



Field Guides Tour Report

Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails II 2013

Oct 31, 2013 to Nov 4, 2013
Dan Lane & Jesse Fagan

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



Guide Jesse Fagan and several participants riding the combine. The mechanical harvest of rice is the key to our success in spotting the elusive Yellow Rail. (Photo by participant Ann Haverstock)

Just a great few days in coastal Louisiana, and what a fun group. The birds and weather cooperated: we had a powerful cold front pass the afternoon before the tour started, which meant cooler temperatures but blue skies for the entire tour. Unfortunately, the heavy rains associated with the front also meant most of the rice fields were saturated with water, not usually good for Yellow Rails. Luck was in our favor, however, as not only did we stomp out a Yellow Rail or two, but we saw literally hundreds of Soras, Virginia Rails, and a couple of King Rails. We will not forget our time on the combine and all that darn good cajun food (granted, I was happy to get some Italian and Thai in me towards the end).

The bird of the trip was indeed the Yellow Rail, nearly a unanimous group vote, but other favorites included the large flock of southbound Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, our cooperative Barred Owl in the Kisatchie, as well as nice looks at Red-cockaded Woodpecker, a federally endangered bird that we located in an oak tree! A couple of people liked the vagrant Brown Boobies, a new bird for Dan in Louisiana.

Dan and I want to thank Steve and Donna for their work with the Yellow Rail festival and helping out with our combine rides -- they did a great job. And Dan and I really enjoyed having you along and hope to see you again real soon.

Good birding to all,

Jesse aka Motmot (from Lima, Peru)

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*) – Two in flight were seen by Jesse's van on the first day.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*) – Not around a week before, the geese had arrived in good numbers for this trip. There

were hundreds in the air and in the fields. Good studies of many many individuals.

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens*) – Ditto above. It seemed there were more Greater White-fronteds than Snows, but we saw a number of this species including a smattering of "blues."

ROSS'S GOOSE (*Chen rossii*) – Nice scope views of several birds in a field with Snows and Greaters. Their smaller size, diminutive bills, and plainer face were all good marks.

WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*) – A pair seen by Dan's van.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – Numerous at a couple of different wetland sites. Good numbers at Cameron Prairie NWR.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – A few wigeon were seen at Cameron Prairie, but not many.

MOTTLED DUCK (GULF COAST) (*Anas fulvigula maculosa*) – We saw this species mainly in flight where their silver wing lining and dark bodies are diagnostic.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*) – I counted roughly 15 mixed in with the waterfowl at Cameron Prairie.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – Seen on two different days. Fairly good numbers.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – A couple of large flocks in flight. We counted hundreds on the water at Cameron Prairie NWR. Probably the dominant wintering duck during this tour.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Small numbers were mixed in with the waterfowl at Cameron Prairie NWR.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – Nice studies of several close submerging birds in the dikes at Cameron Prairie.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

BROWN BOOBY (*Sula leucogaster*) – Bird of the trip for Dan and a couple of other folks. Indeed, a rare bird for Louisiana. We got lucky that three adults showed up on our tour route. It seems all over the US this year that boobies are showing up in odd places. Is this bad news for them? Possibly a change in their ocean food abundance? The birds we saw were on the northwest corner of Lake Calcasieu. You can ask Dan how to pronounce that...

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – Of the cormorants, we had good comparisons of both species. Along the coast, Neotropic was fairly common and in some places the dominant cormorant. Away from the coast, we had a few Double-crested which were only just arriving for the winter.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

Anhingidae (Anhingas)

ANHINGA (*Anhinga anhinga*) – A couple seen and one soaring. The Flying Cross.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – A large beached flock was seen at East Jetty during our picnic lunch.

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – Again, fairly common on the coast. Seen well at East Jetty. The subspecies at this site is *P. o. carolinensis*.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

AMERICAN BITTERN (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) – We flushed one during our rail stomping and rice harvesting! A great bird and distinctive in flight.

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Seen every day of the tour. However, I don't think we will forget the heron trying to eat an entire Swamp Rabbit! Another gobbled up a snake in the wake of the combine.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – Both Great and Snowy egrets were seen every day of the tour in good numbers.

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*)

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*) – Just a few on the first day.

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – Fairly common in coastal Louisiana. Dan mentioned we could call it a day, we had seen the Louisiana Heron.

REDDISH EGRET (*Egretta rufescens*) – A dark-morph was seen at East Jetty.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) – We watched them nearly get eaten up by the combine. I was pleased to see the driver actually brake a few times for them.

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*) – One flushed from the reeds along the dike at Cameron Prairie. Not seen by all.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – A couple were seen during the tour.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*) – Common on this tour. Seen all three days in good numbers. Hundreds around including immatures.

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – We did well picking out one in a flock of White-faced. You really need to see these wintering *Plegadis* ibis in the scope to be able to identify them.

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) – Hundreds. Dan mentioned they make up around 70% of the *Plegadis* ibis; however, away from the coast they are almost certainly all this species.

ROSEATE SPOONBILL (*Platalea ajaja*) – We saw good numbers of this striking pink *Threskiornid*.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*) – Some people thought they saw this species roosting in trees on our drive up to the pinewoods.

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Good numbers on our last day up to the pinewoods.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Several on our first day along the coast.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – One of the more common raptors seen on this tour. Not surprising, given the amount of marsh habitat and agricultural fields.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – Singles on two different days.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – More common than the previous species. We had several flyovers and a perched immature female at Rutherford Oaks.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – A couple of adults were seen in flight.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (*Buteo lineatus*) – One immature was perched on a powerline along West Niblett Road. I just had to mention the name of the road.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – The most common raptor on this tour. We identified the eastern subspecies (*borealis*) and a Fuertes (*fuertes*). Fuertes is largely resident in the southwest US to East Texas, it lacks a strong belly band and has a slightly darker throat than an eastern Red-tailed.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

YELLOW RAIL (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) – BIRD OF THE TRIP!!! We had to work at it, but the heavy rains and flooded fields were not good for us. However, we eventually got very nice looks at one or two birds either from the combine or from the ground.

CLAPPER RAIL (*Rallus longirostris*) – One cooperative bird was seen well along Rutherford Beach Road. This individual seemed quite "warm" in color to my eyes.

KING RAIL (*Rallus elegans*) – We heard them just at our feet during our walk along the boardwalk at Cameron Prairie. However, we all saw them flush from the combine on several occasions (probably 3 or 4 total birds).

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) – I would guesstimate nearly one hundred individuals were seen during our time in the rice fields. Incredible.

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) – By far the dominate rail in the rice fields. They really like that wetter tall grass. I would again guesstimate easily several hundred. Around 300?

PURPLE GALLINULE (*Porphyrio martinicus*) – Seen by a few people during our boardwalk trek at Cameron Prairie.

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – Not many, but a few at Cameron Prairie.

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – Good numbers at Cameron Prairie NWR.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Three were seen at East Jetty.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – The most common Charadrius plover at East Jetty.

PIPING PLOVER (*Charadrius melodus*) – We saw at least four different individuals at East Jetty. A bird that is experiencing serious population issues. Hard to believe that the entire population is estimated to be around 6500 individuals!

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Seen every day.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – Seen in good numbers on the first day.

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*) – This lovely bird was seen well at East Jetty where there was a small flock in basic (winter) plumage.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Often a heard bird in flight, but we saw several on the ground as well.

WILLET (*Tringa semipalmata*) – Seen well at East Jetty. These were all "Western" Willets (*inornata*). Eastern Willets (*semipalmata*) are not found in the US during the winter. However, Western Willet is paler overall, larger and longer legged, with a longer bill. In fact, side-by-side the differences are quite striking being on par with that of Greater vs. Lesser Yellowlegs.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – Just a couple during the tour.

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*) – There were at least three birds at East Jetty.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – One at East Jetty.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – One at East Jetty.

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – This was the dominant small shorebird at East Jetty. One seemed awfully small-billed and slightly smaller in size, which hinted towards a late Semipalmated Sandpiper, but our distance from the bird made it difficult to confirm.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – Several mixed in with the Westerns at East Jetty. Also seen in some of the wet agricultural fields.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – A few were around in the wet fields and again on the coast at East Jetty.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – These were the dowitchers seen at East Jetty. They are very difficult to separate from Long-billed in non-breeding plumage, but the habitat (saline) and their call in flight (tu-tu-tu-tu) clinched it for us.

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – Fairly common on the wet agricultural fields away from the immediate coast. See comment on Short-billed Dowitcher.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) – Fairly common in the wet agricultural fields. Also seen a few times in flight.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Common on the coast and inland where they forage in the cut rice fields.

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – We saw this species well at East Jetty where several migrants were still around.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – Just one first-cycle bird at East Jetty.

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – A couple were at East Jetty.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*) – Dan spotted one distant bird at East Jetty. This species is fairly regular now on the Gulf coast in winter.

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – A couple of birds in flight were foraging over the marsh at Cameron Prairie.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – A large flock of at least 25 birds took off from the ground at Cameron Prairie. Almost certainly these were northern migrants.

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*) – Several birds were at East Jetty with their winter bandit masks.

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*) – Not many, but a few at East Jetty.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Common in cities and towns. Seen all three days.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Also a very common bird on this tour. Seen on all three days.

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) – Seen two out of three days. This bird has really expanded into the region in the last 15 years or so.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*) – Seen all three days of the tour.

INCA DOVE (*Columbina inca*) – Not terribly common at its eastern most distribution; however, seen two out of three days.

Strigidae (Owls)

EASTERN SCREECH-OWL (*Megascops asio*) [*]

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*) – Heard very well at Rutherford Oaks and seen by Jesse's van as it flew across I-10 at dusk. This bird landed on the support cable of a large communication tower!

BARRED OWL (*Strix varia*) – Seen very well in the bottomland forest at Kisatchie NF.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – Seen well a few times. One individual was hunting above a drainage ditch recently filled by heavy rains. It doesn't take much.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – This common woodpecker was seen on all days.

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – Just singles on two different days and they are only just starting to arrive in Louisiana in early November.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – Most days.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – Less common than the Downy, but we saw this species quite well a few different times. Often heard. Dan pointed out the black line dividing the red hindcrown spot on males.

RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER (*Picoides borealis*) – This federally endangered species which lives in mature longleaf pine forests was seen well (on an oak tree!) in the Kisatchie National Forest.

NORTHERN FLICKER (YELLOW-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus auratus*) – One female was perched in the open along the shores of Lake Calcasieu.

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – One was glimpsed in the Kisatchie NF.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara cheriway*) – Rather uncommon on the Louisiana coast. We had two immatures flyover the group on the first day.

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – Common on the tour.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – One was standing on the ground, which we scoped nicely as we stomped out a Sprague's Pipit. This looked like a female.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus virens*) – Very surprising to find two different birds, and definitely different birds! These guys should already be in South America.

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*) – The phoebes had arrived in good numbers. We saw them numerous times each day.

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – A pair (male and female) were seen on West Niblett Road. This is now a regular, uncommon wintering bird on the Louisiana coast.

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*Tyrannus forficatus*) – A flock of 40 southbound migrants were seen in a field on the first day. A flock this size is fairly rare to find. Almost certainly they were moving behind the strong front that had past the day before.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – Seen every day. This species is experiencing serious population declines in other parts of the country, but in Louisiana it seems to be doing well.

Vireonidae (Vireos)

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*) – Not many around this year, but seen or heard on two days. Dan was explaining the mimicry process used to learn its song.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – Loud and obvious, we saw them well at various sites on the tour.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – It isn't easy separating them from Fish Crow unless the two species are side by side and/or calling. However, the larger American Crow was heard and seen regularly on this tour.

FISH CROW (*Corvus ossifragus*) – Several were confirmed outside the hotel. At this time of year the Fish Crows are often in large flocks numbering in the hundreds.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – Several seen on the second day.

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Thousands seen on this tour. A very common wintering species along the Gulf Coast.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – Not nearly as common as the previous species, but still good numbers were seen.

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Poecile carolinensis*) – Fairly common in most woodlots.

TUFTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus bicolor*) [*]

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

BROWN-HEADED NUTHATCH (*Sitta pusilla*) – These cute rubberduckies were seen well in the longleaf pine of Kisatchie National Forest.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*) – Around in good numbers already.

SEDGE WREN (*Cistothorus platensis*) – Seen quite well in the marsh along Rutherford Beach Road. Heard in a few other marsh sites.

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) – Common in the coastal marsh of Louisiana. We saw our first one well at the closed visitor's center in the Cameron Prairie NWR.

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – Can be frustrating to actually see as we found out. We finally did get everyone caught up seeing this species, but it took some work!

Poliptilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliptila caerulea*) – A few were around in the oak shiners.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – Nice looks at several individuals, our first was along West Niblett Rd. Their high-pitched calls can be missed by some.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – They had arrived in good numbers. Seen in practically all mixed-species flocks and usually multiples.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – This pleasant looking species was seen in a few different places on the tour.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) – Probably just arrived to Louisiana for the winter. We had at least five in the bottomland forest of the Kisatchie.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Mostly heard in the thick understory of several wooded areas we visited.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Common on this tour.

BROWN THRASHER (*Toxostoma rufum*) – Just one at Rutherford Oaks was seen well in the scope.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – A common non-native species seen every day of the tour. Most were in their spotted winter plumage following a full molt at the beginning of Fall. The spots wear down over time (the tips of the feathers) and they appear nearly black by Spring.

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) [*]

SPRAGUE'S PIPIT (*Anthus spragueii*) – We stomped one out of a field and only saw it in flight, which wasn't very satisfying.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – This species had arrived in decent numbers. Seen and heard (a rich chip note) at several spots.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Fairly common resident in the coastal marshes. Some wintering birds were around at other sites.

PINE WARBLER (*Setophaga pinus*) – Resident birds were in the Kisatchie. Birds seen away from the pines were wintering birds.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE) (*Setophaga coronata coronata*) – Hadn't arrived in big numbers yet, but we saw several on the tour.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*) – A male was along West Niblett Road.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

BACHMAN'S SPARROW (*Peucaea aestivalis*) – We eventually saw this skulker pretty well in the Kisatchie. One literally disappeared from under our feet. Amazing adaptation.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) – Several in the Kisatchie pinewoods.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – A wintering species that was around in good numbers and seen every day.

SEASIDE SPARROW (*Ammodramus maritimus*) – Two were in the marsh at Rutherford Beach Road. One approached very close giving its soft "seeet" notes.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – Just one on our last day as we stomped a brushy field in the Kisatchie.

SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*) – This nice looking sparrow was seen well most every day. Pretty common in wetter areas and damp fields.

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) – Not many around yet.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – This lovely "red bird" was seen most days.

BLUE GROSBEAK (*Passerina caerulea*) [*]

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Numerous along the Louisiana coast.

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*) – Common in the short grass agricultural fields.

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Mostly large flocks in flight, but we also heard their rusty swing set calls from a few woodlots.

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus major*) – Common along the immediate coast, but also some move inland during the winter. The males rounded head and darker eyes separate it from the similar Great-tailed Grackle.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Found in most inland sites and in cities and towns, this species was common on the tour. The males have bright yellow eyes (we compared this with the darker eye color of the male Boat-tailed). Females are darker overall than female Boat-tailed.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – One large flock we witnessed had several thousand individuals.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Seen in most cities and towns and other disturbed sites. Always around when you are pumping the gas...

MAMMALS

SWAMP RABBIT (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*) – A couple during the tour. One being eaten by a Great Blue Heron was a bit disturbing.

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – Have increased in numbers in the coastal Louisiana area over the past few years.

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*) – Larger than the previous species with orange underparts. Singles were seen on two different days.

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*) – Several were seen from East Jetty.

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – Two seen by Dan's van on first day.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 147 bird taxa and 5 mammal taxa