



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Louisiana: Yellow Rails & Crawfish Tails 2016**

Oct 27, 2016 to Oct 31, 2016

Dan Lane & Dave Stejskal

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



*There goes another one! One of at least nine Yellow Rails that flushed in front of the rice combine as we all looked on in Jefferson Davis Parish. (photo by guide Dave Stejskal)*

What a difference a couple of months make! Remember the severe flooding that hit southern Louisiana in August? At the time, we at Field Guides had no idea whether this tour would get off the ground, or if we'd have to cancel it altogether. Nearly all of the places that we would visit on this tour were under water, including the rice fields (rice likes water, but not THAT much water). But, as it turned out, it never again rained appreciably in southern Louisiana after that and our tour route dried out, making the tour a definite 'Go'.

We never saw any rain this year, unlike the 2015 tour, and our weather for the entire trip was idyllic -- not too chilly in the mornings, not too hot during the day, just right. The only downside to the dry weather was that the rice fields had really dried out, raising quite a bit of dust that eventually covered us all, when the combine made its passes through the fields. Finding the tour's namesake bird was pretty easy, with the combine putting up no fewer than nine Yellow Rails -- a few of which allowed some prolonged viewing by members of the tour group. In addition to seeing the Yellow Rails, we also managed looks at a few Soras, a couple of Virginia Rails, and a few big King Rails in addition to the numerous sparrows and wrens that spooked up out of the rice ahead of the combine. Overall, it was really quite a show, one that we couldn't have managed without the kind and skilled help of Donna Dittman and Steve Cardiff. Thank you both!

Besides the fabulous Yellow Rail and the rice harvesting experience, we had quite a good trip, finding quite a few of the local specialties along our route. Best among these would be some of those piney woods birds that we saw in the Kisatchie NF, such as the multiple Brown-headed Nuthatches, a compliant (finally!) Bachman's Sparrow, and a rare adult male Red-cockaded Woodpecker (I could see the red in one of my photos). Others that stood out were a fantastic Barred Owl perched overhead, a lovely adult White-tailed Kite along the coast, cute Piping Plovers running along the sandy beach, fabulously close Nelson's and Seaside sparrows, a pioneering Great Kiskadee, a very confiding Clapper Rail, a hidden (but exhilarating nonetheless!) pair of close Black Rails, elegant Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, a curious Sedge Wren, and so many more!

Dan and I want to thank all of you for joining us this year on this great little tour. We had a blast birding - and eating! - with all of you for those few days, and hope that we have the chance to bird with you again sometime soon! Good birding!

-- Dave

## 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*) – Ken spotted a big flock of these near Niblett Rd. on our first full day of the tour. A relatively recent invader to s.w. Louisiana, this one seems to be pretty well established here now.

**GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** (*Anser albifrons*) – We witnessed the first big flocks of these arriving for the winter.

**SNOW GOOSE** (*Chen caerulescens*) – Just a handful of these were seen arriving with the Greater White-fronteds on that first full day. There were a few dark-morph Snows, or 'Blue Geese', mixed in with the typical white ones.

**WOOD DUCK** (*Aix sponsa*) – Just a few of these along Pintail Loop at Cameron Prairie NWR.

**MOTTLED DUCK (GULF COAST)** (*Anas fulvigula maculosa*) – We only saw this one in flight, unfortunately, at Pintail Loop.

**BLUE-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas discors*)

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

**WILD TURKEY** (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – A couple of these were released into Peveto Woods along the coast a few years back, and they seem to be holding their own there! [I]

### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

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

### Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

**NEOTROPIC CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – It was fascinating to see that huge active breeding colony along Pintail Loop! The timing for breeding in this state is poorly known - but we all learned something new!

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

### Anhingidae (Anhingas)

**ANHINGA** (*Anhinga anhinga*) – One of the characteristic denizens of the Southern swamps.

### Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

**AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN** (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – A few flocks along the coast of Cameron Parish.

**BROWN PELICAN** (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – The state bird of Louisiana was well-represented along the coast!

### Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

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

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

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

**LITTLE BLUE HERON** (*Egretta caerulea*) – Very few of these were still around at this season.

**TRICOLORED HERON** (*Egretta tricolor*) – We had several nice looks at the 'Louisiana Heron' along the coastal wetlands in Cameron Parish.

**REDDISH EGRET** (*Egretta rufescens*) – A couple of young birds behaved well for the group along Holly Beach in Cameron Parish.

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

**GREEN HERON** (*Butorides virescens*) – Seen by a few of us along the drive on Day 2.

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – A few folks got on an imm. bird at the jetty near Cameron while Dan and I made our picnic lunch.

### Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

**WHITE IBIS** (*Eudocimus albus*) – One of the most common of the herons and ibis represented on this tour at this season.

**WHITE-FACED IBIS** (*Plegadis chihi*) – There may have been a few Glossy Ibis mixed in with these, but the vast majority of the dark Plegadis ibis that we saw were surely this species.

**ROSEATE SPOONBILL** (*Platalea ajaja*) – A couple of flybys were all that we encountered.

### Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

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

### Pandionidae (Osprey)

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*) – One good flyby look along the coast in Cameron Parish.

### Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

**WHITE-TAILED KITE** (*Elanus leucurus*) – This gorgeous raptor was a highlight for many on this tour - and Dan knew exactly where to take us to find one!

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus cyaneus*)

**SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** (*Accipiter striatus*) – A brief flyby for some of us on our way to the rice fields.

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

**BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – For most folks at Lake Arthur.

**RED-SHOULDERED HAWK** (*Buteo lineatus*) – Certainly heard by some of us, but it's strange that this widespread species wasn't detected more often on this tour.

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

*Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)*

**YELLOW RAIL** (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) – YESSSSS!!!!!! What a fantastic experience with this bird!! Between the combine rides and the quad rides with Steve and Donna, all of us had exceptional views of multiple birds in the freshly cut rice fields in Jefferson Davis Parish. The dry conditions there this year made it particularly easy to approach birds that had just put down in the stubble, too! After having waded through a marsh in the summer in s. Manitoba years ago, I think this is the better way to try to see this special bird! Thanks to Steve Cardiff and Donna Dittman for their organization and help to make everybody in our group a happy camper!

**BLACK RAIL** (*Laterallus jamaicensis*) – It was quite a thrill just to hear this one and know that we were mere feet from it! A true rarity in Louisiana, this spot was precisely where Dan had one years ago. [✱]

**KING RAIL** (*Rallus elegans*) – We flushed a few of these big rails from the rice fields as the combine made its way through the rice.

**CLAPPER RAIL** (*Rallus crepitans*) – We had fantastic looks of a responsive bird at the east jetty in Cameron. Now split from the birds along the Pacific coast (that's Ridgway's Rail now), this one may have been a 'lifer' for some of us.

**VIRGINIA RAIL** (*Rallus limicola*) – At least a couple of birds scurried from the rice harvesting action to the safety of the taller weeds on the edge.

**SORA** (*Porzana carolina*) – We had several good looks of a bird in flight during the rice harvesting spectacle.

**COMMON GALLINULE** (*Gallinula galeata*) – Multiples along the Pintail Loop on our second full day.

**AMERICAN COOT** (*Fulica americana*) – The last of our EIGHT rallids on this tour! A record for the trip!

*Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)*

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

**AMERICAN AVOCET** (*Recurvirostra americana*) – Quite a few of these were seen along the immediate coast in Cameron Parish.

*Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)*

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

**SNOWY PLOVER** (*Charadrius nivosus*) – This one is now split from the Old World Kentish Plover - maybe an 'armchair lifer' for some of you!

**SEMIPALMATED PLOVER** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

**PIPING PLOVER** (*Charadrius melodus*) – A couple of birds only along the sandy beaches in Cameron Parish.

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*)

*Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)*

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

**STILT SANDPIPER** (*Calidris himantopus*) – It took some work with the scope - and a lot of patience - to get everyone a look at this one among the throngs of other shorebirds on that first morning of the tour.

**SANDERLING** (*Calidris alba*)

**DUNLIN** (*Calidris alpina*)

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*)

**WESTERN SANDPIPER** (*Calidris mauri*) – A few of these were mixed in with the more common Dunlin and Least Sandpipers on that first day.

**LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – All of the dowitchers that we scrutinized were indeed this species.

**WILSON'S SNIBE** (*Gallinago delicata*) – We had some good scope views of a few birds among the more numerous dowitchers.

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularius*)

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

**WILLET** (*Tringa semipalmata*) – According to Dan, the birds wintering along the coast here are 'Western' Willets.

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

*Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

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

**FRANKLIN'S GULL** (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – A couple of birds among the numerous similar Laughing Gulls along Holly Beach in Cameron Parish.

**RING-BILLED GULL** (*Larus delawarensis*) – Surprisingly few.

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

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** (*Larus fuscus*) – A couple of first-cycle birds flew right by us along the beach on the afternoon that we tried to see those pesky Black Rails.

**GULL-BILLED TERN** (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – This was the least common tern that we encountered along the beaches in Cameron Parish.

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

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

**ROYAL TERN** (*Thalasseus maximus*) – At this season, the Royals always show a dark eye that's completely isolated from the black crown and nape.

*Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)*

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

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

**INCA DOVE** (*Columbina inca*) – A single bird spotted by Julie along Niblett Rd. was the only one on the tour.

**WHITE-WINGED DOVE** (*Zenaida asiatica*) – Increasing rapidly in s. Louisiana.

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

*Strigidae (Owls)*

**GREAT HORNED OWL** (*Bubo virginianus*) – We had a couple of nice encounters with this one, especially at the end of our second full day.

**BARRED OWL** (*Strix varia*) – Dan knew where to find this impressive owl in the piney woods on that last full day of the trip. Great looks!!

*Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)*

**BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – Common on the roadside power lines near the coast.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

**RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – Our most common woodpecker on the tour.

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

**DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides pubescens*)

**HAIRY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides villosus*) – This one and the above sapsucker got us going a little bit in the piney woods, thinking that we might have found that elusive Red-cockaded Woodpecker!

**RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER** (*Picoides borealis*) – Persistence paid off with fine views of an adult male along the roadside in the Kisatchie NF after lunch. We saw plenty of nesting trees in the forest (marked by bold white striping painted on the trunks), but these rare woodpeckers are very quiet, especially at this season. It's a very easy bird to miss, but we scored as the clock ran down!

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

**PILEATED WOODPECKER** (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – Maybe seen by a couple of folks, other than Dan, before it flew off into the woods.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

**CRESTED CARACARA** (*Caracara cheriway*) – We scoped a nice adult and a youngster soon after we got off of the ferry in Cameron. This is another one that's increased markedly in the state in recent years.

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

**MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – A couple of these on our day at the coast.

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – Perched along the roadside near Pintail Loop on Day 2.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

**EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE** (*Contopus virens*) – Julie found us a very late individual in Peveto Woods on the Cameron Parish coast.

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

**VERMILION FLYCATCHER** (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – Thanks to Ken's scouting before the start of the tour, we all got to enjoy a young male in Sabine NWR.

**GREAT KISKADEE** (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) – We easily saw a member of a long-staying pair in Sulphur at a little RV park - with the past year's nest nearby in the same tree! There are still very few records of this tropical species from Louisiana.

**WESTERN KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – A single bird on the telephone wires near Broussard Beach was a mild surprise there.

**SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER** (*Tyrannus forficatus*) – We found a small group of these elegant flycatchers on our way to our picnic lunch spot at the Cameron East Jetty.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

**LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE** (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

**WHITE-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo griseus*) – Our best looks were of a cooperative bird along Niblett Rd. on our first full day.

**BLUE-HEADED VIREO** (*Vireo solitarius*) – I called this one the 'Solitary Vireo' for many years when I was growing up and then while starting to lead birding tours with Field Guides. It's hard to believe that the 'Solitary' Vireo (re-)split is 20 years old!

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

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

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

**FISH CROW** (*Corvus ossifragus*) – We had fewer of these crows than we expected this year.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

**NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW** (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

**TREE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – We saw some impressive concentrations of this species on the first couple of days of the tour.

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

**CLIFF SWALLOW** (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – A few mixed in with the more common swallows at the Yellow Rail rice fields.

**CAVE SWALLOW** (*Petrochelidon fulva*) – This one seems to be quite regular at this season with the hordes of migrating swallows near the coast in s.w. Louisiana, and we all saw at least a few of these while we tried to find our Yellow Rails on our first full day.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

**CAROLINA CHICKADEE** (*Poecile carolinensis*) – Only on our first full day of the tour.

**TUFTED TITMOUSE** (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – A few of these charismatic parids came in for a look at our Barred owl spot in the Kisatchie NF.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

**BROWN-HEADED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta pusilla*) – Of the few piney woods specialties that we searched for on our last full day, this one was, by far, the easiest to find.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

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

**SEDGE WREN** (*Cistothorus platensis*) – It took a fair amount of work to pull this one out for a decent look, but we prevailed!

**MARSH WREN** (*Cistothorus palustris*)

**CAROLINA WREN** (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – Heard far more often than we saw it.

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)

**BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER** (*Poliophtila caerulea*)

Regulidae (Kinglets)

**GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus satrapa*) – A few of these were mixed in with the more common Ruby-crowneds in the Kisatchie NF.

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



#### Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

**EASTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia sialis*) – Not plentiful anywhere on this tour.

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

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*) – I think one flyby bird in Welsh was our sum total for the tour!

#### Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

**GRAY CATBIRD** (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – I expected to hear more of these on this tour.

**BROWN THRASHER** (*Toxostoma rufum*)

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

#### Sturnidae (Starlings)

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

#### Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

**AMERICAN PIPIT** (*Anthus rubescens*) – Brief flyby looks on the first full day.

#### Parulidae (New World Warblers)

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis celata*) – There weren't many warblers around during our tour, but this was one of the most frequently seen species - and we didn't see all that many of these, either.

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*) [I\*]

**BAY-BREASTED WARBLER** (*Setophaga castanea*) – A real surprise at Peveto Woods, Rick spotted this one right next to the parking lot just as we were about to leave.

**PINE WARBLER** (*Setophaga pinus*) – A few nice males in the piney woods at Kisatchie NF on our last full day together.

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

#### Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

**BACHMAN'S SPARROW** (*Peucaea aestivalis*) – YESSS!!! It really took a coordinated effort on our part, but we all eventually found a bird in the light understory of the piney woods that cooperated long enough for all to see.

**NELSON'S SPARROW** (*Ammodramus nelsoni*) – Nicely responsive at our picnic lunch spot near Cameron. Formerly known as Sharp-tailed Sparrow, but it's now split from the coastal form, the Saltmarsh Sparrow.

**SEASIDE SPARROW** (*Ammodramus maritimus*) – Another sparrow that cooperated well for the group near Cameron.

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

**SWAMP SPARROW** (*Melospiza georgiana*) – A few nice looks early on.

#### Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

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

**INDIGO BUNTING** (*Passerina cyanea*) – A few were still moving through on the first couple of days of this short tour.

**DICKCISSEL** (*Spiza americana*) – Some may have seen a tiny speck of a bird as it called and flew over Niblett Rd. on the first day.

#### Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

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

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

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

**BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus major*) – Most of ours were seen along the immediate coast in Cameron Parish. In this part of their range, the males are dark-eyed, contrasting with the pale-eyed male Great-tailed Grackles.

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

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

#### Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

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

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## MAMMALS

**VIRGINIA OPOSSUM** (*Didelphis virginianus*) – DOR only on our third full day.

**NINE-BANDED ARMADILLO** (*Dasypus novemcinctus*) – Another DOR on that last full day.

**SWAMP RABBIT** (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*) – Leah may have been the only one to see this one on Day 2.

**EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – I think our only ones were on Day 3 up in the piney woods in Kisatchie NF.

**FOX SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus niger*) – We had a few in the Welsh/Niblett Rd area on that first full day.

**HISPID COTTON RAT** (*Sigmodon hispidus*) – A few of these were seen darting between rows of rice stubble as we rode the rice combine on Day 1.

**BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN** (*Tursiops truncatus*) – A few of these were seen quite well from the ferry in Cameron.

**NORTHERN RACCOON** (*Procyon lotor*) – Another DOR on that 3rd day.

**STRIPED SKUNK** (*Mephitis mephitis*) – Day 3 was a good day for DORs...

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

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Totals for the tour: 144 bird taxa and 9 mammal taxa