

ITINERARY

***Israel Migration Magic: Birding from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea***  
***March 13-24, 2019***



*The Black Stork migration passes through Israel during the spring. On our 2018 tour, the group witnessed a great push of these large birds soaring over the Eilat Mountains. Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

We include here information for those interested in the 2019 Field Guides Israel Migration Magic tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our web site)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a reference list
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing for and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

The land of Israel, long relevant in the cultural and political landscape of humankind, has for much longer been of tremendous importance as a hotspot for birds. Human habitation in the area stretches back over 100,000 years, and the landscape has witnessed interpersonal strife for as long as there are records. However, long before human conflict entered this setting, an intense and no less compelling drama gripped the land and skies of the region: The annual migration of tens of millions of birds through and over a breathtaking stage of inhospitable desert dotted with lush wadis and punctuated by vital oases.

Israel is a fairly small country, but is biogeographically rich, bracketed by the largely barren Negev Desert in the south and the fertile Hula Valley and Mt. Hermon in the north. Lying in between these end-pieces are a diversity of habitat types including the verdant hills of Jerusalem, the scenic Mediterranean coast, and the freak of nature that is the Dead Sea. We

will focus on the south of Israel on this tour, taking advantage of the regional geography that makes Eilat and the Arava Valley the epicenter of a web of migration that spans three continents.

Whether it is flocks of herons and egrets coming in off the Red Sea, waves of old world warblers filing through lush desert wadis, or the awe-inspiring scene of tens of thousands of raptors materializing thick as fleas out of the desert mountains and parading overhead in battalions that will leave you speechless, southern Israel is one of those places where attaching the word “spectacle” to bird migration is not hyperbole.



*We'll see migrant warblers, such as this Cyprus Warbler, along with numerous larger migrants.  
Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

**About the Physical Requirements & Pace:** Our main purpose on this tour is for all to see well and enjoy a rich diversity of species, and to get a sense and appreciation of the scale of avian migration through the region. We will typically have very early starts (before sunrise) in order to take advantage of the cooler early morning temperatures and the dawn activity, as the desert can heat up quickly. We will do a few picnic or boxed lunches throughout the tour, and there may be a couple of mornings where we will go birding for a bit before coming back for breakfast in the late morning. Elevation should not be an issue with this tour, as we shouldn't get to any places more than 3,000 feet (900 meters) above sea level, and we even spend a couple of nights below sea level around the Dead Sea. There should not be many long hikes, although we may (slowly) cover some decent distances in the desert. Be prepared to remain in one location for a couple of hours in locations where we will try to detect migration (particularly in the Eilat Mountains hoping to connect with raptor migration, and at Eilat's North Beach as we wait to see what migrants get funneled up to the north end of the Gulf of Aqaba. Temperatures vary with location. The southern Negev Desert around Eilat can be somewhat cool early in the morning and late in the afternoon (early mornings can even be downright cold in the mountains or desert), although it typically warms up very quickly, and can get into the mid-90s (F) during the middle of the day. Nighttime temperatures should be expected to be as low as 55 degrees F, although this can vary widely, and can occasionally get into the 40s. The Dead Sea and Northern Negev should be a bit cooler at this time of year (55°-85° for the Dead Sea, about 10 degrees cooler for some places in the Negev), though it still should be warm in the middle of the day.

If you are uncertain about whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with the guide.

## About the Birding Areas

**Nitzana**—Located in the northern Negev Desert, Nitzana and Ezuz are small communal settlements that lie along the northern part of the eastern border of Sinai, Egypt. From a birding perspective, the area is best known for bird species such as MacQueen's Bustard, Pin-tailed, Black-bellied, and Crowned Sandgrouses, Cream-colored Courser, and the desert subspecies of Little Owl (*A.n.lilith*).

In addition to these northern Negev specialties in the area, there are a couple of sewage pools in the area which can be excellent migrant traps for everything from shorebirds to warblers.



**Yeruham Lake & Sde Boker area**—Two excellent birding spots are located close to where we will be spending our nights in this region. The town of Yeruham is just to the east, and its main attraction for us will be Lake Yeruham. The Lake can be an amazing migrant trap, and also hosts a population of Syrian Woodpeckers, and White-throated Kingfishers can be reliably seen. The lake itself also provides possibilities for waterbirds like Ferruginous Duck, Little Crake, Little Bittern, and others.

Sde Boker is a Kibbutz just to the south of here, and with the neighboring Midreshet Ben-Gurion (Ben Gurion Grave Park), and the Ovdat Gorge below, forms a very productive and interesting birding location. Alpine Swift, which we hope to detect as a migrant elsewhere on the tour, breeds here, as does a healthy and well-monitored population of the regionally endangered Eurasian Griffon. The fields just south of Sde Boker can contain foraging Black-bellied Sandgrouse as well. The Yeruham/Sde Boker area is also typically good for finch diversity, which tends to wane south of here.

**Negev Desert and Makhtesh Ramon** — Makhtesh Ramon, (Also known as the Ramon Crater, despite not technically being a crater) takes up an impressive area in the central Negev desert. It is also effectively the southern cutoff for several species, such as Hooded Crow and Great Tit. The walls of the “crater” can host Blue Rock-Thrush, Hooded Wheatear, nesting Egyptian Vulture, and occasionally even Striolated Bunting. South of the Makhtesh lie a couple of excellent desert areas where you can find Temminck’s Lark, Crowned and Spotted Sandgrouse, and high numbers of Isabelline Wheatear. Because of the barrenness of the land in this region, any wadi, or indeed even any little bit of green, even a single tree, can host migrants, from a plethora of Wheatears and *Sylvia* warblers, to forest-loving species like Tree Pipit, which sometimes find a two foot tall bush the closest thing to a tree.

**Eilat and the Arava Valley**—Eilat is justly recognized as one of the meccas of bird migration on the planet. Lying at the northern end of both the Red Sea’s Gulf of Aqaba and the mountains that range south into the desolate Sinai Peninsula, it is an important way-station for an enormous volume of birds, especially in dryer years, when the surrounding desert habitats are not as fertile and useful for migrants. With a diverse array of habitats, the area predictably hosts a diverse set of species, to say nothing of the impressive numbers of individual birds overall. From North Beach, seabirds, waterfowl, waders, and shorebirds can regularly be seen flying north up the Gulf before having to reckon with the fact that they’ve run out of water to fly over, and that a couple of hundred miles of desert is what lies ahead. This situation lends itself to incongruous sights like Jaegers, waterfowl, and terns setting out over desert, risking a long crossing of inhospitable land to get on with their migrations. This is also where we will look for the Red Sea endemic White-eyed Gull. Several of Eilat’s city parks can be excellent for a good selection of migrant passerines as well. The IBRCE (International Birding and Research Center Eilat) is one of the crown jewels of the migrant hotspots, and also functions as an amazing outreach and education center for the general public to learn more about birds, migration, and conservation. We will likely spend a morning here, and hopefully get a banding demo from some of the staff, as part of the sanctuary is devoted to a long-term bird banding/ringing project.

The Arava Valley is the southern extent of the Jordan Rift Valley, and extends out of Eilat to the north. Not only does it have some great natural areas, but the Kibbutzim that are scattered up and down the southern Arava, and their associated sewage ponds, can be extremely productive. Yotvata is the most well known of these to birders, and we will likely be making multiple visits to there, for both the birding and the locally famous ice cream.

**Dead Sea**—The Dead Sea is the largest hypersaline lake in the world, lying at the terminus of the Jordan River, and without any outlet. One of the most unique large bodies of water in the world, its shores lie 1,400 feet below sea level. We will be exploring a couple of locations in the region for species not found farther south, such as Fan-tailed Raven and Clamorous Reed-Warbler, as well as enjoying the landscape around this unique-in-the-world lake. This region is also home to a few very interesting nocturnal species, including the recently described Desert Tawny Owl, the *tamaricis* subspecies of Nubian Nightjar, and Pallid Scops Owl. These species are all highly protected in Israel, and the permitting situation to search for them changes year to year (it is entirely possible that we won’t be able to try for these), but if allowable, we will attempt at least one nocturnal excursion in the hopes of experiencing at least one of these.

## Itinerary for Israel Migration Magic

**Day 1, Wed, 13 Mar. Arrival in Tel Aviv.** If you are flying in, please take a taxi from the airport to our hotel located in Tel Aviv. We will meet in the lobby at 6:30 PM. If you arrive early to Tel Aviv, there are many things to do and see in the Tel Aviv-Jaffa area, from cultural attractions to culinary delights. Night in Tel Aviv.

**Day 2, Thu, 14 Mar. Tel Aviv to the Dead Sea via Jerusalem.** We will depart the hotel at 6:30 AM, after breakfast and head east, stopping in Jerusalem to visit the JBO (Jerusalem Bird Observatory) right in the heart of the city, across from the Knesset. This urban bird observatory is a tiny but rich slice of habitat, and can be a hotbed of bird activity- the bird banding operation should be in full swing at this point in the season as well. Jerusalem has one of the richest cultural histories of any city on the planet, and in order to get a thorough experience, you will want to budget another day or more either before or after the tour to explore, as we will barely scratch the surface during the tour. We will continue birding our way east to the shores of the Dead Sea, and then south to the central Dead Sea coast. Night at the Dead Sea (Ein Gedi).

**Day 3, Fri, 15 Mar. Dead Sea.** We will bird the Dead Sea and surroundings, looking for regional specialties like Clamorous Reed-Warbler and Dead Sea Sparrow, and will likely visit our first wetlands, with great potential for a fantastic diversity of birds. Night at the Dead Sea (Ein Gedi).

**Day 4, Sat, 16 Mar. Drive to Eilat.** We will depart at 5:30 a.m. to make our way down to Eilat, birding all along the way. Night in Eilat.



*The White-eyed Gull is an endemic of the Arabian Sea region. Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

**Day 5-8, Sun-Wed, 17-20 Mar. Eilat.** Eilat, famed worldwide for the winged migration that it experiences every spring, will be our home for four nights. We will be flexible depending on weather while here, but we will likely be out very early every morning to take advantage of the cooler morning temperatures in the desert, before coming back for lunch and a midday rest, then heading back out and birding to dusk most nights. We will likely have one or two night outings down here to look for some nocturnal fauna (not restricted to birds!) as well. Nights in Eilat.

**Day 9, Thu, 21 Mar. Eilat to the northern Negev.** We will leave Eilat early in the morning, and bird our way north towards the Negev Desert. We'll drive through the truly impressive Makhtesh Ramon, which in addition to providing amazing scenery, and some good birds, is a good area in which to find Nubian Ibex. Depending on how long this takes, we may have a late afternoon/evening birding stop in the northern Negev before dinner. Night in Mashabei Sadeh.

**Day 10, Fri, 22 Mar. Nitzana and the northern Negev Desert.** We will have another early departure at 5:00 am for the 40-minute drive to Nitzana, where we'll look to pick up MacQueen's Bustard and a couple of sandgrouse (how many species is highly dependent on the year, mostly linked to rainfall). We will then explore some migrant traps and desert hotspots hoping for species such as the "Lilith" Little Owl and Cream-colored Courser. Depending on how the weather is, we may break after lunch, but if the weather permits we may go birding right from lunch to maximize our time in this biogeographically unique area. Night in Mashabei Sadeh.

**Day 11, Sat, 23 Mar. Negev Desert to Tel Aviv.** We will leave the Mashabei Sadeh early, and we may bird a couple of locations around the Negev before heading back to the north, stopping along the way to look for some species that are more difficult to find, or absent altogether, in the south. We will arrive in Tel Aviv in the late afternoon prior to dinner, Night in Tel Aviv. If you plan on flying out on a red-eye tonight, please don't schedule a flight before 11:30 PM (airport security is very tight and often lengthy, so please don't cut this close).

**Day 12, Sun, 24 Mar. Depart for Home.**

## About Your Guide

**Doug Gochfeld** was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY, and his interest in birds was sparked at a young age (he participated in his first CBC at the age of 7), in part by his father. This interest soon spiraled into a full-blown obsession for Doug for a few years before he abruptly shelved it, in favor of baseball, for several adolescent years. He picked up his interest in birds again in College and once again became a dedicated/obsessed birder.

For several years before starting to lead a full slate of tours for Field Guides in 2016, he traveled extensively as a working birder. These field jobs have included multiple seasons monitoring migration at the legendary migration hotspots of Cape May, New Jersey, and Eilat in Israel (the latter as recently as 2016). He also guided on St. Paul Island, in Alaska's Pribilof Islands, for parts of four years.

Doug is a Leica Pro Staff member, and he has been a regular leader at birding festivals in Texas, Ohio, Florida, New Mexico, and Virginia. He has worked in Alaska, Suriname, and Brazil studying the breeding and wintering ecology of shorebirds, which hold a special place in his heart. His strongest interests in birding are migration, vagrancy, and patterns of distribution, and he's always excited to share his enthusiasm in, and knowledge of, these subjects and much more on his tours, whether close to home or halfway around the world.

*"The stream of migrating hawks, eagles, kites, vultures, storks, and other raptors was truly spectacular, and I was at the right place at the right time, because of the excellent planning and birding skills of Doug Gochfeld."  
C.B., Israel Migration Magic.*

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/guides> for Doug's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

An expert **local guide** will join Doug on this tour.

## Financial Information

**FEE:** \$5250 from Tel Aviv

**DEPOSIT:** \$500 per person

**FINAL PAYMENT DUE:** November 13, 2018

**SINGLE SUPPLEMENT** (Optional): \$950

**LIMIT:** 10

## Other Things You Need to Know

**TOUR MANAGER:** The manager for this tour is Karen Turner. Karen will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

**AIR ARRANGEMENTS:** Please note that the tour begins and ends in Tel Aviv. Participants should arrive on Day 1 in time to meet in the lobby of our hotel by 6:30 p.m. You may leave anytime on Day 12.

Field Guides is a full service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

**Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary** and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees. Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.

**LUGGAGE:** Due to vehicle size limitations, we ask that you limit yourself to one medium-sized bag and a carry on. Laundry service (not cheap) will be available at the Agamim Hotel in Eilat. We won't be staying anywhere else long enough to do laundry. Be aware that many international air carriers have weight restrictions on carry-on/cabin luggage, and plan accordingly. Also, please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these flights are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

**TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS:** The **tour fee** is \$5250 for one person in double occupancy from Tel Aviv. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 11, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 12, all ground transportation except arrival transfer (taxi to hotel), entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Tel Aviv, airport taxes, visa fees, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is \$950. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, complete the Registration/Release and Indemnity form and return it with a **deposit of \$500 per person**. If registering by phone, a deposit must be received within fourteen days, or the space will be released. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or **by November 13, 2018**. **We will bill you for the final payment at either 120 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.** Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

**SMOKING:** Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 120 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 119 and 70 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable.

This policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour fees (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of the insurance is not refundable so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airlines restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

**TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE:** We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer any refund when cancellation occurs within 70 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 70 to 119 days prior to departure (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive from us a brochure regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, 24-hour accident protection, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance when making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights), pre-existing conditions are covered. The CSA brochure includes a contact number; you may also purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/travelinsurance.html> and clicking the link to CSA. Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the reverse side of the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. Field Guides Incorporated accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

**THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.**

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