

Birds of the Mojave

Information

Date/ Time: Friday, October 4, 7:30 pm – 9:30 pm
Sat., October 5, 7:30 am - 4:30 pm
Sunday, October 6, 7:30 am – 12:30 pm

Meet at: [Desert Studies Center, Zzyzx](#)
Zzyzx Road exit off of Highway 15

Instructor: Kurt Leuschner, M.S., Wildlife Ecology, Professor of Natural Resources at College of the Desert in Palm Desert, CA

Overview

Oases in the Mojave Desert are used by a wide variety of bird species every fall as stopping points during their southward migration. Beginning on Friday evening, 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. After slides and a brief lecture, the class takes a short night hike to look for nocturnal species. On Saturday, students travel by car to nearby sites in Death Valley, Baker and Soda Springs that serve as migrant “traps.” Some of these sites are marshes and others are merely small islands of green in a sea of desert. Through observation of both migrant and resident birds in their natural habitats, students learn about ecology, natural history and special adaptations to the harsh desert environment. Sunday’s activities center around the Desert Studies Center where more than 240 bird species have already been recorded. The course should benefit ornithology students of all levels, those interested in general desert ecology and teachers looking for useful ideas for the classroom. This field study is based at the Desert Studies Center (of California State University) located within the Preserve at Soda Springs (Zzyzx), about a three-hour drive from Joshua Tree. The course fee includes two nights’ lodging at the Center (dormitory rooms & some couple rooms), and meals starting with breakfast Saturday through lunch on Sunday. Upon enrollment, you will be sent detailed information about the Center and what to bring.

Itinerary

Friday, October 4, 7:30 pm – 9:30 pm

Desert Studies Center

- Welcome introduction and discussion on bird identification, classification, local families, migration, conservation
- Slide show and preview of weekend activities

Saturday, October 5, 7:30 am – 4:30 pm

- 7:30am Depart DSC for Shoshone via I-15/Hwy 127
Stops may include:
Petroglyphs along Zzyzx Road
The Baker Shell for gas, snacks, ice, restrooms
Visit Chet Huffman Park in Baker
Salt Creek ACEC, Dublin Gulch
Shoshone bird walk – the new wetlands and
around Death Valley High School
- 12:30pm Lunch in Shoshone by the Crowbar
- 1:45pm Nature walk through the oasis and adjacent riparian
- 3:00 Depart China Ranch
- 4:30 Arrive at the Desert Studies Center

Sunday, October 6, 7:30 am – 12:30 pm

Desert Studies Center

- 7:30 Perimeter walk around station and to
the “goat farm” – birding, desert ecology,
Zzyzx history...
- 10:15 Clean out rooms and pack up, pick up lunches.
- 11:15 Depart the DSC for Baker – scope the Baker
sewage ponds for waterfowl, gulls, terns,
shorebirds/waders

What to Bring to the Course

Required Class Materials

- Binoculars

Optional Class Materials

- Bird guide, *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* by Jon Dunn recommended

The 10 Essentials: Every day in the Desert

- Day pack
- 4 quarts of water
- Closed toe hiking shoes
- Lunch and snacks
- Clothing layers
- Hat
- Sun glasses
- Sunscreen
- Notebook and pencil/pen
- Whistle

Fitness Requirements

Participants must be in good physical condition for courses/activities in a desert that may be hot, dry, windy, and sometimes surprisingly cold.

Hike Level

Easy to Moderate

College Credit

If taking this course for 1 unit of Biology (X404.2) credit through the University of California Riverside Extension, (70%) attendance/participation, (30%) field notes, quiz and species profile will determine your grade.

Guidelines

- You are responsible for your safety.
- Park your car in designated areas only. Parking along the side of the road is dangerous to you and the environment.
- Rattlesnakes are present in the desert. Avoid contact with wildlife. Put your hands and feet only where you can see them.
- Stay with the group. If you get lost, stay put.
- Before leaving the class, check out with the Desert Institute Representative.
- Drink plenty of water. If you run out, notify the instructor or the Desert Institute Representative.

Instructor Biography

Kurt Leuschner, M.S., Wildlife Ecology, 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.

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

* The Desert Institute staff/instructors will attempt to accommodate participant's needs; however we reserve the right to deny a student participation in the course due to concerns regarding health and safety issues.