



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails II 2018**

Nov 1, 2018 to Nov 5, 2018

Dan Lane & Chris Benesh

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



*One of the dramatic sunsets seen in Cameron Parish during the tour. Photo by guide Chris Benesh*

This year marked my second opportunity to join Dan Lane on his Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails tour in southern Louisiana. While this is considered primarily one's best opportunity to see Yellow Rails and several other wonderful rail species, it really is jam packed with other avian highlights. The sheer number of birds wintering in the rice fields and hanging out on coastal beaches is staggering. Huge flights of geese, ibis, grackles, and shorebirds blanket the skies at times. Nearby, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers drip from the trees. Further inland, the piney woods of Kisatchie National Forest were different and wonderful, home to three specialized species, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow, and Brown-headed Nuthatch. Throwing Barred Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, and Winter Wren into the mix there made for a terrific morning of birding there. While exploring coastal marshes, we were able to track down two salt marsh sparrows, Nelson's and Seaside. We were also treated to a collection of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers decorating power lines near the coast. But it is the rail experience that really makes this tour. The afternoon spent following a combine around rice fields is a pretty unique way to bird. Who could imagine so many Soras wintering in one spot? Also the way we got to see Virginia Rails and even a King Rail put up by the combine. But it was the Yellow Rail that most were there to see, and see it we did. It was not without its suspense. The first couple of fields held quite a bit of water, more than is suitable for Yellow Rails. We watched quite a few Sora, a few Virginia Rails, and a King Rail in these. It was the last field of the day to be cut that provided a drier, more suitable habitat. Those riding on the combine and in the ATVs were able to watch the action from up close and see as many as nine of them as they flew off ahead of the combine blades. Overall, an unforgettable experience.

Three days of birding is not nearly enough time to really get to know a group, but we made the most of the little time that we had together. It was a treat for me to meet all of you and see a few familiar faces again. Good birding to you all and I hope our paths cross again some time in the future. — Chris

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**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

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## BIRDS

### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl).

**FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK** (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) – It was a treat to see a pair of these among the huge duck flock on the Pintail Loop Road, though spotting them was a challenge at times.

**SNOW GOOSE** (*Anser caerulescens*) – A few sizable flocks seen.

**ROSS'S GOOSE** (*Anser rossii*) – Smaller numbers were picked out from the Snow Geese in mixed flocks.

**GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** (*Anser albifrons*) – Seen everyday.

**CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*) [✱]

**BLUE-WINGED TEAL** (*Spatula discors*) – Well seen on the Pintail Loop Road.

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Spatula clypeata*)

**GADWALL** (*Mareca strepera*)

**AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Mareca americana*)

**MOTTLED DUCK (GULF COAST)** (*Anas fulvigula maculosa*) – At least six of these coastal prairie breeding ducks were present along Niblett Road.

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

**REDHEAD** (*Aythya americana*) – Two females hanging out with the huge duck flock were a bit of a surprise.

### Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies).

**WILD TURKEY** (*Meleagris gallopavo*)

### Podicipedidae (Grebes).

**PIED-BILLED GREBE** (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

### Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves).

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) [II]

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

**INCA DOVE** (*Columbina inca*)

**WHITE-WINGED DOVE** (*Zenaida asiatica*)

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*)

### Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots).

**KING RAIL** (*Rallus elegans*) – Great looks at this species along the boardwalk at the Sabine NWR as well as seeing one flushing up from in front of the combine in the rice fields.

**CLAPPER RAIL** (*Rallus crepitans*) – These looking much like a duller version of King Rail. We had nice looks at a pair of these at the East Jetty Beach.

**VIRGINIA RAIL** (*Rallus limicola*) – Several of these were seen flushing up in front of the combine during our day in the rice fields.

**SORA** (*Porzana carolina*) – This was the most common species of rail to be seen flushing up in front of the combines. We had a lot of practice telling them from Yellow Rail.

**COMMON GALLINULE** (*Gallinula galeata*)

**AMERICAN COOT** (*Fulica americana*)

**PURPLE GALLINULE** (*Porphyrio martinica*) – Nice to see a couple of these on the Pintail Loop Road showing well.

**YELLOW RAIL** (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) – The star of the the weekend! We were fortunate to track down this celebrity for all before the sun set below the horizon. Since we were broken up into smaller groups, some managed to see up to nine, while others saw one or two well.

### Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets).

**BLACK-NECKED STILT** (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

**AMERICAN AVOCET** (*Recurvirostra americana*)

### Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings).

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

**SEMPALMATED PLOVER** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

**PIPING PLOVER** (*Charadrius melodus*) – Nice to see this species on the beach along the Gulf Beach Highway.

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*)

### Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies).

**WHIMBREL (HUDSONIAN)** (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*) – One on the East Jetty Beach.

**LONG-BILLED CURLEW** (*Numenius americanus*)

**MARbled GODWIT** (*Limosa fedoa*) – See that bird WAY out there? That's a Marbled Godwit.

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*)

**STILT SANDPIPER** (*Calidris himantopus*) – Two of these were in a flooded field with lots of other shorebirds.

**SANDERLING** (*Calidris alba*)

**DUNLIN** (*Calidris alpina*)

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*) – Quite a few of these were making use of the parking area at East Jetty Beach.

**WESTERN SANDPIPER** (*Calidris mauri*)

**LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*)

**WILSON'S SNIPE** (*Gallinago delicata*)

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

**WILLET (WESTERN)** (*Tringa semipalmata inornata*)

**LESSER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa flavipes*)

*Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

**LAUGHING GULL** (*Leucophaeus atricilla*)

**FRANKLIN'S GULL** (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – There were still impressive numbers of Franklin's mixed in with all of the other gulls along the coast. Most of them are headed to South America where they winter.

**RING-BILLED GULL** (*Larus delawarensis*)

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

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** (*Larus fuscus*) – One was hanging out on the beach visible from East Jetty.

**GULL-BILLED TERN** (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)

**CASPIAN TERN** (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

**FORSTER'S TERN** (*Sterna forsteri*)

**ROYAL TERN** (*Thalasseus maximus*)

**BLACK SKIMMER** (*Rynchops niger*) – A huge flock of these were hanging out on the beach at East Jetty.

*Anhingidae (Anhingas)*

**ANHINGA** (*Anhinga anhinga*) – A couple seen, with the first spotted by Elton.

*Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)*

**NEOTROPIC CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*)

**DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

*Pelecanidae (Pelicans)*

**AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN** (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

**BROWN PELICAN** (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

*Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)*

**AMERICAN BITTERN** (*Botaurus lentiginosus*)

**GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*)

**GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*)

**SNOWY EGRET** (*Egretta thula*)

**LITTLE BLUE HERON** (*Egretta caerulea*)

**TRICOLORED HERON** (*Egretta tricolor*) – Perhaps better considered a Louisiana Heron in the context of this tour.

**REDDISH EGRET** (*Egretta rufescens*)

**CATTLE EGRET** (*Bubulcus ibis*)

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

*Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)*

**WHITE IBIS** (*Eudocimus albus*) – Nice flights of these on our first morning birding Niblett Road.

**WHITE-FACED IBIS** (*Plegadis chihi*) – Huge numbers of these were seen and despite some effort, we could not find a Glossy in the mix.

**ROSEATE SPOONBILL** (*Platalea ajaja*) – Always a treat to see this vibrantly colored bird.

*Cathartidae (New World Vultures)*

**BLACK VULTURE** (*Coragyps atratus*)

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*)

*Pandionidae (Osprey)*

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*)

*Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)*

**WHITE-TAILED KITE** (*Elanus leucurus*)

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus hudsonius*)

**COOPER'S HAWK** (*Accipiter cooperii*)

**BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Despite the dramatic increase in numbers in recent decades it remains a treat to see this species.

**RED-SHOULDERED HAWK** (*Buteo lineatus*)

**RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

**RED-TAILED HAWK (HARLAN'S)** (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*)

*Strigidae (Owls)*

**EASTERN SCREECH-OWL** (*Megascops asio*) – Dan's special spot for this species paid off with one sitting in a cryptic pose.

**BARRED OWL** (*Strix varia*) – What a treat to see this species. Quite a delay in getting a response from them but eventually they showed up for us.

*Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)*

**BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megasceryle alcyon*)

*Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER** (*Sphyrapicus varius*)

**RED-HEADED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) – After a bit of searching, we finally connected with a couple at Dan's woodpecker rest stop site!

**RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes carolinus*)

**DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Dryobates pubescens*)

**RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER** (*Dryobates borealis*) – Nice to bump into this species early on during our exploration of Kisatche NF.

**PILEATED WOODPECKER** (*Dryocopus pileatus*)

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

*Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras).*

**CRESTED CARACARA** (*Caracara cheriway*)

**AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*)

**MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – The Merlin show was impressive, with one dashing around the boardwalk at Sabine NWR and one perched closely on the side of the road.

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – Two individuals seen in total.

*Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers).*

**EASTERN PHOEBE** (*Sayornis phoebe*)

**WESTERN KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – A bit of a surprise was this late kingbird hanging out along Scissor-tailed Flycatcher row!

**SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER** (*Tyrannus forficatus*) – An impressive showing of this flashy species.

*Laniidae (Shrikes).*

**LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE** (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – A few seen at scattered locations. Sadly, this is a declining species throughout its range.

*Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis).*

**WHITE-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo griseus*)

**BLUE-HEADED VIREO** (*Vireo solitarius*) – One was in a mixed flock at the Barred Owl site.

*Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies).*

**BLUE JAY** (*Cyanocitta cristata*)

**AMERICAN CROW** (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

*Hirundinidae (Swallows).*

**NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW** (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – A few of these mixed in with the much more common Tree Swallows.

**TREE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*)

**CAVE SWALLOW** (*Petrochelidon fulva*) – We picked out a couple of these in the swallow flocks over the rice fields. A scarce bird here.

*Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice).*

**CAROLINA CHICKADEE** (*Poecile carolinensis*)

**TUFTED TITMOUSE** (*Baeolophus bicolor*)

*Sittidae (Nuthatches).*

**RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta canadensis*)

**BROWN-HEADED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta pusilla*) – A southeastern pine woods specialist, we had some good views of it in Kisatchie NF.

*Troglodytidae (Wrens).*

**HOUSE WREN** (*Troglodytes aedon*)

**WINTER WREN** (*Troglodytes hiemalis*) – One did a great job of playing hide and seek near the Barred Owl site.

**SEDGE WREN** (*Cistothorus platensis*) – Small numbers of these were seen flushing ahead of the combine. But our first real looks were along the boardwalk at the Sabine NWR.

**MARSH WREN** (*Cistothorus palustris*) – This species was also along the Sabine NWR boardwalk.

**CAROLINA WREN** (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)

*Poliopitilidae (Gnatcatchers).*

**BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER** (*Poliopitila caerulea*) – I think everybody was impressed by the number of these that winter in southern Louisiana.

*Regulidae (Kinglets).*

**GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus satrapa*) – A couple of these were at the Barred Owl site.

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus calendula*)

*Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies).*

**HERMIT THRUSH** (*Catharus guttatus*)

*Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers).*

**GRAY CATBIRD** (*Dumetella carolinensis*)

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (*Mimus polyglottos*)

*Sturnidae (Starlings).*

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [H]

*Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits).*

**AMERICAN PIPIT** (*Anthus rubescens*)

**SPRAGUE'S PIPIT** (*Anthus spragueii*) – A couple of these flew over calling, early on while we were birding at West Nibbett Road.

*Passerellidae (New World Sparrows).*

**BACHMAN'S SPARROW** (*Peucaea aestivalis*) – One of our high priority target birds, we learned to appreciate just how stealthy this species can be. Fortunately, one sat up where we could get it in a scope for all to see!

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

**VESPER SPARROW** (*Poocetes gramineus*) – One of these appeared along a fence line while we were scanning shorebirds.

**SEASIDE SPARROW** (*Ammodramus maritima*) – We saw three of these along Wakefield Road in marsh grass.

**NELSON'S SPARROW** (*Ammodramus nelsoni*) – We also saw this shy species well at the same location.

**SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

**SONG SPARROW** (*Melospiza melodia*)

**SWAMP SPARROW** (*Melospiza georgiana*) – This species was pretty common along West Niblett Road and again at the Sabine NWR.

*Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)*

**EASTERN MEADOWLARK** (*Sturnella magna*)

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

**BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus ater*)

**COMMON GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus quiscula*)

**BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus major*) – Really huge numbers of grackles were in all of the dam and marshy areas near the coast. It was difficult to get a good sense of the relative numbers of the two common species.

**GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

*Parulidae (New World Warblers)*

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis celata*)

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*)

**PALM WARBLER** (*Setophaga palmarum*) – There were three of these seen while scanning a field for shorebirds.

**PINE WARBLER** (*Setophaga pinus*) – A couple of individuals seen.

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

*Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)*

**NORTHERN CARDINAL** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

**BLUE GROSBEAK** (*Passerina caerulea*) – Best seen on Fulton Street, aka Scissor-tailed lane.

**INDIGO BUNTING** (*Passerina cyanea*)

*Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)*

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) [II]

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## MAMMALS

**SWAMP RABBIT** (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*) – Most got views of this giant cottontail along the coast and sadly we all saw one fall prey to a terrier that was off leash.

**EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus carolinensis*)

**FOX SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus niger*)

**BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN** (*Tursiops truncatus*)

**AMERICAN MINK** (*Mustela vison*) – Quite a surprise encounter near the parking area at Sabine NWR.

**WHITE-TAILED DEER** (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

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**Totals for the tour: 151 bird taxa and 6 mammal taxa**