



DESERT INSTITUTE
JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL
PARK ASSOCIATION

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ANTS: the UNSUNG HEROES of the DESERT

FIELD CLASS / FALL 2023

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Most people can recognize a few species of ants, but there are actually dozens of bizarre species all around us, often hidden in plain sight. In this class, participants will embark on short hikes at multiple locations throughout Joshua Tree National Park. During these hikes, we will learn how to find and identify various desert ant species. We will discuss the biology of the ants we find, and emphasize how they are a critical component to desert ecosystems. This course will involve caravan driving from location-to-location, and participants are responsible for their own transportation; the class will end at Cottonwood Bajada, a different location from where it begins.

MEETING LOCATION

[Black Rock Nature Center](#), 9800 Black Rock Canyon Road, Yucca Valley, CA 92284

DATE and TIME

Saturday, Sept 16th, 8a to 3p

Please arrive on time; we start classes promptly, and in the case of hikes or other classes on the go, we cannot wait for students who arrive late.

ACTIVITY LEVEL: EASY

Participants should be comfortable walking up to two miles over the course of the day. This course will not require participants to boulder scramble or cross steep terrain, but participants may be exposed to potential challenges such as extreme heat and arid conditions, uneven or sandy terrain, and wind. Please contact us if you have questions about accommodations or your ability to participate.

EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

None. This course is open to anyone ages 12 and up.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Admission to Joshua Tree National Park (please download or print your park pass ahead of time, or you will have to pay fees at the gate!)
- First aid and emergency supplies for the group
- Loupes
- Instructor will share field guides/photographic guides with group

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- Meals
- Lodging
- Transportation

GET TO KNOW YOUR INSTRUCTOR: Scott Heacox

Scott Heacox is a professional field biologist, desert ecologist, and Mojave Desert native. He works with a wide variety of plants and animals, but has a particular passion for the study of insects. His goal is to teach about the small, overlooked, and extremely misunderstood inhabitants of our deserts in order to reframe the way we see the world around us. Scott spends most of his time working in the Colorado and Mojave Deserts of California, but has also studied the biology of other areas of the American Southwest, Central America, and Southeast Asia.

PROGRAM AGENDA

We'll start out with a short presentation about ants, followed by a hike around Black Rock Nature Center to see some ant species at these higher elevations within the park. We will then move through the park to Pinto Basin to see some of the species living in hotter, drier parts of the park. After lunch, we will finish the day with a mission to locate leafcutter ants at Cottonwood Bajada. **Please note that the class will end in a different location from where it began.**

SPECIAL NOTES ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

This class will be car caravanning to a few locations. Print or download your park pass ahead of time, and make sure you have a full tank of gas or full EV charge before arriving, as there will be no gas stops along the way. **All participants must complete the [health questionnaire and liability waiver](#) at least one day ahead of the program start date.**

WHAT TO BRING

The essentials for all field courses

- Water, between 3 and 4 liters per person for a full day outing
- Food and snacks, easily packed and eaten in the field, for the duration of your course
- Close-toed athletic shoes or hiking boots; no sandals, not even hiking sandals!
- Sun protection: hat, sunglasses, sunscreen; light-colored long-sleeved shirts are recommended and very effective on hot days
- Warm layers for cooler mornings/evenings (it can be surprisingly cold!)
- Backpack to carry food, water, and any personal items you need for the day
- Notebook and pencil are always good to have

Recommended

- Magnifying aids, such as loupes or glasses (Desert Institute provides basic loupes)
- If you have any field guides that pertain to this course, you may bring them

FAQ

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I AM RUNNING LATE?

Please call our main line: 760-819-4714 and if no one answers, please call the Desert Institute coordinator, Benny Lopez: 949-241-9693.

For classes meeting in the park, please take into consideration the time it will take to go through the entrance gate—on weekends after 9am, you may wait up to 45 minutes! (15-20 minutes is typical.) For afternoon activities, you will also want to allot time to park, as parking lots tend to be congested between 10am and 4p in the busy season. **There is no cell service in the park**, so please plan accordingly!

WHAT IF I NEED TO CANCEL?

Desert Institute will provide a full refund if we are notified 14 days in advance. If we are notified less than 14 days in advance, we are unable to process refunds for any reason. (But we would like you to notify us if you are unable to attend.)

DOES DESERT INSTITUTE CANCEL ACTIVITIES FOR WEATHER OR LOW ENROLLMENT?

Desert Institute runs classes rain or shine, with the exception of astrophotography classes, which require mostly clear skies in order to be successful. If we do not meet our minimum of 4 registered participants for any given activity, we will cancel the activity with 48+ hours notice. We recommend that you purchase travel insurance, as we are unable to reimburse for expenses you incur due to a canceled class, such as airfare and hotel.

ARE THERE ANY THINGS I NEED TO DO TO PREPARE?

All participants must return the completed [health questionnaire and signed waiver](#) before the day of their activity. **Failure to do so will cancel your registration.** If your course enters Joshua Tree National Park, you must **download or print your park pass** ahead of the class, or you will pay the entrance fee at the gate, which is currently \$35 per vehicle.

CAN I BRING MY KIDS? MY SPOUSE? PETS?

Only registered participants may attend Desert Institute activities unless noted in the activity description. If this is a kid-friendly activity, please make sure your child(ren) meets the age requirements. As much as we love our pets, we don't allow them in the field with any of our activities.