



Field Guides Tour Report

LOUISIANA: YELLOW RAILS & CRAWFISH TAILS 2014

Oct 23, 2014 to Oct 27, 2014

Dan Lane & Tom Johnson

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



During the rice harvest, we had the opportunity to actually ride the combine to see rails flying up close. This also provided a good break time to help us digest our most recent Cajun meal. Photo by guide Tom Johnson.

It might take a few weeks to recover from the delicious food and fantastic birds that were packed into the three full days of this tour. Light kidding aside, Dan and I had a great time with the group while experiencing some very fun and often underappreciated aspects of American birding.

After arriving to our hotel in Lafayette and heading to a nearby restaurant to enjoy crawfish, boudin, and other fine Cajun fare, we were all ready to get some sleep. The first full day of the tour found us heading west to the rice country near Thornwell. We birded fields, hedges, and bayous during the morning hours, finding migrants like Greater White-fronted Geese, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, warblers, and sparrows. In the afternoon, we hoped to have a first shot at watching rails flushing ahead of a rice harvesting combine in conjunction with the 2014 Yellow Rails and Rice Festival. Unfortunately, a mechanical issue prevented the combine from working properly, but not before Dan spotted a beautiful dark morph Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk and I ended up tripping and falling into the muddy water of an unharvested rice field. Reinvigorated by this amusement, we ended up walking a few fields in search of other rice country birds, eventually turning up a cagey Le Conte's Sparrow. Another Cajun feast capped off the opening day of the tour.

On Saturday morning, we drove down to the Gulf Coast near Cameron. We had spectacular views of Clapper Rail, Seaside Sparrow, and Nelson's Sparrow, and enjoyed watching a wide diversity of other coastal birds from the vantages at the East Jetty on the mouth of the Calcasieu River. A phone call from the rice country alerted us to the much-anticipated repair of the rice combine, so we pulled up stakes and headed north for the crown jewel of this tour. Throughout the afternoon, we watched many dozens of rails flying up in front of the working combine, including many Sora, several Virginia, one King, and about TEN Yellow Rails! We even rode the combine, getting a marvelous perspective of these secretive birds as they popped out of the rice fields. The day ended with a loop around Lacassine Pool, where we found a young Purple Gallinule, legions of Common Gallinules, and a few American Alligators. We ended this day with eight species of rails, a grand total indeed.

Having satisfied our rail cravings in the rice country, Sunday was spent to the north in pursuit of pineywoods specialties. Though we were able to quickly find flocks of Pine Warblers, Brown-headed Nuthatches, and other songbirds, both Bachman's Sparrow and Red-cockaded Woodpecker remained elusive through the morning hours. A lovely Thai lunch (who'd have thought we'd find THIS in western Louisiana?) prepared us for an afternoon of searching through the woods, which finally paid off with scope views of Bachman's Sparrow and a wonderfully accommodating group of five Red-cockaded Woodpeckers.

Dan and I enjoyed sharing the birds of western Louisiana with everyone over the long weekend, and we hope to see all of you down the road.

Thanks,

Tom Johnson

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)

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*) – We saw and heard many small flocks of these in the rice country. They are just now arriving for the winter.

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens*) – One was flying with two Ross's Geese near Thornwell on our second day.

ROSS'S GOOSE (*Chen rossii*) – We saw two of these small white geese with a Snow Goose near Thornwell.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – Nonmigratory introduced population. [I]

WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*)

MOTTLED DUCK (GULF COAST) (*Anas fulvigula maculosa*) – We only saw these large, dark ducks in flight.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*)

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*)

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – A few of these posed nicely for us - we even got to admire their jewel green eyes through the scope.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

Anhingidae (Anhingas)

ANHINGA (*Anhinga anhinga*)

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – We saw several flocks of these around Cameron, including on the beach at East Jetty.

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – These were near the coast in Cameron, often in the company of American White Pelicans for nice comparisons.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*)

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*)

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – One juvenile was along the road at Lacassine Pool.

REDDISH EGRET (*Egretta rufescens*) – We saw one distant white morph bird "dancing" as it chased prey in the surf at East Jetty in Cameron.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*)

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

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – Brief views for some near Cameron.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*)

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) – We were able to see the pink faces and red eyes of this species on few birds in the large flocks of dark *Plegadis ibis*. White-faced Ibis make up the large majority of the *Plegadis* here; we didn't identify any Glossies on this trip, though we almost certainly saw some in the flocks of hundreds of flying ibis.

ROSEATE SPOONBILL (*Platalea ajaja*)

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*) – Several of these soared over during our pineywoods excursion on the last day.

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – Common - along with Red-tailed Hawk, almost ubiquitous in the open country here.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – One flew over in the rice country on our first morning.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – One immature cruised over the highway south of Welsh on our first morning.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (*Buteo lineatus*)

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – We saw many of these. Part of the fun of birding here is the variety of subspecies of Red-tailed Hawk from fall through spring. We mostly saw Eastern birds, but saw one likely light morph adult Western and a gorgeous dark morph adult "Harlan's" Hawk soaring near Thornwell.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

YELLOW RAIL (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) – Almost everyone chose this as a favorite bird of the tour, and for good reason. This is one of the most difficult-to-see birds in North America, but the rice harvest along the Gulf Coast affords us a prime opportunity. We had great views of about ten birds flushing and flying out of rice fields ahead of a working combine. Additionally, banding efforts during the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival resulted in us seeing one up close in the hand.

CLAPPER RAIL (*Rallus longirostris*) – Several obliging individuals of the bright Gulf Coast population paraded around for us at East Jetty in Cameron.

KING RAIL (*Rallus elegans*) – One flushed out of rice ahead of the combine near Thornwell and flew toward the group, allowing for wonderful views of this large, colorful rail. After landing in the cut rice near Tom, it completely vanished.

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) – After missing this bird during the harvest of a dry rice field that contained several Yellow Rails, we got to see several flush out of a wet rice field.

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) – This was the dominant rail in the rice at Thornwell. We saw over 50 of these in flight, and also got to see a few in the hand during banding operations.

PURPLE GALLINULE (*Porphyrio martinicus*) – One greenish immature bird stood around in the open for us at Lacassine Pool before cackling and flying off into the marsh.

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – We saw many of these handsome rallids along the road through Lacassine Pool.

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*) – Several tight flocks flew around and foraged in the surf at East Jetty in Cameron.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

SEMPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*) – One flew over in Thornwell in the afternoon of the first day.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

WILLET (*Tringa semipalmata*) – We saw these at East Jetty in Cameron. These were "Western" Willets, the lanky, pale gray counterpart to the "Eastern" Willets that leave the United States for the late fall and winter months.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*) – An especially long-billed individual paraded around on the beach for excellent scope views at Cameron East Jetty.

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*) – One was elusive and ducked behind vegetation along the beach at East Jetty in Cameron.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*)

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – This is the standard "gray peep with black legs" at this season in Louisiana. Almost all Semipalmated Sandpipers have left by this point in the year.

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – We saw and heard a few of these rotund shorebirds, including at a flooded field near Oakdale on Sunday. While this species is by far more common than Short-billed Dowitcher in freshwater habitats in Louisiana, it was nice to confirm the identifications by hearing these birds' sharp "keek" calls.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) – We had some scope views of these in a flooded field, and also got to see some flushing out of the rice fields with the rails.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Many at Cameron East Jetty.

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – One immature was loafing on the beach at Cameron East Jetty with Laughing Gulls.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

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

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*)

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*)

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – These introduced colonizers have rapidly taken over in towns and agricultural areas in the region.

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) – We only had a few of these on the first day of the tour, including one that flew by during our pit stop in Welsh.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

INCA DOVE (*Columbina inca*) – These small, handsome doves flushed up from roadsides on several occasions in the rice country.

Strigidae (Owls)

EASTERN SCREECH-OWL (*Megascops asio*) – Three individuals responded to whistled imitations during daytime birding in the rice country near Thornwell.

Apodidae (Swifts)

CHIMNEY SWIFT (*Chaetura pelagica*) – One flew over for brief views at Oak Grove Sanctuary on the second day.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*)

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – These migrant woodpeckers arrived to scold Tom when he tried to hoot up a Barred Owl in Kisatchie NF. The species winters in large numbers in wooded habitats here.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*)

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*)

RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER (*Picoides borealis*) – After a lot of careful listening and searching, we eventually located a group of 5 individuals in the pineywoods of Kisatchie National Forest in the afternoon of the third day. We had some superb scope views of this endangered woodpecker.

NORTHERN FLICKER (YELLOW-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus auratus*)

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*)

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara cheriway*) – This bulky falcon graced us with a few flybys in the rice country during the first two days of the tour.

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*)

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – One was perched near the ground at Cameron East Jetty.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*)

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*Tyrannus forficatus*) – We encountered these strikingly beautiful flycatchers as roadside migrants on all three days of birding.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – Common on roadside wires and fences.

Vireonidae (Vireos)

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*)

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*)

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – These were the common crows in the pineywoods of Kisatchie National Forest.

FISH CROW (*Corvus ossifragus*) – This was the crow species that greeted us outside the hotel in Scott in the mornings. "Uh-uh!"

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – A handful sat on wires along W. Niblett Rd. in Thornwell, allowing great scope views.

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – This was the most common swallow during the tour - we saw hundreds in most open habitats.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Poecile carolinensis*)

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

BROWN-HEADED NUTHATCH (*Sitta pusilla*) – These squeaky toys made their presence known at many stops in the pineywoods on the last day.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

WINTER WREN (*Troglodytes hiemalis*) – One was "chimp-chimp"ing from the understory at the Oak Grove Sanctuary near Cameron, and eventually popped up for some views.

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) – We saw these flushing from rice fields along with rails, but had our nicest views at Lacassine Pool.

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*) – Gnatcatchers (along with Ruby-crowned Kinglets) responded instantly to scolding calls at nearly every stop we made.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – We had nice views while hooting for Barred Owls in a bottomland forest in Kisatchie NF.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – This was one of the most ubiquitous songbirds of the trip, often forming the core of mixed flocks.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) – A few called and came in to scolding in the pineywoods. This is the standard wintering spot-chested thrush here.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*)

BROWN THRASHER (*Toxostoma rufum*)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

PALM WARBLER (*Setophaga palmarum*) – We briefly saw one dull "Western" bird on a wire on West Niblett Rd. near Thornwell.

PINE WARBLER (*Setophaga pinus*) – Ubiquitous in the pineywoods.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE) (*Setophaga coronata coronata*) – We only saw one, a calling flyover in the pineywoods.

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER (*Setophaga virens*) – One perched up briefly near Thornwell on the first day.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*) – We saw two of these - one was along the edge of an agricultural field near Thornwell.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

BACHMAN'S SPARROW (*Peucaea aestivalis*) – This was a highlight for many on the trip - we enjoyed scope views of Bachman's Sparrow for several minutes in Kisatchie NF on day 3. This was the rusty western form of the species.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Hundreds! This was the most common bird to flush along roadsides and out of the rice fields.

LE CONTE'S SPARROW (*Ammodramus leconteii*) – We found one by walking through the edge of a flooded rice field near Thornwell. While some did manage to get good perched views, we mostly saw a small, spike-tailed, straw-colored sparrow in flight.

NELSON'S SPARROW (*Ammodramus nelsoni*) – These brightly colored interior birds popped up alongside Seaside Sparrows in a marsh patch at the Cameron East Jetty.

SEASIDE SPARROW (*Ammodramus maritimus*) – Like Nelson's, we were fortunate to enjoy close studies of these brightly marked Gulf Coast birds. They are considerably more colorful on the chest and face than the Seaside Sparrows along the Atlantic Coast.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*)

SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*) – Quite a few of these gave their sharp metallic chip call and popped out along the edges of hedges and rice fields.

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) – We had brief views of this arriving winterer on a few occasions.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – A few "Eastern" birds sat up for us along W. Niblett Rd. near Thornwell.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*) – These were surprisingly common for late October, with over 10 along the edges of rice fields near Thornwell on the first two days.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*)

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – We saw some large flocks in wooded areas including in Welsh and along W. Niblett Rd. near Thornwell.

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus major*) – Large grackle ID requires special attention in SW Louisiana; we saw dark-eyed Boat-tailed Grackles both along the coast and in the rice country, often alongside Great-tailed Grackles.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Great-tailed Grackles dominated some of the grackle flocks in the rice country, and were the common parking lot grackle away from the coast. We had nice comparisons between these flat-headed, yellow-eyed beasts and Boat-tailed Grackles during the first two days of the tour.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – Several large flocks of hundreds impressed us along the roads in the rice country near Thornwell.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*)

MAMMALS

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

SWAMP RABBIT (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*) – A few of these bounded out of the rice as we watched for rails.

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*)

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*)

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*) – Roughly five were swimming in the mouth of the Calcasieu River in Cameron.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Other animals included some great views of some very impressive American Alligators, including a photogenic individual at Lacassine Pool.

Totals for the tour: 135 bird taxa and 5 mammal taxa