

ATTENTION:

WARNING

Under Louisiana law, R.S. 9:2795.5, there is no liability for an injury to or death of a participant in an agritourism activity conducted at this agritourism location if such injury or death results from the inherent risks of the agritourism activity.

Inherent risks of agritourism activities include, among others, risks of injury inherent to land, equipment and animals, as well as the potential for you to act in a negligent manner that may contribute to your injury or death. You are assuming the risk of participating in this agritourism activity.



It is important to realize that the majority of the areas visited by the public during the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival are private farm properties. These are working farms and farm activities are in progress during the festival. For that reason, it is important to always remain alert and pay attention to your surroundings while visiting a farm. Farm roads are intended for and used by farm vehicles and equipment- roads can be rough, uneven, muddy, and slippery. Adjacent fields, ditches, or areas with standing water can also pose potential hazards if caution or good judgement is not used. Farm equipment is large and potentially very dangerous, so keep a safe distance from farm operations. For a good festival experience, always use caution when in your vehicle or on foot to avoid injury to yourself or damage to personal property.

Typical Louisiana environmental hazards can also occur during the festival or on these properties, such as heat, humidity, insect pests (notably fire ants, mosquitoes, and biting flies), even occasionally poisonous snakes. Use normal precautions to protect yourself from these dangers, such as wearing rubber boots, sunscreen, and drinking plenty of fluids.



The **Yellow Rails and Rice Festival** is intended: 1) to bring birdwatchers and other interested participants and rice farmers together during Louisiana's late (second) rice harvest in a more organized format that will make Yellow Rail searching a more reliable endeavor; 2) to give individuals the opportunity to see rice harvesting operations up close and personal and to further appreciate the rich cultural traditions of southwest Louisiana agriculture-based communities; 3) to promote mutually beneficial agritourism/ecotourism that will provide recreational enjoyment and generate economic opportunities in southwestern Louisiana's rice-growing region and adjacent areas; 4) to further educate the public of the critical importance of rice cultivation and other "working wetlands" to bird populations and to encourage cooperation between agricultural and bird conservation interests in a joint effort to preserve these relatively bird friendly agricultural systems; and, most importantly, 5) to have fun, see lots of great birds, and meet lots of nice people!

brochure printed courtesy of

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Yellow Rails are secretive denizens of marshes and wet field, rarely affording good views. But, during the second rice harvest, they can usually be seen flushing in advance of working combines.

YELLOW RAILS & RICE FESTIVAL

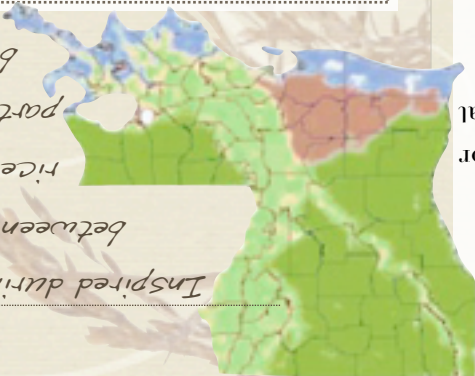
Inspired during a humorous dinner conversation

between friends - one couple birders, the other

rice farmers - it's our hope that not only will

participants enjoy this event but learn something about

birds, working wetlands, and importance of US rice!



Louisiana's coastal prairie comprises about 2.5 million acres (indicated by brown on map). Following completion of the railroad in 1885, farmers flocked to this area and rapidly converted nearly 100% to agriculture. Due to the area's water retaining ability, rice became the most tenable crop, which was fortunate for most wildlife species because rice is somewhat similar in structure to native prairie grasses and water is a principal component of its production. Rice production created a small but critical replacement ecosystem, which helped ameliorate habitat loss to wildlife in the region. Rice farmers also use some form of dry rotation to minimize weeds to maintain rice yield, such as alternating the rice crop with another (such as soybeans or sorghum), or allowing fields to go fallow. But introduction of crawfish aquaculture during the 1970s and use of a crawfish-rice rotation greatly benefits birds by providing wet soil/aquatic habitats across a wider area throughout the year. The expansion of crawfish aquaculture was also occurring during the same period when so much coastal marsh was being lost - since 1950 over 1.5 million acres of adjacent wetlands.

Five important agriculture waterbird habitats are created by rice and crawfish farming: mudflats, shallowly flooded or lightly vegetated impoundments, shallowly flooded and densely vegetated impoundments, deeper water impoundments, and heavily vegetated drainage ditches. Located at the southern

terminus of the Mississippi flyway, a visitor to SW Louisiana's rice-growing region can hardly miss the sheer spectacle of bird numbers associated with these habitats from winter flocks of geese and other waterfowl, wading species such as herons and ibis, and large concentrations of migrant shorebirds. And, during harvest activities, secretive species, such as Yellow Rails, can be observed when they are flushed in advance of combines.

A pilot program called Working Wetlands Initiative is trying to gain legislative momentum; this program would provide economic and societal incentive for farmers who participate in shorebird friendly/other waterbird management. Because rice and crawfish cultivation provides a critical habitat resource and the importance of this artificial habitat extends beyond state borders, operations that manage water resources that result in creation of wetland wildlife habitat should be recognized for their environmental benefits.

Consider what would be the outcome if this habitat disappeared.



A combine cutting rice. Rice is structurally similar to native prairie grasses.



Snow, White-fronted, and Ross's geese resting in a rice field.



Water is used to control weeds. Here waders make use of a flooded field.