

Louisiana Rails & Birding Festival With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



Oct. 27 – Nov. 1, 2021

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Join us for a most unusual birding event: Louisiana's Yellow Rails and Rice Festival. This unique event brings together rice harvesting and birding, thanks to friendly local farmers who allow access not only to their fields, but also to the combines used to harvest the rice.

We also make time to visit Louisiana's rich coastal region, alive with herons, egrets, and beautiful Roseate Spoonbill. We walk the beaches and learn skills to identify shorebirds. Forested areas bring the possibility of seeing Crested Caracara, Painted Bunting, Pileated Woodpecker, and more.

Andrew Haffenden coordinates and guides this fun journey. See up to four kinds of rails, bird from a working combine harvester, enjoy energizing Cajun music, and indulge in Cajun delicacies. Andrew combines the festival, great food, and exceptional birding—don't miss the fun!

Please note: **The timing of day-to-day events is weather dependent**—if there is very heavy rain, the fields cannot be harvested until they dry out a bit. We have allowed several days for the rice field birding for Yellow Rail, and our other birding activities are arranged around our days in the fields. Generally, half to one day is devoted to working a rice field while it is harvested, but if few rails are seen, we add another session. Thus, the following itinerary is likely to change around due to weather and bird activity—flexibility is key.

Tour Highlights

- Bird from a working combine harvester, in search of four different species of rails
- Explore Longleaf Pine savannah, one of the most endangered habitats in the U.S., for Bachman's Sparrow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine Warbler, and Pileated Woodpecker
- Walk the beaches of Cameron County in search of five species of plover and other water and shorebirds
- Embark on a bayou boat ride, looking for large numbers of geese, ducks, ibis, shorebirds, and even Crested Caracara

Tour Summary

6-Day / 5-Night Louisiana Birding & Festival Fun
w/ Andrew Haffenden
\$2290 from Lafayette
Airport is Lafayette Regional (LFT)

Itinerary

Wed., Oct. 27 Arrivals at Lafayette Airport

Fly in to Lafayette today. Delta, United, and American fly to Lafayette, and all have flights arriving between 4:00 and 5:00 PM. Do try to book one of these mid- to late-afternoon flights; earlier flights mean a longer wait at the airport before our group transfers to the hotel. From Lafayette we drive to our hotel in Jennings, about 30 minutes away, where the festival is centered.



Enjoy a welcome dinner, perhaps some wonderful local seafood if you like, and a chance to get to know your travel companions.

Accommodations at Hampton Inn & Suites, Jennings (B,L,D)

Thurs., Oct. 28 Rice Fields

Today is our first chance to look for rails. We first travel to a watery field to look for feeding birds. Typically, we see some species in numbers ranging from hundreds to thousands, including Greater White-fronted Geese, dark ibises—mostly White-faced but there are a sprinkling of Glossy and hybrids—and several species of shorebirds, including Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs. Red-winged Blackbird can also number in the tens of thousands. Other species often seen are Gull-billed Tern, American Avocet, Yellow-headed Blackbird, and often Vermilion Flycatcher. In the afternoon we watch the combine harvesting the rice, flushing birds such as Yellow, King, and Virginia Rails and Sora, with the latter two often counting in the 50 – 100 range. American Bittern is also often flushed. Although we typically see the most birds (and enjoy the most comfortable birding) from the sidelines, we do get an opportunity to climb aboard the combine for a close, though often dusty, view.

Accommodations at Hampton Inn & Suites, Jennings (B,L,D)

OPTIONAL BLACK RAIL FIELD TRIP: Tonight, the Festival offers an optional Black Rail field trip for the adventurous among us—let us know when you sign up if this is of interest. Assist with a salt marsh banding operation in Cameron Parish using rope pulls and spotlights! Target species is Black Rail, which has been flushed and banded during the previous festival Evening Black Rail Survey trips in 2017, 2018, and 2019. However, since 2019, the coast has experienced two major hurricanes with tidal surge in 2020; we do not know what to expect this year. The number of participants is limited. Note that this activity is **AFTER DARK** in a coastal salt marsh. **This field trip is strenuous.** Walking in salt marsh can be extremely hard especially in the dark; the ground is uneven with holes, vegetation is thick and knee-deep, and it is wet. During previous banding efforts, groups have walked about half a mile to flush a handful of rails. There are no standing, sitting, or side-viewing areas—to see the rails you have to walk into the marsh and keep up with the group.

Fri., Oct. 29 Pineywoods Birding

Today we explore Longleaf Pine savannah, one of the most endangered habitats in the U.S. We look especially for pine savannah specialties, including Bachman's Sparrow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine Warbler, and Pileated Woodpecker. We also visit several crawfish ponds for an array of herons, egrets, Roseate Spoonbill, and often raptors, including Bald Eagle. To the east we also visit the Crowley Sewer Ponds, which always provide something of interest.

Accommodations at Hampton Inn & Suites, Jennings (B,L,D)



Sat., Oct. 30 Cameron County

Today we head to the southeast corner of the state to look for marsh birds, waterbirds, and shorebirds along the beaches. Cheniers—oak hummocks—should provide late migrant warblers and arriving winter residents. Resident Mottled Duck and early arriving northern ducks provide added variety. We expect to find all five species of plovers on the beaches: Black-bellied, Semi-palmated, Snowy, Piping, and Wilson’s, plus other shorebirds such as Western Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, American Avocet, and Western Willet.

Away from the beach, migrating Long-billed Dowitcher and Stilt Sandpiper may be seen. Probable terns include Caspian, Royal, possibly Sandwich, and Black Skimmer, with Gull-billed over the marshes and occasionally on the beach. Nelson’s and Seaside Sparrows inhabit the marshes here, and with a bit of patience both can usually be seen. We are especially on the watch for Crested Caracara as we drive the more northern part of this area.

Accommodations at Hampton Inn & Suites, Jennings (B,L,D)

Sun., Oct. 31 Greater Jennings Region

We return in the general direction of Cameron again to bird Cameron Prairie NWR and Lacassine NWR and other locales in the area. We take a boat ride on the bayou. Today should provide us with Fulvous Whistling-duck, Wood Stork, Wilson’s Phalarope, Crested Caracara, large numbers of geese, ducks, ibis, shorebirds, and others. Vermilion Flycatcher, Cave Swallow, Sprague’s Pipit, Lark Sparrow, and Yellow-headed Blackbird should also be present. Le Conte’s and Henslow’s Sparrows and other soggy area birds are likely as well.

Accommodations at Hampton Inn & Suites, Jennings (B,L,D)

Mon., Nov. 1 Departures

This morning we transfer to Lafayette Airport for our departure flights. Please book flights out from 10:00 AM onwards. (B)

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Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive between 4:00 and 5:00 PM on October 27 at the Lafayette Regional Airport (LFT), Louisiana. We list this time based on when a number of flights on varying airlines come in to Lafayette. If you arrive early, it will just mean a bit of a wait for our group transfer. Please book flights out for 10:00 AM onwards on November 1.

Photo Credits

Roseate Spoonbill, Steve Shunk (SS); Blue Heron, Blue Heron, Joshua J. Cotten on Unsplash; Yellow Rail by Dominic Sherony via wikimedia; Sora, Becky Matsubara via flickr; Festival, courtesy of yellowrailsandrice.com; Painted Bunting, Dave Smith; Louisiana Marsh, Stephanie-Moody; Pileated Woodpecker, Carlos Sanchez (CS); King Rail, CS; Bald Eagle by Richard Lee via Unsplash; American Bittern, CS; Bachman's Sparrow, CS; Greater White-fronted Geese Steve Buckingham.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the Journey: \$2290 DBL / \$2590 SGL from Lafayette, Louisiana.

Tour cost includes five night's accommodations, all meals from dinner day one to breakfast day six, airport transfers, transportation during the journey, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, festival registration, \$200 festival fee and \$50 field trip package, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour cost does not include round-trip airfare to and from Lafayette, personal expenses such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, and gratuities for luggage handling or other services. Guide gratuities are at your discretion.

Tour Notes & Pace

Group: This tour will have a maximum of 11 travelers and 2 guides, traveling in two vehicles.

Schedule: The rice harvest is weather dependent, so our schedule is flexible if we need to visit the fields on an alternate day.

Dining: Casual, at restaurants that feature local foods including seafood and southern cuisine.

Pace: Moderate, full days of birding and walks on sometimes wet but established roads and trails, or on the beach, a typical walk is one-half to up to possibly two miles. Option to return to hotel on several days if one wishes a lighter pace.