



LOUISIANA: YELLOW RAILS & CRAWFISH TAILS

Nov 3, 2011 to Nov 7, 2011

Dan Lane & Jesse Fagan

Dan has put together a really fine trip. What can be better than in-your-face Yellow Rails (and tons of other rails!), walks in Longleaf Pine savannah with Bachman's Sparrow and pitcher plants, and loads of wintering geese, the sky sometimes filled by the thousands?! Plus, you add in the fact that this is a one-site trip, it's also short, and the food, well, it's darn good Cajun eatin' (I must say). The weather this year was also absolutely perfect: blue skies with just a touch of coolness in the air. Indeed, it felt good to stand in the sun.

Highlights this year most definitely were the Yellow Rails (all 30 or 40 or 50 or...) that we saw in flight, plus several on the ground. This is an extremely difficult bird to observe and it's one species that many birders still have yet to see. The Green-tailed Towhee was a highlight for the guides, at least, and for a few of our participants from the East. It was only the twelfth or so record for Louisiana (but expected since this has been an irruptive year for them). We couldn't have done better with the Bachman's Sparrow in the Kisatchie. The Barred Owl was so cool!

Thanks to a great group who really came together from the very beginning. It was fun being with you all. Thanks to my co-leader, Dan "The Man" Lane, and our hosts in the rice fields, Donna Dittmann, Steve Cardiff, and Kevin Berken.

Bird On.

--Jesse aka Motmot

For more information about this tour including future departures, please visit our website at www.fieldguides.com

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*) – A couple of distant birds were spotted just after our lunch at East Jetty.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*) – By the thousands. The most common wintering goose in this region. We saw them well on the ground and in flight.

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens*) – Numerous, but far less common than the previous species.

ROSS'S GOOSE (*Chen rossii*) – We scoped a field that had around 25 individuals of this species. They made for nice comparisons with nearby Snows. They have shorter necks, more rounded heads, and smaller bills.

WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*) – A group of around 30 individuals flew by us pretty quickly. Somewhat unusual to see so many in one place.



Easily the best of the 50+ Yellow Rails we saw on the tour was this cooperative fellow that posed so nicely on the dike! (Photo by guide Jesse Fagan)

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – We had a flock of about 20 birds fly over us pretty high, so we knew that they were migrants (and countable!).

MOTTLED DUCK (*Anas fulvigula*) – This one is very similar to female-plumaged Mallard. We had a couple of close birds and we could make out the yellow-green bill of the female and orange-yellow bill of the male. They also have paler heads and necks that contrast with the darker body (like in Black Duck).

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*)

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – Lots of shovelers were around, many in flight.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Also lots of pintails, but mostly in flight where we could make out their longer tails and slimmer bodies.

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

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – Just one female that Dan spotted in a small containment pond near East Jetty.

In general, the divers were lacking on this tour.

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – We had Neotropic Cormorant closer to the coast especially around Sabine Nature Trail. Several were even showing the wispy white breeding plumes on the head.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – The larger of the two species, which is also found further inland.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – Several groups of soaring migrants.

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – This and the next species were seen everyday of the tour.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – Just a couple around.

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – Surprising to find just one (!) during our time on the coast.

REDDISH EGRET (*Egretta rufescens*) – Dan spotted a white-morph at East Jetty. We then were able to watch it "shadowing" prey and "dancing" along the edge of the water. Very nice.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*)

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Just a brief flyby of a young bird at Sabine Nature Trail.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*) – A number of them over our three days.

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) – The ones we identified (mainly by numbers) were White-faced. In non-breeding plumage, it can be very difficult to separate from Glossy. Glossy are around in much fewer numbers, so we needed to get close to them with a scope, which we never did.

ROSEATE SPOONBILL (*Platalea ajaja*) – A couple of small pink "flamingos" went flying over us. ;-)

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*) – Not nearly as common as Turkey.

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)



A fabulous Bachman's Sparrow in the Longleaf Pine savanna at Kisatchie NF demonstrates that you don't need bright colors to be beautiful! (Photo by guide Jesse Fagan)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Just a single bird.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*) – Splendid show as we watched two perched birds during our walk along the boardwalk at Sabine Nature Trail. Such a sharp looking bird. The Old World equivalent to this species is now called Black-shouldered Kite.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – A pair of adults over the rice fields.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – Numerous over the fields including a few males, the "Gray Ghosts."

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – The only accipiters we saw were of this species. We saw a number of large females, too.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (*Buteo lineatus*) – Pretty common in the forest patches we birded. Especially up in the Kisatchie.

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*)

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – This is a great region for studying wintering Red-tailed Hawks. We saw both eastern and western types, plus a nice juvenile Fuertes. The westerns have darker throats.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara cheriway*) – A good bird for the Louisiana coast and a write-in on the checklist.

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – A couple of different Merlins were seen.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – The three Peregrines sitting on powerpoles right in a row was pretty cool.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

YELLOW RAIL (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) – Well, this is the star of the tour and it didn't let us down. We all had fantastic looks at this species (remember the one on the dike!), and it was hard to estimate how many in total. 30, 40, 75???

CLAPPER RAIL (*Rallus longirostris*) – This one was oblivious to us as it foraged along the water within feet of our, well, feet.

KING RAIL (*Rallus elegans*) – Another great look at this species while on the Sabine boardwalk. We worked on it, but in the end it payed off!

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) – A few in the rice fields.

COMMON MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus*)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – A few non-breeding individuals were on the beach.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Lots of Killdeer.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*) – Several nice groups of this species were seen. Most were huddled together along the beach, and all were in a non-breeding plumage (with the whitish gray heads).

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Several around, at least by voice.

WILLET (*Tringa semipalmata*)

WHIMBREL (AMERICAN) (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – This was the common wintering "peep" or small shorebird.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – We identified this species based mainly on habitat; they prefer the coastal, brackish marshes for feeding. The calls are diagnostic, however, but all the birds we encountered were silent.

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – The dowitchers most likely to be found more inland and at

freshwater sites.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) – Numerous in flight, especially at dawn and dusk.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*)

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – We picked out a bunch of Franklin's at different spots. Nice comparisons were made with the nearby Laughing Gulls.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

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

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*) – We had two different individuals: a first-cycle and an adult. A rare, but regular wintering gull to the upper Gulf.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – A Common Tern was seen just as we got off the ferry. It sat for a long time giving us great studies. The carpal bar was a good mark.

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*) – This one has the "bandido" mask in non-breeding plumage. It was pretty common at different coastal sites.

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*)

SANDWICH TERN (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) – Seen all to briefly in flight. Maybe just Dan and one other participant saw it.

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*)

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) – This one is a uncommon, but regular now in Louisiana. They have expanded greatly into Central Texas, but I was surprised to find so many in Central Louisiana. It was very rare in East Texas when I live there.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

INCA DOVE (*Columbina inca*) – Just three birds seen near Oak Grove.

COMMON GROUND-DOVE (*Columbina passerina*) – A nice pick up and our last columbid (dove) for the trip! Well done.

Strigidae (Owls)

BARRED OWL (*Strix varia*) – A real highlight of the tour! We had this one very well in Kisatchie.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*) – Just a quick flyby. This one was pretty late. Most are gone by mid-October.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – Singles here and there.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*)

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – This one winters in Louisiana and it was already around in pretty good numbers.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*)

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – Just a couple in the Kasatchie.

RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER (*Picoides borealis*) – Wow. Great experience. And it was interesting first locating them in non-pine tree. Good looks at three different birds. This one is federally endangered and restricted to the longleaf pine forest.

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

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – A pair danced around us, but I think most people had good looks (at least in flight).

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*) – A real good bird for Louisiana. Again, Dan's local knowledge helped us find this one.

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*) – A real good bird for Louisiana. Again, Dan's local knowledge helped us find this one.

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – Good to have that local knowledge. Dan put us on this rare bird for Louisiana. There were at least two birds, a young male and an adult male.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – They seemed really common in Louisiana where their populations appear to be doing just fine. In other parts of the country they are not doing so well (experiencing long term population declines).

Vireonidae (Vireos)

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*) – Common wintering bird in coastal Louisiana. I was a little surprised to see so many. Inland they are much rarer.

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*)

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Dan and I had fun trying to figure out which were the crows we were seeing in flight or on powerlines. We disagreed on just one or two. They are easy by voice, and there are obvious size differences, but a lone silent bird can be quite tough.

FISH CROW (*Corvus ossifragus*) – Uh-uh!

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Winters in huge concentrations on the Gulf coastal plain. We saw a bunch, but I wasn't counting!

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Poecile carolinensis*)

TUFTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus bicolor*)

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

BROWN-HEADED NUTHATCH (*Sitta pusilla*) – Good looks at several of these "rubber duckies" in the Kisatchie.

Certhiidae (Creepers)

BROWN CREEPER (*Certhia americana*) [*]

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) [*]

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*) – Fairly common wintering bird here.

SEDGE WREN (*Cistothorus platensis*) – We worked at both Sedge and Marsh in the coastal areas of Cameron Parish. We were successful at seeing both.

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*)

Poliptilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliptila caerulea*) – Like White-eyed Vireo, winters along the coastal plain, but not much further inland.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – Great looks at this species. They like the canopy more than the Ruby-crowned.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – We got them stirred up enough to see their ruby crowns!

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*)

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) – Just one in the Kasatchie near where we saw the Barred Owl.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Hadn't really arrived in large numbers, but seen on a couple of days.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) [*]

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*)

BROWN THRASHER (*Toxostoma rufum*) – A couple were seen on the first day, but generally scarce.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – We picked out their calls in flight including one large flock of at least 40 birds.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – It's rich metallic call is pretty distinctive. We recorded several on each tour day.

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

PINE WARBLER (*Dendroica pinus*) – Mainly in the Casatchi NF.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – This one may have only been heard, but it was heard a number of times! A tough one to see well b/c they like to hang out in marshy areas or in dense, wet grass. [*]

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Wilsonia pusilla*) – I was surprised again to see so many Wilson's wintering along the coast. We had probably three or four total for the tour. It is probably much rarer further inland.

Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows and Allies)

GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE (*Pipilo chlorurus*) – Dan and I looked at each other in surprise. Could it be?! Yes, it could.

Green-tailed Towhee! Only the twelfth or so record for Louisiana and the second for the year. A year that saw an irruption across the southern US.

BACHMAN'S SPARROW (*Peucaea aestivalis*) – A real highlight of the tour. We had a memorable encounter with a perched bird in the Kisatchie NF. I got a pretty good photo! ;-)

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*)

FIELD SPARROW (*Spizella pusilla*)

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*) – This is a sharp looking bird. We saw it well while it kicked around in the middle of the road, then eventually sat on the barbwire for us.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

GRASSHOPPER SPARROW (*Ammodramus savannarum*) – A difficult bird to see well. We were fortunate to find one foraging in the open along the Sabine Nature Trail.

LE CONTE'S SPARROW (*Ammodramus leconteii*) – Our hard work, persistence, and local knowledge really paid off.

Great looks at two close birds. Dan even got them in the scope!

NELSON'S SPARROW (*Ammodramus nelsoni*) – One snuck up on us quickly and quietly...and before we knew it, it was gone!

SEASIDE SPARROW (*Ammodramus maritimus*)

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*)

SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*) – Pretty common and encountered on all days. Winters in Louisiana.

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia albicollis*)

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – We lucked out in finding this species, which is an uncommon wintering sparrow in Louisiana. We had four in the thick scrub on our final afternoon.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED) (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*)

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*) [*]

DICKCISSEL (*Spiza americana*) [*]

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*)

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Their call sounds like a rusty swing set, at least to my ears! :-)

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus major*) – This species occurs along the coast. It is very similar in appearance to Great-tailed, but has a more rounded head, an iridescent green wash to the body, and a different call. It does overlap in places with Great-tailed.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Seen at all gas stations and Wal-Mart parking lots.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – The huge cowbird flock we observed was pretty awesome. Must have been thousands of individuals.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*)

MAMMALS

HUMAN BEING (*Homo sapiens*)

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*)

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*)

NORTHERN RACCOON (*Procyon lotor*)

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 151 bird taxa and 5 mammal taxa