

Trip Report — Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails 2025

October 23-27, 2025 with Dan Lane & Alex Sundvall



The group exploring the longleaf pine savannas of the Kisatchie National Forest, here looking for Bachman's Sparrow. Photo by Bob Mead.

This short and sweet tour of Louisiana packs a surprising amount of birds in such a short amount of time! While many people sign up for the hopes of glimpsing a Yellow Rail, as we all found out that is only a small part of what makes this trip an experience to remember. From birding coastal cheniers and beaches, to marshlands and rice fields, all the way to the pineywoods and longleaf pine savannas, this tour has an impressive mix of birds in just three days of birding! While the weather this year gave us some concerns as to just how much birding we would be able to do, we were thankfully spared and

were able to accomplish all of our plans with few changes! We saw nearly 150 species of birds in our time together, including fantastic views of Yellow Rail (the main star of the tour and everyone's collective favorite bird), Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatches, Bachman's Sparrows, Seaside Sparrows, Nelson's Sparrows, and even had a couple local rarities in Upland Sandpiper and Brown Booby. Punctuating all of our birding was some of the best Cajun food Louisiana has to offer.

From Dan and I and everyone here at Field Guides, we thank you for choosing to take this short adventure through Louisiana with us. Dan and I so appreciated your flexibility as plans were adapted to changing weather, and your patience on longer van drives to get from place to place. We hope you all had a lovely long weekend and enjoyed your time in Acadiana and that we will see all of you somewhere on the birding trail again soon!

Here is a daily breakdown of our short time together.



The bird everyone was here to see! How lucky we are to have found ourselves in the migratory path of this Yellow Rail. Photo by guide Alex Sundvall.

Day 1: Our first day of birding saw us doing some marsh and edge birding in the morning, with the main highlight being our search for Yellow Rails later in the day. Our first stop of the morning was along Niblett Rd, which was a nice road that bordered some bayous and scattered trees and fields. This mix of habitats gave us a nice collection of species: some residents and a handful of later migrants. Some of the real highlights along this road were the more widespread southern and eastern birds like Carolina Chickadee, Blue Jay, Carolina Wren, and White-eyed Vireo. We also had some really nice looks at some migrating birds, in particular Sedge Wren and Dickcissel performed really nicely! On the rarer scale of things, a nice Yellow Palm Warbler of the eastern subspecies showed briefly, and we had our first flyover Cave Swallow, an increasingly common bird around the Louisiana Coast! A little farther up the road we had an exceptionally late Upland Sandpiper, one of only a few late October records for the US! While it was a little far back in the field, we still all got pretty great looks at it, and any day with an Upland

Sandpiper is an excellent day as they are one of my favorite birds! Farther still up the road we heard, and a few lucky ones in the group saw, a Limpkin, yet another bird that recently expanded its range to include Louisiana. After a successful morning of birding, we looped around to the south toward an early lunch. As we did, we stopped to look at a large flock of Ibis, most of which were identifiable to White-faced Ibis with a single White Ibis hanging out among them. Also interspersed with the Ibis were a handful of Greater White-fronted Geese. After our first of many delicious Cajun meals, we headed back out to the rice fields to see if we could spot any Yellow Rails.

Typically during this tour we'd be partnering with the long-running Rails and Rice Festival, but unfortunately that festival is no longer happening! On top of that, we had to run the tour a week earlier than usual. So this year was a bit of an exploratory one, and we found a farmer that was willing to let us on his fields while he was harvesting. With crossed fingers we walked up to the fields hoping that the recent cold fronts had brought some Yellow Rails southward and we would have some success. While we were waiting, there were plenty of other birds using the fields. Hundreds of Western Cattle-Egrets were preying on small rodents and insects flushing from the blades of the combine, and hundreds of Tree and Barn Swallows were enjoying the insects as well. It was here that we all got some of my best ever views of Cave Swallows, at times foraging right over our heads! Yellow Rails weren't the only rails we were hoping to see flush from the combine; in fact, we also had a few Sora and even a mighty King Rail flush while we were waiting. But thankfully, we didn't need to wait too long before we started hearing the honks from the harvesters, meaning that they were seeing Yellow Rails flush in front of the combines! We positioned ourselves to be in a good zone to see one flushing and sure enough, as the combine drove toward us pops a Yellow Rail and it landed out in the open in the freshly harvested chaff! We were all able to run up towards it and get exceptional views of this secretive marsh bird before it ran back into the taller unharvested rice. What an exhilarating experience! To end the day, we took a spin around the wildlife loop at Lacassine National Wildlife Refuge. Here, we picked up a few ducks we had been missing, like the Gulf Coast Mottled Duck. Among the thousand or so Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks scattered around the pools, we were

able to pick out nearly a dozen of the rarer Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, getting great comparative views between the two species. Other highlights here were our first looks at Anhinga, Vermilion Flycatcher, Merlin, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Purple and Common Gallinules, and some fantastic views of Limpkins now as a group. An incredible end to an already wonderful first day of birding.



During our time on the coast, we had some fantastic comparative views of Laughing and Franklin's Gulls. Photo by guide Dan Lane.

Day 2: Part of the reason our first day was so amazing was we definitely front loaded as much as we could, as the forecast for the next couple days looked pretty sketchy, with periods of heavy rains across the state potentially putting a kibosh on some of our plans. With our hopes and dreams ready to be dashed, we decided to head up into the pineywoods on our second day, hoping that any rain would finish up on our longer drive up there. As we

drove, we saw possibly one of the best sunrises of my life. With the incoming storm and humidity, the air around us just absolutely glowed a golden orange. Half the sky was a brilliant peach as the other half was a slightly less inviting deep dark gray. Unfortunately, the gray was the direction we were headed and before long the sky erupted in rain. Once we arrived at our birding spot for the morning, we decided to stay in the vehicles until the rain had finished. Thankfully, it cleared up after about 30 minutes (perfect amount of time for a quick catnap!) and before long we were out birding in the longleaf pine savanna hoping for a trio of specialty birds. All around us the trees were marked with paint, signaling the nest holes of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, one of the main targets of the morning. The birds didn't make us wait long as they too were excited to get out and about after the rain had ended, and soon we were looking at a small family group of these endangered endemic woodpeckers. As we were enjoying our views, another group of endemic birds swung by and suddenly there were Brown-headed Nuthatches above our heads. A successful first stop! We continued down the road and stopped at a creek crossing where we nearly swept the woodpeckers, missing only Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in the list of expected species. Red-headed woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, and Downy Woodpecker all showed lovely while the others were heard only. The rest of the morning was spent trying to track down a Bachman's Sparrow, which can be incredibly challenging this time of year. They prefer to stay on or near the ground calling quietly. With a relatively open understory with few low bushes for them to perch on, it took quite a long time to really track one down to an area where we had even a small chance of seeing it. We tried for over an hour running around the savanna, but by the end of it most of us were walking away with good views, with some lucky folks who were in the right place at the right time getting sublime views! At our lunch spot, we stopped to take note of the Fish Crows in town, which are surprisingly more common inland here than over on the coast! We finished the afternoon with a long drive back down towards the hotel, breaking up the drive with a stop at Lake Charles where we got a taste of some of the coastal birds we'd be seeing tomorrow, as well as a couple nice continuing rarer birds blown in from the storm: an American Herring Gull loafing on the

beach with the other gulls and terns, and a very distant young Brown Booby way out on a pylon in the middle of the lake!



Possibly my best ever view of a Cave Swallow, foraging over the rice fields on our first day. Photo by guide Alex Sundvall.

Day 3: Our final day of birding took us down along the coast toward the Texas border, birding some of the coastal cheniers and beaches. Before we got too close to the coast, we made a quick stop just off the main highway to gawk at a large flock of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers that were gathered on the wires. Also with them were a handful of Western Kingbirds, another later migrant. An auspicious start to the day! Turning off the main drag and heading towards the coast, we made a quick stop as an American Bittern was just chilling on the side of the road! It had taken a quick step away from the dense marsh grasses just for our viewing pleasure before retreating back to a more camouflaged area. The marshes soon gave way to beaches as the Gulf of Mexico sprawled before us. Wherever we could, we stopped along the road to scan through the flocks of birds loafing in the surf. Our first stop

rewarded us with a handful of goodies like a flock of American Avocets scything through the shallow water, a Snowy Plover running through the sand with Ruddy Turnstones, and a smattering of rarer Larids like Gull-billed Terns, Franklin's Gulls, and a Lesser Black-backed Gull. These mixes of birds continued with the more common Royal and Caspian Terns, Sanderlings, Semipalmated Plovers, and Laughing Gulls as we made our way along the coastline, now searching mainly for Piping Plovers. We were in luck, as one of our next stops produced another Snowy Plover (this one still in pretty good breeding plumage) and an adorable Piping Plover. Always wonderful to see these two rare plovers together to compare and contrast their field marks. Our final stop of the morning, and where we set up our picnic lunch, was at Peveto Woods. This is one of the few remaining good coastal cheniers preserved by the Baton Rouge Audubon Society. Cheniers are disappearing on the coast due to development and hurricanes, and the ones that are hanging on are still impacted by continuing droughts in the region. Here at some of the last trees before the Gulf of Mexico, a handful of migrants were staging before making the leap across the gulf to the Yucatán. Hooded and Magnolia Warblers, American Redstarts, Northern Parula, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Blue Grosbeaks, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, and a Winter Wren were some of the many highlights as we walked around. After lunch, we took a short ferry ride across the Calcasieu River heading slowly back towards the hotel. Our first stop on the way back was just the other side of the ferry terminal where we searched for a few of the coastal saltmarsh birds. Almost immediately we had Clapper Rails calling around us, but they were being incredibly secretive for this species and despite having at least three pairs around us at close range, we never had eyes on them for too long. Thankfully our two other targets were quite a lot more cooperative, and we had prolonged close views of both Seaside Sparrow and Nelson's Sparrows! Our next stop was just a quick drive through the community of Cameron, which had a flock of Bronzed Cowbirds mixed in with the other blackbirds. Our final birding spot of the day was a long road bordering fields which can be great for raptors, but today the only thing around were a few Crested Caracaras, always a nice bird to see. We made it back to the hotel in time for our final Cajun meal and our goodbyes before all heading home the next day!



The rice combine with flocks of birds waiting to snatch flushing insects. Photo by guide Dan Lane.

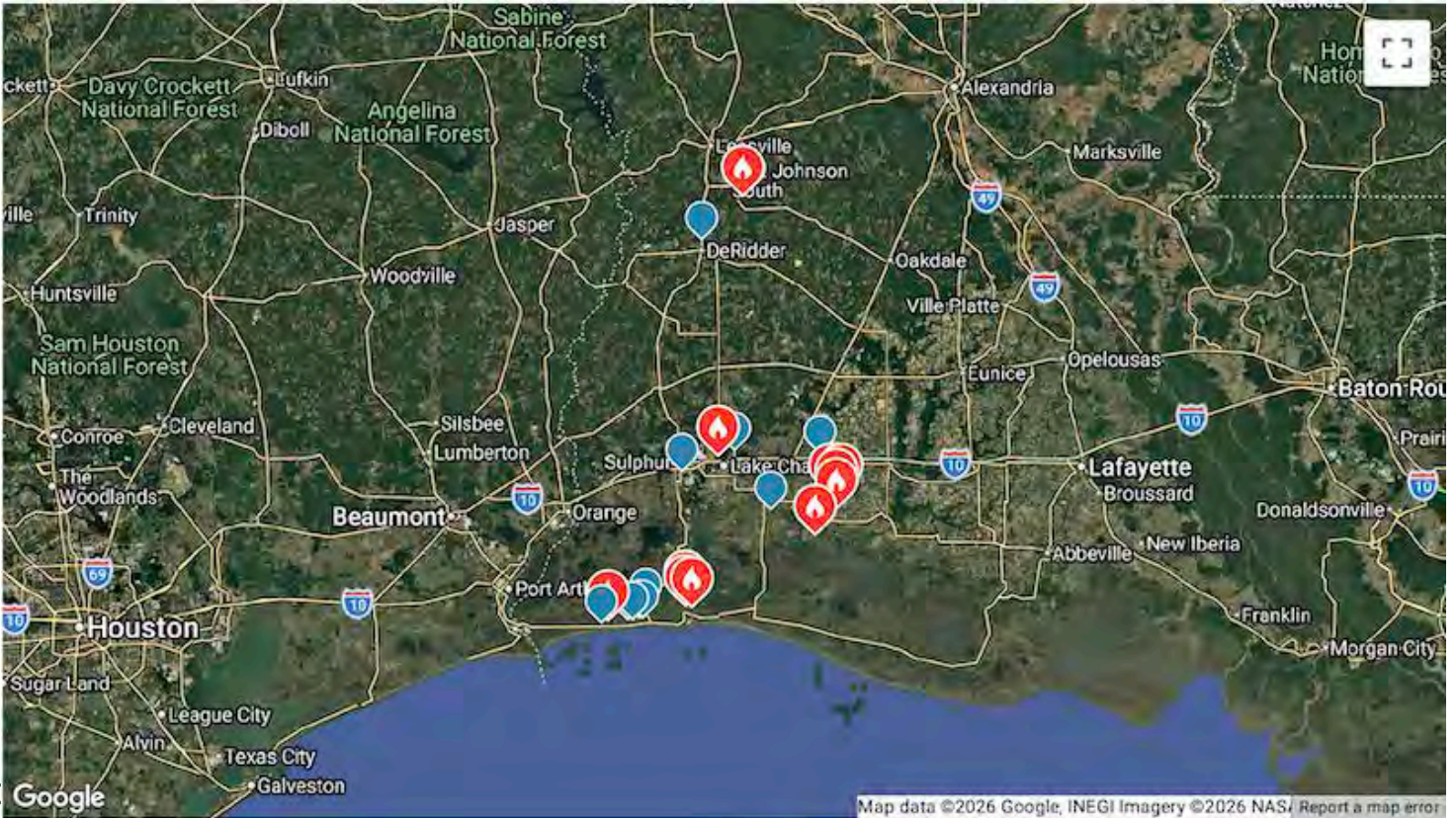
You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/498889>

Dan and Alex

Field Guides Birding Tours - Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails, 2025 (with guides Dan Lane and Alex Sundvall)



24 – 26 Oct 2025 (3 days) Public



Louisiana, United States

Beauregard | Calcasieu | Cameron | Jefferson Davis | Vernon

Alex Sundvall



For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional media for this trip...
















































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Species Observed
























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1000	Black-bellied Whistling-Duck <i>Dendrocygna autumnalis</i>	 1
11	Fulvous Whistling-Duck <i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>	 1
100	Greater White-fronted Goose <i>Anser albifrons</i>	 2
4	Wood Duck <i>Aix sponsa</i>	 1
2	Mottled Duck <i>Anas fulvigula</i>	 1
25	Green-winged Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	 1
58	Rock Pigeon <i>Columba livia</i> *	 2
1	Eurasian Collared-Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> *	 1
48	Mourning Dove <i>Zenaida macroura</i>	 5
2	Ruby-throated Hummingbird <i>Archilochus colubris</i>	 1
1	King Rail <i>Rallus elegans</i>	 1
6	Clapper Rail <i>Rallus crepitans</i>	 1
1	Virginia Rail <i>Rallus limicola</i>	 1
3	Sora <i>Porzana carolina</i>	 1
12	Common Gallinule <i>Gallinula galeata</i>	 1
5	American Coot <i>Fulica americana</i>	 1
2	Purple Gallinule <i>Porphyrio martinica</i>	 1
2	Yellow Rail <i>Coturnicops noveboracensis</i>	 1
8	Limpkin <i>Aramus gurauna</i>	 3
12	Black-necked Stilt <i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	 1
12	American Avocet <i>Recurvirostra americana</i>	 1


7	Black-bellied Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	▶  2
30	Killdeer <i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	▶  5
6	Semipalmated Plover <i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>	▶  2
4	Piping Plover <i>Charadrius melodus</i>	▶  2
4	Snowy Plover <i>Anarhynchus nivosus</i>	▶  3
1	Upland Sandpiper <i>Bartramia longicauda</i>	▶  1
125	Long-billed Dowitcher <i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>	▶  1
11	Wilson's Snipe <i>Gallinago delicata</i>	▶  2
2	Lesser Yellowlegs <i>Tringa flavipes</i>	▶  2
6	Willet <i>Tringa semipalmata</i>	▶  3
4	Greater Yellowlegs <i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	▶  1
12	Ruddy Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>	▶  2
49	Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>	▶  5
3	Least Sandpiper <i>Calidris minutilla</i>	▶  3
407	Laughing Gull <i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>	▶  6
4	Franklin's Gull <i>Leucophaeus pipixcan</i>	▶  2
1	Ring-billed Gull <i>Larus delawarensis</i>	▶  1
2	American Herring Gull <i>Larus smithsonianus</i>	▶  2
2	Lesser Black-backed Gull <i>Larus fuscus</i>	▶  2
13	Gull-billed Tern <i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	▶  2
49	Caspian Tern <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	▶  4
31	Forster's Tern <i>Sterna forsteri</i>	▶  4
53	Royal Tern <i>Thalasseus maximus</i>	▶  4
2	Pied-billed Grebe <i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	▶  1

1	Brown Booby <i>Sula leucogaster</i>	▶ 1
3	Anhinga <i>Anhinga anhinga</i>	▶ 2
3	Double-crested Cormorant <i>Nannopterum auritum</i>	▶ 3
3	Neotropic Cormorant <i>Nannopterum brasilianum</i>	▶ 2
545	White Ibis <i>Eudocimus albus</i>	▶ 8
514	White-faced Ibis <i>Plegadis chihi</i>	▶ 3
3	Roseate Spoonbill <i>Platalea ajaja</i>	▶ 1
1	American Bittern <i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>	▶ 1
1	Yellow-crowned Night Heron <i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>	▶ 1
12	Black-crowned Night Heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	▶ 1
2	Little Blue Heron <i>Egretta caerulea</i>	▶ 2
24	Snowy Egret <i>Egretta thula</i>	▶ 4
502	Western Cattle-Egret <i>Ardea ibis</i>	▶ 3
75	Great Egret <i>Ardea alba</i>	▶ 7
15	Great Blue Heron <i>Ardea herodias</i>	▶ 4
21	American White Pelican <i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	▶ 1
35	Brown Pelican <i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	▶ 5
9	Black Vulture <i>Coragyps atratus</i>	▶ 2
21	Turkey Vulture <i>Cathartes aura</i>	▶ 6
2	Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	▶ 2
1	Sharp-shinned Hawk <i>Accipiter striatus</i>	▶ 1
4	Cooper's Hawk <i>Astur cooperii</i>	▶ 3
10	Northern Harrier <i>Circus hudsonius</i>	▶ 7



1	Bald Eagle <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	▶  1
1	Red-shouldered Hawk <i>Buteo lineatus</i>	▶  1
4	Red-tailed Hawk <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	▶  2
11	Belted Kingfisher <i>Megasceryle alcyon</i>	▶  4
1	Red-headed Woodpecker <i>Melanerpes erythrocephalus</i>	▶  1
4	Red-bellied Woodpecker <i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>	▶  3
5	Downy Woodpecker <i>Dryobates pubescens</i>	▶  4
4	Red-cockaded Woodpecker <i>Leuconotopicus borealis</i>	▶  2
3	Hairy Woodpecker <i>Leuconotopicus villosus</i>	▶  1
2	Pileated Woodpecker <i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>	▶  2
2	Northern Flicker <i>Colaptes auratus</i>	▶  2
15	Crested Caracara <i>Caracara plancus</i>	▶  5
11	American Kestrel <i>Falco sparverius</i>	▶  7
4	Merlin <i>Falco columbarius</i>	▶  2
8	Eastern Phoebe <i>Sayornis phoebe</i>	▶  5
4	Vermilion Flycatcher <i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i>	▶  3
3	Western Kingbird <i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>	▶  1
31	Scissor-tailed Flycatcher <i>Tyrannus forficatus</i>	▶  3
2	White-eyed Vireo <i>Vireo griseus</i>	▶  2
7	Loggerhead Shrike <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	▶  6
20	Blue Jay <i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	▶  8
6	American Crow <i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	▶  2
6	Fish Crow <i>Corvus ossifragus</i>	▶  1

8	Carolina Chickadee <i>Poecile carolinensis</i>	▶  4
6	Tufted Titmouse <i>Baeolophus bicolor</i>	▶  3
455	Tree Swallow <i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	▶  4
130	Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	▶  4
10	Cave Swallow <i>Petrochelidon fulva</i>	▶  3
7	Ruby-crowned Kinglet <i>Corthylio calendula</i>	▶  3
2	Golden-crowned Kinglet <i>Regulus satrapa</i>	▶  2
3	Brown-headed Nuthatch <i>Sitta pusilla</i>	▶  1
16	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher <i>Polioptila caerulea</i>	▶  3
8	Northern House Wren <i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	▶  6
1	Winter Wren <i>Troglodytes hiemalis</i>	▶  1
9	Sedge Wren <i>Cistothorus stellaris</i>	▶  4
2	Marsh Wren <i>Cistothorus palustris</i>	▶  2
8	Carolina Wren <i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i>	▶  7
12	European Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> *	▶  2
4	Gray Catbird <i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	▶  3
1	Brown Thrasher <i>Toxostoma rufum</i>	▶  1
17	Northern Mockingbird <i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	▶  8
2	Eastern Bluebird <i>Sialia sialis</i>	▶  1
2	Hermit Thrush <i>Catharus guttatus</i>	▶  1
10	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i> *	▶  1
6	Bachman's Sparrow <i>Peucaea aestivalis</i>	▶  1
4	White-crowned Sparrow <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	▶  1

4	White-throated Sparrow <i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>	▶  3
3	Seaside Sparrow <i>Ammospiza maritima</i>	▶  1
2	Nelson's Sparrow <i>Ammospiza nelsoni</i>	▶  1
14	Savannah Sparrow <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	▶  4
3	Swamp Sparrow <i>Melospiza georgiana</i>	▶  3
10	Eastern Meadowlark <i>Sturnella magna</i>	▶  5
1	Baltimore Oriole <i>Icterus galbula</i>	▶  1
1000	Red-winged Blackbird <i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	▶  13
15	Bronzed Cowbird <i>Molothrus aeneus</i>	▶  1
285	Brown-headed Cowbird <i>Molothrus ater</i>	▶  4
16	Common Grackle <i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>	▶  3
226	Boat-tailed Grackle <i>Quiscalus major</i>	▶  9
122	Great-tailed Grackle <i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>	▶  7
4	Tennessee Warbler <i>Leiothlypis peregrina</i>	▶  1
3	Orange-crowned Warbler <i>Leiothlypis celata</i>	▶  2
7	Common Yellowthroat <i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	▶  4
1	Hooded Warbler <i>Setophaga citrina</i>	▶  1
1	American Redstart <i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>	▶  1
1	Northern Parula <i>Setophaga americana</i>	▶  1
1	Magnolia Warbler <i>Setophaga magnolia</i>	▶  1
14	Palm Warbler <i>Setophaga palmarum</i>	▶  5
1	Pine Warbler <i>Setophaga pinus</i>	▶  1
9	Yellow-rumped Warbler <i>Setophaga coronata</i>	▶  3

- 12 **Northern Cardinal** *Cardinalis cardinalis* ▶  4
- 2 **Blue Grosbeak** *Passerina caerulea* ▶  1
- 3 **Indigo Bunting** *Passerina cyanea* ▶  2
- 1 **Dickcissel** *Spiza americana* ▶  1

ADDITIONAL TAXA

- 350 **Glossy/White-faced Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus/chihi* ▶  2
- 10 **Boat-tailed/Great-tailed Grackle** *Quiscalus major/mexicanus* ▶  1