 to Nov 5, 2012
Dan Lane & Eric Hynes

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, [please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.](#)

Another Yellow Rail tour has finished, and it was a good one! Seeing everyone with smiles after seeing multiple Yellow Rails well always makes me happy, and this year produced just such a result. In addition, we also enjoyed the birdlife of southwestern Louisiana from the Cajun rice country to the Cameron coast and marshes and the Longleaf Pine savanna forest farther to the north. We managed over 150 species, which is no mean feat in the US in November!



Hot on the trail of Yellow Rails in the rice fields. (Photo by guide Dan Lane)

There were many memorable moments; topping the list, of course, was our Yellow Rail experience! Hot on

its heels were the excellent views of Bachman's Sparrow that we enjoyed, as well as the colorful LeConte's Sparrows our last evening, followed by an amazing Chestnut-collared Longspur as the last bird of the day and the tour! A snip (?) of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers beside I-10 was quite a sight, especially since a Western Kingbird tried to hide among them. Then there was the Nelson's Sparrow in that little marsh patch at East Jetty, the views of Swamp Sparrow that were firsts for some among us, the graceful Sandhill Cranes, the boldly-patterned Red-headed Woodpecker, the squeaky-toy Brown-headed Nuthatches, the incredible blackbird flocks that rolled over the rice fields and enfolded that power station, and the opportunity to converse with our rice combine operator. These and much more made our tour fun. Eric and I will add one more thing that made the tour fun: the participants! Hope we get to see you again sometime in the near future! Meanwhile, y'all be good, sha! Aahhhiiiiieeee!

--Dan

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) – Several in the oxidation ponds in Cameron, including a hen with several recently-hatched ducklings! [N]

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*) – Fairly good sized flocks of 'specklebellies' over the rice country.

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens*) – A few flocks already showing up, including Snows and Blues. These are the Lesser Snow Geese, which winter in the interior and western portion of the continent.

ROSS'S GOOSE (*Chen rossii*) – Noticeably smaller and scattered among the flocks of the previous.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – Seen by Claude.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Wild birds (unlike the town park feral birds) in flooded rice fields on Lionel Deruin Rd.
MOTTLED DUCK (GULF COAST) (*Anas fulvigula maculosa*) – Very like Black Ducks, the western form is darker than the form found in Florida.
BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*)
NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – Few of the males we saw were out of 'eclipse plumage'.
NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)
GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*)
RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – A pair were among the scaup on the oxidation pond in Cameron.
LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*) – A huge flock off the beach at Holly Beach, then a few on the oxidation pond in Cameron.
RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – A single female at the Cameron oxidation pond.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – Thanks to Susan for spotting the flock that melted into the pine woods understory shortly thereafter.

Gaviidae (Loons)

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – A flyby during lunch at East Jetty was a nice surprise! This is a very uncommon wintering species in much of Louisiana.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – Another rather rare species in Louisiana, we had one individual among the diving ducks at the oxidation pond at Cameron.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – The more common of the two cormorants on the SW coast of Louisiana. Several in Cameron already were showing breeding plumes.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Seen at the very beach in Cameron.

Anhingidae (Anhingas)

ANHINGA (*Anhinga anhinga*) – A few folks caught a glimpse of the 'snakebird' the day we drove to Cameron.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – A huge mixed roost of pelicans was a treat at East Jetty.

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*)

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*) – One at Sabine Nature Trail.

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – Ahem: 'Louisiana Heron' please! We had one bird at Sabine.

REDDISH EGRET (*Egretta rufescens*) – A last-minute sighting, a white morph adult showed up at East Jetty to give us a near-complete sweep of herons.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) – Always entertaining to watch as they perform dare-devil stunts around the rice combines.

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*) – Eric's van got a view of this rare wintering bird as we drove back from the coast.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*) – Many of the birds in the rice fields were unsupervised youngsters.

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) – Despite the hundreds of 'plegadis ibis' we saw, only a few close flyovers allowed us to see that they had red eyes, and were thus White-faces. As I had been telling folks, the ratio in SW Louisiana is roughly 70/30 White-faced/Glossy.

ROSEATE SPOONBILL (*Platalea ajaja*) – Several seen rather well our day on the coast.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – One bird seen in Cameron; a rare wintering species.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*) – Thanks to sharp eyes, a pair was spotted in the fields along Holly Beach, where they were dive-bombing a harrier (perhaps better known as a harrie?).

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Three seen altogether: an adult and second-year the first day, and a young bird the second day.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – Thick!

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (*Buteo lineatus*) – One adult bird at the Say's Phoebe site showed well.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – An abundant wintering species in the SW of the state, and many forms can be found here. We saw mostly eastern and 'Fuertes', but Steve and Donna spotted a dark bird while we were at the pipit airstrip, which perhaps some folks managed to see.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara cheriway*) – One flew by us at the rice field, and another was flushing birds at East Jetty. A species that has recently staged a marked increase in the state.

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – One each of the first two days.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

YELLOW RAIL (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) – All right! After a bit of a slow start, we managed to get everyone on a bird or two by the end of day one. Several that flushed into the cut rice allowed close approach, but still we couldn't see them until they flew again!

CLAPPER RAIL (*Rallus longirostris*) – A very bold bird made no attempt to hide on the flats at East Jetty.

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) – Another rail we saw being flushed up by combines.

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) – The third combine flusher.

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – Until recently considered conspecific with Common Moorhen of the Old World, voice and DNA are the data used to separate this one. The AOU has reverted to the older name 'gallinule' in part because it is a familiar one to many birders, and in part because it seems silly that members of genus *Gallinula* aren't called 'gallinules'!

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – It seems that the big flocks haven't quite arrived yet.

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*) – At least fifty or so were already on Lionel Deruin Rd. This group increased from a small flock to several thousand birds in the past fifteen years!

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis dominica*) – One bird mixed in with Black-bellied Plovers was in the field next to our final rail field.

SEMPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – After seeing one in the rice fields, we had several at East Jetty.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – 'Marsh poodles', these excitable birds 'bark' at any intruder.

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*) – Fair-sized flocks at East Jetty were nice to see.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

WILLET (WESTERN) (*Tringa semipalmata inornata*) – With the recent interest in separating eastern and western populations, we saw 'western' types at Cameron. Popular wisdom is that eastern birds depart for eastern South America and the Caribbean by August/September.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – It must be daunting to have to wander around a forest of legs of larger birds the way these little sandpipers do at East Jetty!

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – A few of these larger peeps were mixed in with Least Sandpipers in the shorebird field in the rice fields.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – A good comparison of winter Dunlin and Stilt Sandpipers was had.

STILT SANDPIPER (*Calidris himantopus*)

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – Identified by their calls, this is the more common wintering species in Louisiana.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) – Several flocks flying overhead, but Eric spotted three on open mud in the rice fields.

WILSON'S PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus tricolor*) – One lingering migrant at the oxidation pond was late.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*)

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – Two first year birds were at East Jetty (thankfully, one flew right past us, as they were hard to point out on the ground). Later that day, a small flock passed over us as we drove back to the highway.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*)

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*) – One adult bird was at East Jetty. Fairly good numbers pass through Louisiana in autumn, presumably to winter in the Caribbean and Mexico. Where are they coming from?

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – A pair in the rice fields allowed good views.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – Nice comparisons were possible on the Cameron coast.

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*)

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*)

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*) – A fair-sized flock was roosting at East Jetty.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – We saw remarkably few of these feral birds [1]

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Another recent introduction in the American avifauna that has spread widely in the South and West. [1]

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) – Seen daily, including a flock of 30 or so over Welsh.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

INCA DOVE (*Columbina inca*) – Expanding slowly east along the Gulf Coast, we saw a pair at the Say's Phoebe site.

Strigidae (Owls)

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*) – A few folks saw one in flight our last evening as we drove back.

BARRED OWL (*Strix varia*) – Fine looks at one in the bottomland spot in the pine woods.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – Not a regular breeder in southern Louisiana, but an abundant wintering bird!

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) – Kudos to Richard for spotting this often difficult bird!

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*)

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – One at Welsh was the last bird of day two.

RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER (*Picoides borealis*) – Thank god these call! We enjoyed views in the pine woods.

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – Seen in flight twice in the pine woods.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*)

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*) – A couple of these rare western flycatchers were wintering near our rice fields.

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – Two female-plumaged birds were at the site with the last species. An increasing wintering visitor to Louisiana.

WESTERN KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – One bird mixed in with the flock of Scissor-tails.

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*Tyrannus forficatus*) – Wow, what a sight! A flock of at least 15 birds on the wires along I-10! Talk about lovely!

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – Still doing fairly well in Louisiana, shrikes have undergone a bit of a decline even here.

Vireonidae (Vireos)

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*) – One our first morning was probably already on a winter territory.

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*) – A brief look at one bird in the pine woods.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*)

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Heard and seen in the pine woods.

FISH CROW (*Corvus ossifragus*) – A group at our hotel the final morning made the hour lost to the time change worth it.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – Several moving west along Holly Beach were nice.

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – Still migrating in good numbers, we had some groups over the rice fields and Cameron.

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Poecile carolinensis*)

TUFTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – This and previous species responded to scold tape in the pine woods.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

BROWN-HEADED NUTHATCH (*Sitta pusilla*) – A cute squeaky-voiced bird of Southeastern pine woods.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – This and the next wren were mostly heard, but a few were seen the first morning.

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

SEDGE WREN (*Cistothorus platensis*) – Good views our first evening was a nice way to end that day.

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) – One bird responded well at Sabine Nature Trail.

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*) – A common wintering bird, we saw several the first morning.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – One the first morning among Ruby-crowns.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – Heard and seen (distantly) in the pine woods.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) – One bird needed no coaxing in the pine woods.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – A rare wintering species along the Gulf Coast, one showed well the first morning.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – Seen strictly as flyovers, but the distinctive call gave them away.

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

CHESTNUT-COLLARED LONGSPUR (*Calcarius ornatus*) – Heck yes! What a great final bird of the tour! And what a show it put on for us... allowing us nearly an hour of observation. If accepted, this will be the seventh state record!

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – A late migrant or possibly a wintering bird, near the Say's Phoebe spot.

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – Common in winter in Louisiana.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

PALM WARBLER (*Setophaga palmarum*) – A pair of 'western' (drab-bellied) birds along Holly Beach was nice.

PINE WARBLER (*Setophaga pinus*) – Common in the pine woods.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE) (*Setophaga coronata coronata*)

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*) – An uncommon wintering bird in Louisiana, at least two were at the Say's Phoebe spot.

Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows and Allies)

BACHMAN'S SPARROW (*Peucaea aestivalis*) – Great views! Thanks to everyone for their persistence, particularly to Juliette for sticking with that one bird and getting us all on it again!

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) – Seen flying over the pine woods.

VESPER SPARROW (*Poocetes gramineus*) – One bird at Sabine Nature Trail looked like it'd had a rough day already.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Abundant in the state in winter, we certainly saw many!

LE CONTE'S SPARROW (*Ammodramus leconteii*) – A fairly common, if difficult to see, wintering species in the state. Happily, they seem to respond to playback well!

NELSON'S SPARROW (*Ammodramus nelsoni*) – One bird at East Jetty showed well!

SEASIDE SPARROW (*Ammodramus maritimus*) – Good views at Sabine Nature Trail.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*)

SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*) – A new bird for some, and a common wintering species in Louisiana.

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia albicollis*)

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – One young bird was in the rice fields the end of the first day, but only seen by a few.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

BOBOLINK (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – A very late migrant was flushed out of the last rice field as the combine did its rounds! Nice!

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*)

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – A good-sized flock our first morning.

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus major*) – Often in mixed flocks with the next species, we saw this salt marsh specialist well the second day.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Apparently, a gas station specialist.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) [*]

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*)

MAMMALS

SWAMP RABBIT (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*) – The common rabbit along the coast.

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*) – One or two live individuals in addition to the ones we saw asleep on the roads.

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*) – One was in the Calcasieu River as we crossed on the ferry.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 156 bird taxa and 3 mammal taxa