



Field Guides Tour Report

Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails 2015

Oct 29, 2015 to Nov 2, 2015

Dan Lane & Chris Benesh

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



A dawn flight of Fish Crows at our motel in Scott. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

This year's tour was perhaps the wettest on record. Yet despite this, we managed to see a wonderful assortment of species, experience the rail phenomenon associated with the rice harvest, and sample from some fantastic Cajun fare. Our first morning arrived with a wonderfully colorful sunrise and a large flight of Fish Crows. Little did we know that it would be the last of the sunny skies. But no matter, we headed off to "rice country" and were treated to lots of birds -- thousands of them in fact! Big flights of geese and ibis entertained us while we sought out various shorebirds and land birds along Niblett Road. That afternoon found us following a combine around, watching rails, wrens, and sparrows flushing ahead of the combine blades, while many swallows zoomed low over the fields. Sora Rails were everywhere, and small numbers of Virginia Rails and a King Rail appeared. But it was during the last couple of passes in the first field that the star of the day appeared -- a Yellow Rail! Alas, the wetness of the fields and an approaching rain front meant that the railing was done. The combines were to lie dormant for the rest of the weekend.

The weather looked grim for the rest of the weekend. Dire forecasts prepared us for the worst, but surprisingly, we managed to dodge the majority of the nasty weather. We got in several hours of birding in the Cameron Prairie coastal area before the rains finally caught up with us. During that time we saw quite a few birds along Holly Beach and even managed to rescue four Blue Crabs that had been trapped in a crab pot that had washed ashore in a storm.

Our final day was spent in the pine woods near Fort Polk, where we sought out some shy pine woods specialties. The Brown-headed Nuthatches came easy, but the Bachman's Sparrow and Red-cockaded Woodpecker demanded more time. Once again, the rain held off long enough for us to accomplish our goals before letting loose.

We clearly had the odds stacked against us on this departure. Dan and I are thankful to have had such a super group of clients to spend the time with. We appreciate your patience and enthusiasm. We look forward to traveling with each of you again in the future! — Chris

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*) – Seeing thousands of these flying over fields in along Niblett Road and nearby rice country was an impressive sight.

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens*) – Dan spotted one in with a flock of White-fronts along Niblett Road.

ROSS'S GOOSE (*Chen rossii*) – A flock of six flew overhead at Niblett Road.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*)

MOTTLED DUCK (GULF COAST) (*Anas fulvigula maculosa*) – A few distant birds.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*)

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*)

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – A female was seen by some at a roadside pond.

Gaviidae (Loons)

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – One flying past Holly Beach along the coast was a nice find as this species is scarce in Louisiana.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – A few seen on ponds.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – Quite a few near the coast including a bunch at our rest stop near Lake Calcasieu.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

Anhingidae (Anhingas)

ANHINGA (*Anhinga anhinga*) – Close looks at a single bird slinking through roadside water.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – Quite a few near East Jetty.

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – Common along the coast.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

AMERICAN BITTERN (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) – A few of us saw a bird flushing out of a rice field near Thornwell.

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*)

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*) – We did eventually connect with this species along the Pintail Loop trail at the Cameron Prairie NWR.

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – We decided to revert to the former name of this species, namely Louisiana Heron.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) – Most seen hanging with cattle.

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*) – One was seen along a roadside flooded field.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*) – Quite a few of these in the rice country, looking very impressive in flight.

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – In scanning through large flocks of ibis, we did a one or two scattered among the White-faced.

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) – This is the common dark ibis in the rice country here.

ROSEATE SPOONBILL (*Platalea ajaja*) – Our best views were in the rain at the Cameron Prairie NWR.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – A couple of these seen near the coast.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*) – Nice views of one a roadside bird near Cameron.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – We had three different birds in the rice country east of Hayes.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

YELLOW RAIL (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) – The star of the tour, this species proved somewhat challenging owing to various conditions. But as the combine was finishing up that last couple of rows of uncut rice, one was flushed a couple of times that gave us good views of its distinctive white wing patches.

KING RAIL (*Rallus elegans*) – The combine stirred up one in the rice fields.

CLAPPER RAIL (*Rallus crepitans*) – Most of the group saw this species at East Jetty in spite of the heavy rain. This turned out to be one of the main highlights of the trip for several clients.

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) – Some nice looks at this species in the rice fields and at the banding station nearby.

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) – This was the most common rail flushing from the rice field we were working.

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

SNOWY PLOVER (*Charadrius nivosus*) – Nice looks at one on Holly Beach with some Sanderlings.

SEMPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

PIPING PLOVER (*Charadrius melodus*) – A couple of these were seen within a few minutes of the Snowy Plover, allowing us to discuss differences between these two beach plovers.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

WILLET (*Tringa semipalmata*)

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*) – One on the beach.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

STILT SANDPIPER (*Calidris himantopus*) – Best looks were of a couple at a pond near Holly Beach.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*)

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*)

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*)

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*)

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) – An amazing number of these took off from a field along Aguiard Road northwest of Thornwell.

WILSON'S PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus tricolor*) – One or two present in the big shorebird flocks along Niblets Road.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – One of the most amazing spectacles of the tour was seeing many thousands of these flying along the highway near Lake Charles. These had presumably been displaced by recent bad weather.

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – Small numbers of these were present in the gull flocks at Holly Beach.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

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

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*) – We had at least one adult bird in a gull flock at Holly Beach.

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – A few seen along Niblets Road.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – One at a pond along Davis Road on our way to East Jetty.

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*)

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*)

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) [I]

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) – One or more were present during our pit stop in Sulphur.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

Strigidae (Owls)

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*)

BARRED OWL (*Strix varia*) – One of the finest experiences of the trip. We had a pair of birds respond and fly in at the Fort Polk WMA near Drakes Creek. Wonderful to hear them calling back and forth to each other.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megascops alcyon*)

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) – We had one in the distance at our pit stop on the south side of Sulphur.

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*)

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*)

RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER (*Picoides borealis*) – It took quite a bit of looking, but we eventually tracked down two birds in the Fort Polk WMA where we got good scope looks at them.

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

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – Seen at the Barred Owl spot and along the highway.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara cheriway*) – Three or four seen on the trip. This species has recently increased in abundance in Louisiana.

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – One briefly seen.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – Several nice studies of birds, particularly along the coastal plain.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*) – This was the default flycatcher of the trip.

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*Tyrannus forficatus*) – We did manage to see one alongside the highway, though the rain likely kept us from finding others.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*)

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*)

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – This species became more common as we headed inland to the pine woods. Dan pointed out the different posturing this species adopts when vocalizing, throwing its entire body into the call.

FISH CROW (*Corvus ossifragus*) – Quite common around our motel in Scott where there was a large morning roost.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

CAVE SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon fulva*) – One was seen along Niblett Road and a couple more were flying over the rice field that was being harvested.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Poecile carolinensis*)

TUFTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – Best looks were in the Fort Polk WMA.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

BROWN-HEADED NUTHATCH (*Sitta pusilla*) – This species was everywhere in the pine woods of the Fort Polk WMA.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

SEDGE WREN (*Cistothorus platensis*) – A few flushed by the combine in the rice fields.

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) – A few seen flushing out of the rice fields.

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*)

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – We had an impressive flock along the last bit of Niblett Road. Others were scattered elsewhere.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – Mostly heard.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) [*]

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*)

SPRAGUE'S PIPIT (*Anthus spragueii*) – Alas, our views were of the stakeout bird launching itself into oblivion in front of our eyes.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*) – One encountered briefly at Niblett Road.

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*)

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

HOODED WARBLER (*Setophaga citrina*) – A female at Peveto Woods was a nice find. Most have departed by this date.
AMERICAN REDSTART (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – A handsome male was hanging out at Peveto Woods.
NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – One was briefly seen at Peveto Woods.
MAGNOLIA WARBLER (*Setophaga magnolia*) – Dan spotted one at Peveto Woods that some got to see.
PALM WARBLER (*Setophaga palmarum*) – One was hanging out at East Jetty in the rain.
PINE WARBLER (*Setophaga pinus*) – Most of those we encountered were in the pines at the Fort Polk WMA.
YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE) (*Setophaga coronata coronata*)
BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER (*Setophaga virens*)
CANADA WARBLER (*Cardellina canadensis*) – Harlan and Sheila spotted a bird that fit this description, though unfortunately we were unable to relocate it.
WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*) – Nice looks at two birds along Niblett Road.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

BACHMAN'S SPARROW (*Peucaea aestivalis*) – Talk about super stealthy in winter! Despite putting in a lot of effort, we were only able to get brief glimpses of this shy species.
SEASIDE SPARROW (*Ammodramus maritimus*) – Seen by those who braved the rain at East Jetty.
CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*)
LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*) – Good scope views of one along Warehouse Road in Thornwell.
WHITE-THROATED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) [*]
SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)
SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*) – Seen and heard along Niblett Road.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)
INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*)

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)
EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*)
COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*)
BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus major*)
GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)
BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – A single bird was seen along Niblett Road.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [I]

MAMMALS

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*)
FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*)
BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*) – Quite a few of these were in the channel of the Calcasieu River.
WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 152 bird taxa and 4 mammal taxa