



Field Guides Tour Report

Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails II 2017

Nov 2, 2017 to Nov 6, 2017

Cory Gregory and Dan Lane

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



A highlight of our tour was seeing Yellow Rails at the banding station during the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival. We also had some great views of these elusive critters in the field. Photo by participant Kenneth Trease.

Hold dat gumbo, we's done! It was another great Cajun tour here in southern Lou'anna, and we saw some great birds and et some great food! Maybe too much of the latter, actually... but the former was just in the right amount. We dipped our toes in Cajun culture, or at least the core of it—the food—and we also saw the importance of the southwestern part of Louisiana to wintering North American birds. Waterfowl, waders, some shorebirds, sparrows, kinglets, gnatcatchers, blackbirds, and other groups gather in large concentrations in the rice country and coast of Louisiana, making it one of the most important areas of the continent for non-breeding birds. The sheer spectacle is enough to warrant a tour, but there are some specialties that make it that much more interesting, with Yellow Rail topping the list. This secretive species is so difficult elsewhere, that the opportunity to see it during the second rice harvest of the year is nearly irresistible! Where else can you see the bird so well with a minimum of effort?

Our visit overlapped with the Yellow Rails and Rice festival, and we really benefited from that with some great in-the-field views of Yellow, King, Virginia rails and Soras, followed by in-hand views of the same. Not often that happens! In addition, we had some great luck with some of the other top targets of the tour: some of the mousy sparrows such as Bachman's, LeConte's, and Nelson's, which all performed admirably, and some slightly less regular Louisiana birds such as White-tailed Hawks (that looked like they were nearly in Texas through our scopes) and Couch's Kingbird (that was firmly over Louisiana soil). Other memorable sightings included the cloud of Black Skimmers at East Jetty, the flying scoop of strawberry ice cream, locally known as a "Cajun Flamingo" (but more often called Roseate Spoonbill), the fine daytime view of a bleary-eyed Barred Owl, the swarm of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers on some roadside wires, the masses of mixed geese that had just come from the Arctic and were doing their arrival laps over the rice fields, the graceful White-tailed Kites on the beach side in Cameron Parish, the very late Yellow-billed Cuckoo that caught us by surprise, and locally common, but perhaps rare elsewhere, species such as Sedge Wren, Swamp Sparrow, and Orange-crowned Warbler, all of which we enjoyed viewing. That previous sentence could be considered a run-on sentence, but this is a checklist introduction and not a thesis, so I'm stickin' with it!

Cory and I really enjoyed your company for this short, but bird-and-food packed tour. We hope you enjoyed it as well, and that you'll consider coming along with us again, perhaps a bit further afield, in the near future. There are a lot of birds out there to see, and we'd love the opportunity to show some of them to you! Keep your binocs close and good birding!

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*) – The most numerous of the geese we saw.

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens*) – Here in the Mississippi flyway, Snows and "Blue" geese are present in almost equal numbers.

ROSS'S GOOSE (*Chen rossii*) – Several of these diminutive geese were peppered among the Snows.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – A few colorful males were in the duck gaggle on Watkin's Road.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Here, we're only talking wild, migratory Mallards, not the barnyard or city pond types. We saw a few of the former amid congregations of other ducks.

MOTTLED DUCK (GULF COAST) (*Anas fulvigula maculosa*) – The local resident "Mallard" type. We only saw a pair at Cameron Prairie NWR.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*)

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)

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

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*) – A pair on Watkin's Road and another female on Rutherford Beach Road.

HOODED MERGANSER (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) – Cory and one or two folks in his van spotted some mergansers down in Cameron Parish.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – The more common marsh cormorant in Cameron Parish.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Rarer than the last in Cameron, but more common on the Gulf.

Anhingidae (Anhingas)

ANHINGA (*Anhinga anhinga*) – A flyover on West Niblett.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – Some numbers of this migrant from the north were along the Gulf coast.

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

LEAST BITTERN (*Ixobrychus exilis*) – Not seen, but we heard at least two of these giving their "cough cackle" in the Phragmites at Sabine Nature Trail. [*]

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*)

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*) – Adults and white young were in the marsh at Cameron Prairie NWR.

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – Better known at "Louisiana Heron", of course!

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*)

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*)

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – A handful of these dark ibis were among larger groups of White-faced on Watkin's Road. We could detect them by their bluish-white facial skin borders and dark irides.

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*)

ROSEATE SPOONBILL (*Platalea ajaja*) – Flying strawberry sundaes.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Mostly seen in the coastal marshes of Cameron, where they spend the winter.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*) – Two birds showed for us along the road from Holly Beach to the Ferry west of the Calcaieu River.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – A numerous raptor in the coastal marshes, where we saw a few males among the many brown birds.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – One individual over the Turf Farm area.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Several seen in a few different plumages. One memorable bird came down and removed a gull from the premises of the Watkin's Road pond.

WHITE-TAILED HAWK (*Geranoaetus albicaudatus*) – A juvenile and a second year bird were frolicking in some trees on the far side of a field from us on Fruge Road. These birds had been found about three weeks earlier, and are not a yearly-occurring species in Louisiana.

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*) – A single juvenile flew over us on Marceaux Road, late for its migration to Argentina.

RED-TAILED HAWK (CALURUS/ALASCENSIS) (*Buteo jamaicensis calurus*) – A single dark-morph bird along LA-27 just north of the Cameron/Jeff Davis parish border was of this form, which is one of the rarest to occur in Louisiana.

RED-TAILED HAWK (BOREALIS) (*Buteo jamaicensis borealis*) – The common eastern form of Red-tail; we saw mostly these.

RED-TAILED HAWK (KRIDER'S) (*Buteo jamaicensis kriderii*) – A bird on the power poles along Holly Beach appeared to be this pale variety of Red-tail that breeds in the northern Great Plains.

RED-TAILED HAWK (FUERTESI) (*Buteo jamaicensis fuertesi*) – Another variety of Red-tail that is more common in Texas west to Arizona, we saw one or two birds without obvious belly bands.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

YELLOW RAIL (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) – The main focus of the tour, and happily, one we saw well and in good numbers on our first day. An added bonus was being able to see birds in the hand as the banding crew did their work.

KING RAIL (*Rallus elegans*) – The largest of Louisiana's rails, we saw somewhere around 5-7 individuals in the field, three of which were captured by the banding crew. Another bird showed quite well at Sabine Nature Trail, thanks to Joe for spotting it!

CLAPPER RAIL (*Rallus crepitans*) – After the big rail day the day before, we enjoyed fine views of this saltmarsh rail at East Jetty.

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) – Small numbers were in the rail field, and at least a couple were captured by the banders.

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) – One of the most common of the rails in the rail field, several were also captured.

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – Formerly called "Common Moorhen" but called "Gallinule" before that, this bird has changed names several times in the past century. It is now known not to be the same species as is called "Moorhen" in the Old World, hence the recent return to "Gallinule."

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Antigone canadensis*) – Not exactly stellar looks, but we saw several across the White-tailed Hawk field.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – Good numbers in the rice fields.

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*) – An elegant shorebird we enjoyed first on Niblett Rd, and then on the beach.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

PIPING PLOVER (*Charadrius melodus*) – One of these rare plovers was on Holly Beach.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*) – A small group among the roosting birds at East Jetty was nice.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

STILT SANDPIPER (*Calidris himantopus*) – A few birds mixed in with yellowlegs in a wet field along Marceaux Rd.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*)

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – The regular Dowitcher in freshwater situations, and the expected species inland in Louisiana at this season.

WILSON'S SNIBE (*Gallinago delicata*) – This used to be considered conspecific with Common Snipe in the past, but was split recently due to differing displays.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*) – A rare sandpiper this late in the season.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

WILLET (WESTERN) (*Tringa semipalmata inornata*) – With all the attention paid to Willets now, it is useful to know that contemporary wisdom states that "Eastern" Willets, which breed in Louisiana, depart for South America by the beginning of September, and any Willet present after then is likely a "Western."

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*)

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – A small number of birds, all non-adults, were lingering on the beaches this late. Most of the rest of the world's population is along the Pacific coast of South America right now.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

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

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – A fair sized group on Holly Beach, but our first was on Watkin's Road.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*)

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*)

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*) – A nice-sized swarm at East Jetty.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [H]

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

INCA DOVE (*Columbina inca*) – Increasing in the state, we spotted some in the rice country and again at Oak Grove.

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) – Another dove that has really invaded Louisiana.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus americanus*) – Wow, great spotting! This was a very late migrant.

Strigidae (Owls)

BARRED OWL (*Strix varia*) – After hearing a bird at Niblett, we enjoyed a great view of a bird in the pine woods.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*) – Another late migrant, but some remain for the winter (but not usually in wood patches).

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) – Even in the fog, the distinctive pattern of this fancy woodpecker was easy to see.

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*)

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – One bird was harassed by the Red-cockaded.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*)

RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER (*Picoides borealis*) – Happily, a pair was pretty quick to find in the pine savanna habitat.

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

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – A pair responded in the pine woods.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara cheriway*) – Seen daily. Twenty years ago, when I first moved to Louisiana, that was unheard of!

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*)

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*)

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*) – The default wintering flycatcher in Louisiana.

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – Three individuals in the rice country was a nice number for one day. That male was a real looker!

COUCH'S KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus couchii*) – A vagrant from Texas. Thanks to Donna and Steve for finding it the week earlier!

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*Tyrannus forficatus*) – A nice group on wires in Cameron Parish was a fine sight! Snazzy birds!

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*) – The common crow of the pine woods.

FISH CROW (*Corvus ossifragus*) – Not very numerous on this tour, but the crow of southern part of the Louisiana.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Big flocks over most habitats.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – It's getting late for these long-distance migrants, but they were still moving through in good numbers.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Poecile carolinensis*)

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

BROWN-HEADED NUTHATCH (*Sitta pusilla*) – One of the common pine specialties of the Southeast.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

WINTER WREN (*Troglodytes hiemalis*) – It kept a low profile, but the bird in Kisatchie sang loudly, which was nice.

SEDGE WREN (*Cistothorus platensis*) – Two rather extroverted birds across the canal at Sabine Nature Trail. Extroversion is not a common condition in Sedge Wrens.

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*)

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – As per usual, this species was a sneaky one for us... they can be quite extroverted when you aren't looking for them, but will stay hidden when you are.

Poliptilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliptila caerulea*) – If only we could have seen this one easily! I must try to find a way to draw it out into view some day...

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – Nice views our last afternoon near the Welsh Landfill.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – Like the Gnatcatcher, this one is impossible to see well. Right?

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – A trio flew over the forest at Kisatchie.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Remarkably scarce in the tour area, we only saw two flying high over our breakfast spot in Oakdale.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Heard more than seen, but we caught glimpses of one or two near Welsh.

BROWN THRASHER (*Toxostoma rufum*)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – Heard flying high over the White-tailed Hawk site. [*]

SPRAGUE'S PIPIT (*Anthus spragueii*) – At least two individuals at the same site as the last, one seen as it zipped over us.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – One of the more common wintering warblers in southern Louisiana, we saw several.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

PINE WARBLER (*Setophaga pinus*) – One at Oak Grove followed by several in the pine woods.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE) (*Setophaga coronata coronata*) – Remarkably absent from most sites until we got to the Welsh Landfill area.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*) – A bird near Welsh landfill was nice.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

BACHMAN'S SPARROW (*Peucaea aestivalis*) – Woo hoo! Our second or third bird behaved wonderfully, perching in the open for all to see for a reasonable amount of time!

LE CONTE'S SPARROW (*Ammodramus leconteii*) – One of the more-wanted targets for several of the participants, this colorful sparrow is always a favorite when we see it well!

NELSON'S SPARROW (*Ammodramus nelsoni*) – Like the last, this was high on the list of wants for many participants, and showed well at East Jetty.

SEASIDE SPARROW (*Ammodramus maritimus*) – Responding to the last, it popped up in the Spartina marsh at East Jetty.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) [*]

VESPER SPARROW (*Pooecetes gramineus*) – A bird hopping along a fence in Holly Beach was in an odd place.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolni*) – Not a very common sparrow in Louisiana, one showed well on Niblett.

SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*)

EASTERN TOWHEE (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) – Oddly absent from most good towhee habitat in western Louisiana, it is more regular in winter, and found in hedgerows in the rice country, as we had one.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – Heard only, but a good bird for southern Louisiana. [*]

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*)

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – A few in the fog by the Red-headed Woodpecker, and a few others flying over our last day.

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus major*) – In the autumn and winter, this and the next species form mixed flocks and scour the rice fields for food. In the breeding season they divide habitats a bit more cleanly with Boat-tailed in coastal marshes and Great-tailed in more urban and upland areas.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

BRONZED COWBIRD (*Molothrus aeneus*) – Cory's van spotted a bird on the ground at the start of the road out to East Jetty.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*)

MAMMALS

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – Several folks spotted this widespread rabbit as we drove around the SW of the state.

SWAMP RABBIT (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*) – More closely tied to marshes and coastal habitats, we saw one well at Sabine Nature Trail.

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*)

MARSH RICE RAT (*Oryzomys palustris*) – The rats we were seeing bailing out of the cut rice fields (either in the bills of egrets or under their own power).

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

mouse sp.

American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*)

Marsh Brown Snake (*Storeria dekayi limnetes*): the little snake we encountered at Sabine Nature Trail.

Eastern Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*)

Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta*)

Map Turtle/Chicken Turtle (*Graptemys/Deirochelys* sp.): the other turtles we saw with yellow-scrawled necks but no red ears.

Totals for the tour: 157 bird taxa and 5 mammal taxa