

Insects and Arthropods of the Eastern Mojave

Information

Date/ Time: Friday, May 15, 7:30 pm – 9:30 pm

Saturday, May 16, 7:30 am - 4:30 pm, 8 - 9:30 pm

Sunday, May 17, 7 am – noon

Meet at: [Desert Studies Center, Zzyzx](#) (click on link for a map of the meeting site)

Zzyzx Road exit off of Interstate 15

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

Overview

In this course students will learn about the basic anatomy of insects, and how to tell them apart from other desert arthropods. We will also review the many insect orders and families found in the East Mojave Desert region. Some of these local insects have some very interesting stories to tell! Specimens in a demonstration collection will be examined. Mimicry, the use of pheromones, fluorescence, and other important survival traits will be discussed.

We will spend time in the field to observe *diurnal* (day active) insects and examine them up close, using a variety of different catch-and-release collecting methods such as pit traps, light traps, and aerial nets. Some of the insects will be hiding in the leaf litter or on leaves, while others will be flying around and nectaring on flowering plants. The instructor will provide all the necessary equipment. As we walk around the Desert Studies Center and explore a local Joshua Tree ecosystem during a Saturday field trip, we will examine the different habitats and behaviors of insects that we encounter and discuss the various adaptations that enable insects to survive in this harsh desert environment.

After dark we will move outside and examine insects that are attracted to the lights that we set up earlier. Ultraviolet lights and mercury vapor lamps will be used on the border of two different habitats: riparian and desert. Different insects will appear at different times: those that are active just after sunset are referred to as *crepuscular* and those that fly in complete darkness are *nocturnal*. Still others do not fly until a few hours after nightfall, so patience is required! We'll also use handheld ultraviolet lights to search for glowing scorpions – two different species will be encountered and you'll learn to tell them apart. A powerpoint presentation will introduce you to some of the more notable insects and other arthropods that are often encountered in the East Mojave Desert. Teachers and docents will find this information especially valuable.

The fascinating world of insects awaits you!

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

- Late afternoon arrival (anytime after 5pm), check in & orientation at 6 pm, 6:30 pm snack in the classroom. **NOTE: (you should bring your own dinner tonight)**
- 7:30-9:00 pm Meet in the Classroom. Introductions, arthropod characteristics, classification and overview of 23 insect orders – check blacklights, UV scorpion search (weather permitting), prepare for tomorrow

Saturday

- 7:30am breakfast (optional birding on your own before breakfast – it gets light early!)
- 7:55 am depart on field trip – carpool to Teutonia Peak trail or possibly Kelso Dunes depending on the weather conditions.
- Box Lunch at Kelso Depot – after lunch visit the lava tube (4.5 miles each way on washboard dirt road), Mad Greek Cafe and Baker sewage ponds optional.
- Return to DSC around 4:30 pm for siesta and/or soaking pool.
- Option 1: set out 3 pit traps/flags on your own nearby.
- Option 2: 5 pm excursion down the road to open the big pit traps (150 in all).
- 6:30 pm Zzyzx store is open for business – all forms of payment accepted.
- 7pm Dinner
- 8 pm Meet in the classroom: Movie: *The Sensitive Scorpion* – a BBC/Attenborough production – including locally filmed scenes!
- 9-9:30 pm Check blacklights or scorpion hunting (weather permitting).

Sunday

- 7 am breakfast (optional birding on your own before breakfast – or if you set your own pit traps before breakfast would be a good time to check them)
- 8am-10:15 am Check the big pit traps for insects, reptiles, mammals etc.
- Short break to grab your packed lunch.
- 10:30 am Meet in the classroom to review the insect collection/discuss findings, and watch a powerpoint on Desert Insects.
- 12:00 pm End of Class.
- Clean out rooms and drive safely! Enquire about places to stop on the way home.

What to Bring to the Course

Required Class Materials

- Flashlight/headlamp

Optional Equipment

- Hiking Poles
- Binoculars
- Camera
- 10x Loupe (magnifier)
- UV flashlight

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 2 unit of Entomology (X405) credit through the University of California Riverside Extension, (70%) attendance/participation, (30%) field notes, quiz and species profile will determine your grade.

Email required assignments to Kurt Leuschner at kleuschner@collegeofthedesert.edu

- 1) Take and turn in **field notes** during the class
- 2) Complete a 1-2 page **species profile** (choose an insect) due in one week
- 3) Complete the **take home insect quiz** which will be emailed to you

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

Kaufman Field Guide to Insects of North America

Other Useful References: Insects of the Los Angeles Basin by Hogue

Desert Insects and Kin of Southern California by Monroe

California Insects by Powell and Hogue

Field Guide to the Spiders of California and the Pacific Coast by R.J. Adams

A Field Guide to Desert Holes by Pinau Merlin

Tracks & Sign of Insects and other Invertebrates by Charley Eiseman

* 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.