



# GREAT BIRDING PROJECTS



An approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing

30 October 2012

## ***Rails and Rice Festival*** *Evaluating a festival like no other*

The fourth annual Yellow Rails and Rice Festival took place on 24-28 October 2012, based out of Jennings, in southwest Louisiana. Designed with birding fun in mind, the festival's goal has been to provide participants a unique opportunity to view Yellow Rails - and other birds - while also bringing birders and rice farmers together to realize the value to birds of the area's "working wetlands."



Yellow Rails are elusive, to say the least. But the timing of southwest Louisiana's second rice harvest - "ratoon" - can be an ideal opportunity to pursue this species, as well as Soras and Virginia Rails in the rice fields. This rail-search used to be an informal practice in the past, with regional birders on the alert for active combines flushing these birds out of the fields. But through this Yellow Rails and Rice Festival, the experience has been formally organized and has

been mutually beneficial, with birders and rice farmers teaming up to make the opportunity available to an appreciative public. This [short 2010 video](#) provides a glimpse of the experience, including from the cab of a rice combine.

The festival schedule is fairly casual, and the participants can attend all field days in the rice (weather permitting) or come and go at their leisure. Leaders and facilitators are positioned at field sites and help participants spot birds as well as provide information or answer questions. The festival is relatively small, capped at the number of participants who can potentially ride the combines and cover the available fields in a reasonable fashion. This year, there were 125 people attending, from 27 states and five countries.



Here is a wonderful event for people interested in waterbirds in general and rails in particular. It is also a perfect opportunity to appreciate the value of rice, which is the only mass-produced bird-compatible crop in the U.S.

In addition to visiting rice fields, participants at this festival also joined field trips to local

points of interest, highlighting some of southwestern Louisiana's other habitats and the birds associated with them: geese, ducks, ibises, herons, shorebirds, and songbirds aplenty.

Many of the agencies and organizations that study, manage, and protect these bird-filled areas also assist at the festival, so that participants can learn more about their activities. Cooperating organizations, partners, and sponsors are [varied](#), indeed. In many ways, this is a model festival, specifically when it comes to developing and nurturing a crucial and lively birder/farmer connection.

Ecotourists and avitourists might also note that the area of this festival is just to the east of the [Creole Nature Trail](#), an official All-American Road, and is part of America's Wetland Birding Trail, serving a core for its [Lacassine Loop](#). These routes cover National Wildlife Refuges, bayous, lakes, and, of course, rice-country, just packed with birds and wildlife.

View the full schedule for the 2012 Yellow Rails and Rice Festival [here](#), and take a look at multiple photos from last year's festival (2011), in a [slideshow](#).

Of course, there are already plans being made for the 2013 festival.

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### Liability Issues on the Rice Farms

In 2008, the Louisiana legislature expanded the limitation of liability in *La. R.S. 9:2795.5* to include limitation of liability for certain agritourism activities. Under this law, there is no liability for an injury to or death of a participant in an agritourism activity if such injury or death results from the inherent risks of the agritourism activity. Before being allowed to attend, all participants at the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival had to sign forms indicating that they hold harmless the organizers, sponsors, and farmers involved in the events associated with the festival.

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## ***Birding Diversity Meeting Video-archived*** *Meeting held in Bloomington, Minnesota, 13 October*

On 13 October, dozens of bird educators and bird conservationists got together at the second "Focus on Diversity - Changing the Face of American Birding" meeting at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge in Bloomington, Minnesota. The event was led by Dave Magpiong and his [Fledging Birders Institute](#).

The purpose of the meeting was to develop effective outreach methods to diverse audiences - specifically, Hispanic, African-American, Asian, and Native-American - using a message of birding and nature-study opportunities, outdoor recreation, and a conservation ethic.

Below you can be directed to some of the key archived videos from the conference. (The audio in the beginning may be a bit loud, but the volume levels out as one gets further along.)

- 1 [Early Morning Live Stream](#)
- 2 [Late Morning Live Stream](#)



## ***"Birds and Nature"***

### *An interesting radio broadcast*

You can also connect with a two-hour radio show (out of Pittsburgh - WMNY, 1360AM Radio) from Sunday, 7 October, with Scott Shalaway ("Bird and Nature") [here](#).

The entire show is informative, but Scott Shalaway and Paul Baicich start a particularly interesting discussion about half-way into the program, a dialogue that goes on for about 20 minutes. This exchange emphasizes the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp, but also National Wildlife Refuges, American hunting culture, current birding, feeders, and outdoor trends (e.g., National Survey on Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation).

### **Words to Consider:**

"The universe is full of magical things, patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper."

- Eden Phillpotts (1862-1960) Indian-born British novelist and poet

### **GBP Bulletin Archives**

Great Birding Projects is a vehicle to promote a creative approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing. GBP functions as a bridge to an innovative engagement between people and birds. You can access all previous issues of the *GBP* bulletin on the GBP website [here](#).

