



Field Guides Tour Report

Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails II 2014

Oct 30, 2014 to Nov 3, 2014

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



Those smiles reflect our success in finding Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and Bachman's Sparrows in the piney woods! Okay -- there could be a few residual Yellow Rail smiles in there, too.

We had a great run of birding packed into a short three days in Louisiana. The tour was focused primarily on searching for regional specialties in the form of birds and also Cajun food -- we had plenty of both.

We spent the first day in the rice country near Thornwell, first birding woods and hedges while waiting for the farmers to harvest rice in nearby fields. This tour fortuitously piggybacks on the splendid Yellow Rails and Rice Festival organized by Steve Cardiff and Donna Dittmann, and we were in frequent contact with them about the status of the rice fields and noteworthy birds in the local area. The group had an excellent time in the rice fields, with many dozens of rails flushed by the rice harvesting combine, including good flight views of our target Yellow Rails and a few King Rails among oodles of Sora and Virginia Rails -- what fun! We alternated between watching from alongside the rice and riding the combine to get a fascinating perspective on the harvest and the birds. A Cajun meal at Prejean's near Lafayette was highlighted by crawfish enchiladas, étouffée, and other delightful (and filling) Louisiana fare.

Day two meant a trip to the Gulf Coast of southwestern Louisiana. We headed straight for Cameron East Jetty at the mouth of the Calcasieu River, and found coastal birds like Clapper Rails, Nelson's and Seaside sparrows, and many gulls and terns on the beach. It was quite cold and windy this morning after the passage of a cold front, so we didn't stay out on the beach for too long before retreating to more protected oak forest on the beach ridges east of Cameron. We took a duck-filled lap through Cameron Prairie NWR (remember the American Bitterns and all those Fulvous Whistling-Ducks?) before returning to the rice country for another rail-watching experience near Thornwell (including more Yellow Rails!).

The third and final day sent us northwest to the pineywoods of Kisatchie National Forest. Here we found our target Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Bachman's Sparrows, and Brown-headed Nuthatches, though we couldn't dig up a scouted Henslow's Sparrow. Thai food for lunch in a small town in western Louisiana might sound risky, but we were served some truly memorable food (and at a different great restaurant than the one we visited on the first tour).

Good times definitely rolled! Dan and I hope that you had an enjoyable experience getting to know Louisiana on this short tour, and we hope to bird (and eat) with you again in the future.

--Tom

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*) – We had some roadside views of these peculiar tree ducks between the rice country and the coast on the second day of the tour.

FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) – We saw a large flock of 60 birds (unusual flock size for this late in fall) at the Pintail Loop of Cameron Prairie NWR.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*) – Large flocks of these Arctic migrants were arriving from the north; we heard their nasal "klee-a-lee" calls in many places, especially in the rice country near Thornwell.

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens*) – We saw a flock of these white geese mixed with Greater White-fronted Geese in the rice fields while we were leaving Thornwell after our first afternoon of rail watching.

ROSS'S GOOSE (*Chen rossii*) – At least one of these tiny white geese was with the Snow Goose flock near Thornwell on the first day.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – We saw these dabblers in flooded fields in the rice country and also at Cameron Prairie NWR.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – These were along the Pintail Loop at Cameron Prairie NWR.

MOTTLED DUCK (GULF COAST) (*Anas fulvigula maculosa*) – Most of our views of these large, dark dabblers were of birds in flight; we did see a few birds in flooded fields near Thornwell and had good looks a quite a few pairs along the Pintail Loop in Cameron Prairie NWR.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*) – One of the most common migrant ducks here - we saw a large flock of about 500 in flooded fields northeast of Thornwell.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – Quite common - we saw these at many stops in the rice country and along the coast.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Our tour coincided with the arrival of some of the season's first southbound pintail - some circled and landed in the flooded fields near Thornwell where we saw huge flocks of other ducks, geese, and shorebirds.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Though these were greatly outnumbered by Blue-winged Teal, we did see quite a few of these tiny, fast ducks, especially well in flooded fields near Thornwell.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – We saw a few of these "hammerheads" diving at Cameron Prairie NWR.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – Just a few - these were in the deeper flooded fields near Thornwell on the first day.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – These tiny grebes met us at many protected freshwater stops on the first two days of the tour.

Ciconiidae (Storks)

WOOD STORK (*Mycteria americana*) – We had a great, close flyby of this huge black-and-white while scanning ducks and shorebirds near Thornwell on Day 1.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – This was the small, slender, long-tailed cormorant that we studied in a few canals and ditches near Cameron Prairie. Especially away from the immediate Gulf Coast, they outnumber Double-crested Cormorants by a fair margin at the sites visited on our itinerary.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – This is Louisiana's large cormorant - we saw most of ours near the coast in Cameron, and were able to compare them with the smaller, lankier Neotropic Cormorants.

Anhingidae (Anhingas)

ANHINGA (*Anhinga anhinga*) – We saw a few of these snakebirds in trees south of Cameron Prairie NWR.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – These massive birds winged over both in the rice country and also at the coast at Cameron East Jetty.

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – Coastal only - we saw ours at Cameron East Jetty.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

AMERICAN BITTERN (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) – Good views of two (one for each van!) standing in the open at the same time along the Pintail Loop at Cameron Prairie NWR.

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Common and widespread; seen on all three days.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – Common and widespread; seen on all three days.

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – We found these in the rice country and near the coast.

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*) – Great views of 9, including both white youngsters and dark adults, at Cameron Prairie NWR.

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – We managed great, close views of an adult feeding in a roadside pool with a Clapper Rail at Cameron East Jetty.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) – Common and widespread. A small flock was tailing the rice combine near Thornwell, picking off insects and other small critters flushed by the machine.

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

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – Greatly outnumbered here by White-faced Ibis - we eventually had good views of one with a flock of White-

faced at the Pintail Loop of Cameron Prairie NWR.

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) – Hundreds - this is the common *Plegadis* ibis in southwestern Louisiana.

ROSEATE SPOONBILL (*Platalea ajaja*) – These awesome pink birds were mostly near the coast; for instance, we had 35 at the Pintail Loop at Cameron Prairie NWR.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*) – Two soaring over at Kisatchie NF were our only ones of the tour.

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Widespread - we saw them every day.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – One migrant flew over at Cameron Prairie when we stopped to look at a Merlin.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – These are not terribly common here, but we did see a few soaring over the rice country on the first two days.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (*Buteo lineatus*)

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*) – A light morph immature soared over during an afternoon in the rice country at Thornwell. This species is an uncommon migrant and winter resident in southern Louisiana.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Abundant; we had fun picking through these in search of geographic variation (see immediately below).

RED-TAILED HAWK (HARLAN'S) (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) – A beautiful dark morph with a gray-streaked tail soared past a few times in the Thornwell rice fields. This is the boreal forest breeder from western Canada and Alaska.

RED-TAILED HAWK (KRIDER'S) (*Buteo jamaicensis kriderii*) – One of these light Northern Plains-breeding beauties flew past us at the Pintail Loop at Cameron Prairie NWR.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

YELLOW RAIL (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) – It's in the name of the tour, and we all saw this bird well. We spent two afternoon sessions watching the rice harvest near Thornwell, and got to stand along the edge of the rice fields as well as ride on the huge combines. These "Clandestine Coturnicops" flashed white secondaries when they flew out ahead of the combine, helping us to identify them.

KING RAIL (*Rallus elegans*) – A few of these large, rusty rails flushed out of the rice fields near Thornwell. One flew past us at very close range - it was captured later by researchers who set mist nets at the edge of the rice fields. We also heard the slow, bass-y calls of one along a trail at Cameron Prairie NWR.

CLAPPER RAIL (*Rallus crepitans*) – The bright Gulf Coast subspecies graced us with some excellent views in coastal pools near the Cameron East Jetty.

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) – During the rice harvest, we saw about 20 (including 18 the first day) of these small, dark rails with their long, droopy bills. This was the second most common rail in the rice fields (after Sora).

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) – We probably saw close to 100 (~80 the first day, ~20 the second day) of these short-billed rails during the rice harvest near Thornwell. This was easily the most common rail seen in the fields.

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – Many in the rice country; also a few near the coast at Cameron.

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*) – We found an impressive 65 in flooded fields near Thornwell.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – 3 were at Cameron East Jetty in the cold wind.

SEMPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

WILLET (*Tringa semipalmata*) – We saw one in the rice fields and more down at the coast near Cameron. Those that we identified to subspecies were all the expected lanky, pale, thin-billed "Western" Willet (*inornatus*); "Eastern" Willets are thought to leave the USA for points south by mid-autumn.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

STILT SANDPIPER (*Calidris himantopus*) – We had a very impressive count of over 200 individuals in flooded fields near Thornwell on the first day.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – Many around, including 500 in flooded fields near Thornwell.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*)

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – This is the standard freshwater dowitcher at this season in Louisiana - we had ~1800 in flooded fields near Thornwell.

WILSON'S SNIBE (*Gallinago delicata*) – Our best looks were of birds that flushed out the rice fields in Thornwell during the harvest.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Common near the coast, especially at Cameron East Jetty.

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – One immature circled over us at some flooded fields near Thornwell on the first day.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – A few were in the rice fields and at Cameron East Jetty.

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – We saw several of these large gulls on the Gulf Coast beach at Cameron East Jetty.

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – Four patrolled the marshes of the Pintail Loop at Cameron Prairie NWR.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – We saw these at a distance in Cameron and later had close views in flight at the Pintail Loop of Cameron Prairie NWR.

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*)

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*)

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*) – These were hunkered down in the wind on the beach at Cameron East Jetty.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*)

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Ubiquitous now in inhabited areas - we saw these in small rice country towns while driving through.

INCA DOVE (*Columbina inca*) – These small, scaly doves are increasing along the Gulf Coast. We had especially nice views of two perched in small trees near the productive flooded fields in Thornwell.

COMMON GROUND-DOVE (*Columbina passerina*) – Dan pointed one out just before it bailed out of a tree along W. Niblett Rd. near Thornwell.

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) – A few flew over at our bathroom stop north of Thornwell on the first morning.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

Strigidae (Owls)

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*) – Heard hooting at W. Niblett Rd.

BARRED OWL (*Strix varia*) – After what seemed like a failed attempt to hoot up these owls in a patch of bottomland forest in Kisatchie NF, we were about to get back into the vans when a loud "Who cooks for you?" rang out pretty much overhead. We then managed some great scope views of these handsome, dark-eyed owls.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*) – Two visited flowers at the Oak Grove Sanctuary east of Cameron.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – Common along waterways.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*)

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – Three came in to our Barred Owl imitations at Kisatchie NF - sapsuckers sure don't like Barred Owls!

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – One was in the company of Hairy Woodpeckers at the Oak Grove Sanctuary east of Cameron.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – Two in the oaks at Oak Grove Sanctuary near the coast were our only ones of the tour.

RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER (*Picoides borealis*) – This was one of our two primary targets in the Kisatchie NF - we visited a beautiful open pine forest and found a small group of these social woodpeckers. With relatively little struggle, we all had great scope views of these handsome and rare birds.

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

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – At least 3 hollered and loped past us in Kisatchie NF on the last day.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara cheriway*) – We had several great roadside views of these bizarre falcons in the rice country on the first two days.

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – Common in open country throughout the tour.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – One was hunting from the top of a utility pole at Cameron Prairie NWR; we stopped for scope views.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*)

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – A frequent roadside sight.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*)

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Most of ours were inland, including quite a few at Kisatchie NF in the pine woods.

FISH CROW (*Corvus ossifragus*) – Whenever we were near our hotel in Scott during daylight, we'd see a small flock of Fish Crows near the interstate. We also were able to compare these small crows to the huge Great-tailed Grackles at a rest stop on our way to the coast on day 2 - they're not too dissimilar in size!

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – Two were along W. Niblett Rd. near Thornwell on our first day in the field.

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Abundant at many sites, especially in the rice country. Easily the most common swallow on the tour.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – Handfuls were mixed in with larger flocks of Tree Swallows, especially in open areas in the rice country and along the coast.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Poecile carolinensis*)

TUFTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus bicolor*)

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

BROWN-HEADED NUTHATCH (*Sitta pusilla*) – These little squeakers found us at many of our stops in the piney woods of Kisatchie NF on the last day.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

WINTER WREN (*Troglodytes hiemalis*) – One met us with Song Sparrow-like "chimp-chimp" calls at the Oak Grove Sanctuary east of Cameron.

SEDGE WREN (*Cistothorus platensis*) – Several flushed out of the rice fields during harvest, but our best view was of a calling bird that sat up for most of the bird in some unharvested rice.

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) – Common, both in the rice fields and in taller wetland vegetation.

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)

Poliophtidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*) – Abundant; these formed an ubiquitous presence at most of our wooded or edge habitat stops.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – We heard and saw one in bottomland forest in Kisatchie NF.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – Abundant; we saw these just about everywhere.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – We eventually found one in pine forest at Kisatchie NF on the last day.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) – 4 in denser portions of Kisatchie NF on the last day.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*)

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

TENNESSEE WARBLER (*Oreothlypis peregrina*) – One was with a small, mixed flock at the Oak Grove Sanctuary near Cameron.

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – Fairly common; we heard the thin chip frequently and saw a few of these dull, thin-billed warblers.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*)

PALM WARBLER (*Setophaga palmarum*)

PINE WARBLER (*Setophaga pinus*) – Very common in pine forest - we found them in Kisatchie NF.

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

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER (*Setophaga virens*)

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

EASTERN TOWHEE (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*)

BACHMAN'S SPARROW (*Peucaea aestivalis*) – Along with Red-cockaded Woodpecker, this was a much-anticipated bird for the last day of the tour. We surrounded a tail-less individual in the open piney woods of Kistachie NF and admired its gray and rust tones at leisure through our scopes.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*)

FIELD SPARROW (*Spizella pusilla*)

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

NELSON'S SPARROW (*Ammodramus nelsoni*) – Several of one of the brighter interior subspecies (*nelsoni* or *alterus*, probably *nelsoni*) were at Cameron East Jetty. Researchers also netted one in the rice fields near Thornwell.

SEASIDE SPARROW (*Ammodramus maritimus*) – We had good views of these large-billed, pastel-colored sparrows in the salt marsh of Cameron East Jetty. These were the bright Gulf Coast subspecies.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*)

SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*)

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia albicollis*)

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)

DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED) (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*) – Our only ones were along the road near a Red-cockaded Woodpecker cluster at Kisatchie NF.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*)

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – Dan spotted a small group of these open country blackbirds on wires outside Thornwell.

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Common and in large flocks, especially in or near wooded areas.

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus major*) – These large grackles are especially common near the coastal marshes, but they are also widespread in flooded rice fields well up toward I-10.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Easily confused with Boat-tailed Grackles, this is the standard open-land large grackle in dry agricultural areas and roadsides. They do broadly overlap with Boat-tailed Grackles in habitat selection here in Louisiana, so care is necessary with identification.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*)

MAMMALS

SWAMP RABBIT (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*) – A couple of these bunnies flushed out of the wet rice fields during the harvest near Thornwell.

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*)

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*)

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*) – We saw these large, coastal dolphins in the mouth of the Calcasieu River in Cameron.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 151 bird taxa and 4 mammal taxa