



DESERT INSTITUTE
JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL
PARK ASSOCIATION

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BIRDS OF THE MOJAVE

FIELD CLASS / FALL 2023

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Oases in the Mojave Desert are used by a wide variety of bird species every fall as stopping points during their southward migration. This course examines the important role of these stopover areas in the conservation of neotropical migrant birds and introduces the techniques used to identify the common families of birds found in the vicinity of the Desert Studies Center, where more than 240 bird species have been recorded. We'll car caravan to nearby locations that serve as migrant "traps" to observe both migrant and resident birds in their natural habitats and learn about ecology, natural history and special adaptations to the harsh desert environment. This weekend course is appropriate for ornithology students of all levels, teachers looking for useful classroom ideas, and also those interested in general desert ecology. Two-nights' lodging and five meals are included with the course fee.

DATE, TIMES, and MEETING LOCATIONS

- **Zoom session:** Tuesday, Sept 26th, 7p-8:30p
- **Field study:** Friday, Sept 29th, 4p through Sunday, Oct 1st at 11:30a at [Desert Studies Center](#), 49441 Zzyzx Rd, Baker, CA 92309 (*Please arrive between 4 and 7p on Friday*)

ACTIVITY LEVEL: EASY

Participants will take short walks each day, totaling no more than two miles per day with elevation gains/losses of no more than 200 feet. Participants may walk over uneven surfaces, including sandy washes or dunes.

EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

None

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- First aid and emergency supplies for the group
- Five meals (Saturday breakfast through Sunday lunch)
- Two-nights' lodging (dormitory-style rooms)

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- Transportation

GET TO KNOW YOUR INSTRUCTOR: Kurt Leuschner, M.S., Wildlife Ecology

Kurt Leuschner is a Professor of Natural Resources at College of the Desert. Leuschner's specialties include ornithology, entomology, and desert ecology. He has led hundreds of field trips both locally and as far afield as Africa. He teaches natural history courses for the Bureau of Land Management, UCR Extension, the Desert Institute, the Living Desert, California State Parks, Riverside County Parks, and many other conservation organizations.

PROGRAM AGENDA

Day 1: Tuesday, Sept 26th

We'll meet on zoom at 7:00 pm (link sent after registering) for an introduction to bird identification, classification, local families, migration, and conservation. We'll discuss the weekend activities and answer any questions you have about the weekend. We'll finish by 8:30p.

Day 2: Friday, Sept 29th

Arrive at the Desert Studies Center between 4 and 7p and get settled in for the weekend. Please plan to eat before you arrive or bring dinner with you.

Day 3: Saturday, Sept 30th

We'll get started early at with a short bird walk around Lake Tuendae at 6:30a. Breakfast will be served at 7:00a, and after we'll depart DSC for Shoshone near Death Valley National Park. We'll visit the petroglyphs along Zzyzx Road, the gas station if people need to fill up, Chet Huffman Park, Salt Creek, and Dublin Gulch Shoshone bird walk. We'll have lunch by the Crowbar around 12:30p and afterwards take an hour-long nature walk through the oasis and adjacent riparian areas. We'll depart China Ranch by 3p and arrive back at DSC by 4:30p.

Day 4: Sunday, Oct 1st

We'll start with another 6:30a birding session at DSC followed by 7:00am breakfast. We'll visit the sewage pond for waterfowl, gulls, terns, shorebirds/wader and return to

DSC around 10a for an hour-long recap and visit to the “goat farm” where we’ll learn a little about Zzyzx history. Students will pack up and leave the premises between noon and 1p.

SPECIAL NOTES ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

This course takes place at the Desert Studies Center, a field station operated by several CSU campuses and located within the Mojave National Preserve at Soda Springs (Zzyzx), about a three-hour drive from Joshua Tree. The course fee includes lodging on Friday and Saturday nights in dormitory-style rooms, as well as five meals, beginning with breakfast Saturday and ending with lunch Sunday. There are very few amenities in the Baker area, so please plan to bring dinner with you on Friday, or eat before you arrive. Please review the DSC at Zzyzx document for details about the center. **All participants must complete the [health questionnaire and liability waiver](#) ahead of the program start date.**

WHAT TO BRING

Required

- Sleeping bag or set of bed sheets (full size bed)
- Pillows
- Flashlight or headlamp
- Toiletries and towel (communal bath house)
- Water, between 3 and 4 liters per person for a full day outing; there is potable water onsite, please bring a reusable water bottle or reservoir
- Food and snacks, easily packed and eaten in the field (sack lunch provided for both Saturday and Sunday)
- Sturdy 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

Suggested reading

- National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America by Jon L. Dunn*
- A Field Guide to Warblers of North America, Jon Dunn & Kimball Garrett
- Introduction to California Birdlife, Jules Evens & Ian Tait, UC Press
- Sibley's Birding Basics, David Sibley
- The Birder's Handbook: A Field Guide to the Natural History of N.A Birds by Paul Ehrlich

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.