



DESERT INSTITUTE
JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL
PARK ASSOCIATION

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55922 Twentynine Palms Highway,
Yucca Valley, 92284

BIRDS OF THE MOJAVE

FIELD CLASS / SPRING 2024 / INSTRUCTOR: KURT LEUSCHNER

APRIL 30TH (ZOOM, 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM)

MAY 3RD (ARRIVE 4:00 PM) - MAY 5TH (DEPART 11:00 AM)

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 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.

PROGRAM AGENDA

Day 1: Tuesday, April 30

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, May 3rd

Arrive at the Desert Studies Center anytime between 5 and 7p and get settled in for the weekend. Please plan to eat before you arrive or bring dinner with you.

Day 3: Saturday, May 4th

We'll get started early with a short bird walk around Lake Tuendae at 6:30a. Breakfast will be served at 7:00a, and after that 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, Dublin Gulch, and a pupfish preserve and birding trail in Shoshone. We'll have lunch in a shady area outside the Crowbar restaurant around 12:30p, and afterwards take a nature walk through the oasis and adjacent riparian areas of China Ranch. We'll depart China Ranch around 3:30p and should arrive back at DSC around 4:30p.

Day 4: Sunday, May 5th

We'll start with another 6:30a birding session at DSC followed by 7:00am breakfast. We will bird around the DSC this morning, visiting the "goat farm" as we also learn more about the unique history of this place. We will then pack up our stuff, clean out our rooms, and pack our box lunches to go before departing DSC around 11a. Our final stop will be the famous Baker sewage ponds to look for waterfowl, gulls, terns, shorebirds, other waders, and even a few interesting land birds. Class will end around noon.

MEETING LOCATION

- **Zoom session:** Tuesday, April 30th, 7p-8:30p
- **Field study:** Saturday, May 4th, at 6:30a through Sunday, May 5th, at 12 noon at [Desert Studies Center](#), 49441 Zzyzx Rd, Baker, CA 92309 (*Please arrive to check-in anytime between 5 and 7p on Friday*)

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.

REQUIRED PREPARATION

Waiver: All participants must complete the [participation waiver](#) at least 24 hours before a class begins. *Failure to do so may forfeit your right to participate.*

Park Pass (\$30 per vehicle): For classes inside Joshua Tree National Park, participants are now required to purchase a [park pass](#). You can purchase a park pass [online](#), or pay at a park entrance. If you have an existing pass, you may use that!

ACTIVITY LEVEL

Moderate ▾ 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.

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
- Snacks
- Water/drinks

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 (please leave no trace)
- 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

Required for this course:

- 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 closed-toe 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

- *Merlin* bird app for your phone (free)
- 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

GET TO KNOW YOUR INSTRUCTOR

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.

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.**



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FAQ+ _

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I AM RUNNING LATE?

Desert Institute Manager Benny Erdahl: **949-241-9693**
or Education Director Dr. Justin Lenzi: **760-819-4714**

For classes meeting inside the park, it can take up to 45 minutes to go through an entrance gate on weekends after 9am (though 15-20 minutes is typical). Please 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***, please plan accordingly.

WHAT IF I NEED TO CANCEL?

Desert Institute will provide a full refund if we are notified more than 14 days in advance. We are unable to process refunds for *any* cancellations less than 14 days in advance.

DOES DESERT INSTITUTE CANCEL ACTIVITIES FOR WEATHER OR LOW ENROLLMENT?

If we do not meet our minimum of 6 registered participants for any given activity, we will likely cancel the activity with at least 48+ hours notice.

Desert Institute runs classes rain or shine, with the exception of astrophotography classes, which require mostly clear skies in order to be successful.

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.

WHAT IF I FORGOT SOMETHING I NEED?

Our visitor centers and park stores are stocked with amazing essentials for your adventure. Preview or purchase items from our [online shop](#); we carry [hats](#), [shirts](#), bandanas, water bottles, notebooks, [maps](#), [books](#). And more!

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) are registered and meet the age requirements.

As much as we love pets, we don't allow them in the field with any of our activities.

