

ITINERARY
Arizona Mindful Birding Retreat: Sedona
April 15-19, 2027



Oak Creek, near Sedona, is one of Arizona's hidden gems. On this retreat, we'll spend time along the creek, experiencing the tranquility and opening our senses. Photograph by guide Holly Thomas.

We include here information for those interested in the 2027 Field Guides Arizona Mindful Birding Retreat: Sedona:

- a general introduction to the retreat
- 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

These additional materials will be made available to those who register for the tour:

- 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 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

Set among the spectacular red rock landscapes of Sedona and the cool waters of Oak Creek, this unique retreat invites you to experience birding in a different way. Together, we'll explore the practice of Mindful Birding, an emerging style of birding that blends the observation of birds with simple mindfulness practices, allowing us to engage more fully with the birds and landscapes around us while also experiencing many potential health benefits including reduced stress, lowered anxiety, and elevated mood. If you're new to mindful birding, you'll find a more detailed introduction in the itinerary.

Holly Thomas and Holly Merker, of the Mindful Birding Network and co-hosts of *The Mindful Birding Podcast*, are internationally recognized for pioneering the practice of Mindful Birding and together bring decades of combined experience and training in mindfulness, professional bird guiding, and nature-based wellness programming. They are joined by Chris Benesh, whose extensive knowledge of Arizona's birds, wildlife, and natural history enriches the retreat experience.



We've carefully selected the award-winning Briar Patch Inn, Sedona's "Nature Resort" as our home base for the retreat. Nestled beneath towering cottonwoods and sycamores along Oak Creek, the property invites us to settle into one place and become familiar with its natural rhythms. Morning birdsong, the changing light on the canyon walls, the gentle movement of the creek, and the regular visits of birds to the feeders become companions throughout the retreat, reminding us that meaningful nature experiences often unfold when we stay still long enough to notice.

Our days will include exploring some of northern Arizona's most beautiful habitats—from striking Red Rock State Park to the tranquil waters of Page Springs. Along the way we'll encounter an impressive diversity of birds while exploring how mindful attention can enrich both our birding and our overall experience of the natural world. Spring bird specialties may include Summer Tanager, Yellow-breasted Chat, Common Black Hawk, Violet-green Swallow, Bell's Vireo, and Black-chinned Hummingbirds. As we wander the trails, we may encounter a variety of flycatchers, including Western Wood-Pewee, Black Phoebe, Vermillion, Ash-throated and Brown-crested flycatchers, Cassin's, and Western kingbirds, in addition to many other riparian species. Spring also brings a mix of warblers to the Verde Valley, including Lucy's, Virginia, Northern Yellow, Common Yellowthroat, Grace's, and Painted Redstart.

Intentionally spacious afternoons will have optional guided experiences, and allow time for personal reflection, journaling, photography, relaxing by the creek, or simply doing nothing at all. Optional guided evening offerings may feature stargazing, exploring nocturnal wildlife, sharing a gratitude practice, and reflecting on the highlights of the day.

Whether you're an experienced birder curious about mindfulness, someone new to birding and eager to explore the natural world in a supportive setting, or simply seeking a restorative retreat in nature, we hope you'll join us for this memorable experience in one of the Southwest's most inspiring landscapes.

We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.

Physical requirements of this tour

- **TRAILS & WALKING:** Moderate amounts of walking (up to 2 - 3 miles per outing) mostly on dirt or gravel paths with little elevation gain. We may encounter some stairs and uneven surfaces and places that can be rocky and it is necessary to step over downed logs and fallen limbs. If we visit West Fork Oak Creek, part of the walk may include some stream crossings, though it is an option to stay back and bird another area instead. Lightweight hiking boots are recommended for most days. You may want to bring along a set of trekking poles if they offer you added stability.
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** One needs to be physically able to get in and out of 15-passenger vans and maneuver potentially to the back of the van. Stream crossings at West Fork Oak Creek could be challenging but they are optional.
- **PACE:** The Sedona area is not on Daylight Saving Time so it gets light relatively early. Sunrise will be close to 6 a.m. each day. The early morning will offer an opportunity for mindful birding right at Briar Patch. Breakfast at Briar Patch takes place from 8 - 10 a.m., and we will work our breakfast around leaving plenty of time to enjoy a full morning of birding. Our off-property locations will be within 15 - 40 minutes of the inn. We will have lunch out at a restaurant on our way back to Briar Patch. Afternoons offer time for relaxation and more mindful birding on

the property. We will have time to shower before driving to dinner off property and may engage in more evening activities back at Briar Patch.

- **ELEVATION:** Birding on this tour will be at moderately high mountain elevations (around 4500 ft).
- **WEATHER:** Spring weather in the Sedona area ranges from cool mornings starting in the 40s, to warm, sunny days in the 70s. Though rain is uncommon, it's best to be prepared.
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** Whenever possible, we use modern, indoor restrooms, but on occasion, participants should be prepared to make a comfort stop in nature.
- **OPTING OUT:** Since we are in the same lodging for the entire tour, participants can easily opt to sit out a day or sometimes a half-day.

If you are uncertain 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.



The Canyon Wren has a wonderful, distinctive song that we'll hear often during this tour. These wrens are generally found in rocky habitats, where they search for insects and other invertebrate prey. Photograph by guide Chris Benesh.

About the Birding Areas

Oak Creek Canyon/Sedona Area—Just south of Flagstaff, the 2000-foot-high Mogollon Rim forms the edge of the huge Colorado Plateau. Famous Oak Creek Canyon cuts through this rock wall, forming a lush riparian gorge that empties into the drier desert lowlands and Red Rocks of Sedona. From the head of the canyon to the mouth and the surrounding area, one finds a mixture of desert, foothill, and montane birds amid the inspiring red sandstone backdrop. Exploring these various habitats, we may meet the Common Black-Hawk, Gila Woodpecker, Ash-throated and Brown-crested flycatchers, Bridled Titmouse, Canyon and Bewick's wren, Lucy's, Virginia's, and Red-faced warblers, Hepatic and Summer tanagers, Abert's Towhee, and Hooded and Bullock's orioles.



The Briar Patch Inn is a wonderful location for a mindfulness retreat, featuring trails, a labyrinth, and spaces to relax and observe. We'll have time to spend on these activities, as well as taking trips to some nearby birding locations. Photograph by guide Holly Thomas.

Itinerary for Mindful Birding Retreat: Sedona

Day 1 Thu, 15 Apr. Arrival in Sedona. Guests may choose our optional shuttle from the Flagstaff airport or make their own way to Sedona and the beautiful Briar Patch Inn, our home for the next four nights. If taking the shuttle, please plan to arrive in Flagstaff no later than 2 p.m. for a 2:30 shuttle. Nestled beneath towering sycamores and cottonwoods along the banks of Oak Creek, the inn provides an ideal setting for our mindful birding retreat. The property itself offers excellent birding, with feeders, lush riparian vegetation, quiet creek-side paths, and inviting places to simply sit and observe. By remaining at one lodge throughout the retreat, we'll have the opportunity to become familiar with its rhythms, watching birds, light, and the changing character of the landscape unfold over several days.

After settling into our rooms, we will gather at **4:00 p.m.** for a welcome orientation and introduction to mindful birding. Throughout the retreat, we'll weave simple mindfulness practices into our time together while exploring the growing science of mindfulness, birds, and nature connection. Research suggests these practices can support resilience and well-being by reducing stress and anxiety, restoring attention, fostering positive emotions, and strengthening our sense of connection with the living world.

If time allows, we'll enjoy a relaxed walk around the property, where we'll start to meet our new neighbors (the birds, that is!). After dinner, and as evening settles over Oak Creek, we'll begin exploring how slowing down and paying closer attention can deepen both our birding and our connection with the natural world.

Days 2 - 4 : Fri-Sun, 16-18 Apr. Sedona's Red Rock and Riparian Landscapes. Each morning, we may begin the day gathering together before breakfast at the inn to engage in a mindfulness practice such as deep listening while greeting the dawn chorus, guided sensory engagement, or mindful walking. After breakfast we'll visit one of the nearby birding locations that invites a contemplative and immersive experience. One morning we plan to visit the striking Red Rock State Park, where Oak Creek winds beneath spectacular red sandstone cliffs through one of Sedona's most treasured riparian landscapes. Gentle trails offer wonderful opportunities to observe both birds and the rich web of life supported by these stream-side habitats.

On another morning, our exploration will bring us to one of northern Arizona's richest birding destinations. The spring-fed waters of Page Springs Fish Hatchery, and the adjacent Bubbling Ponds or Sedona Wetlands, create a remarkable oasis for birds in the arid Southwest.

Another day will be spent exploring one of the Verde Valley's outstanding riparian ecosystems. Depending on the conditions and access, we may visit the magnificent West Fork Oak Creek or another exceptional riparian destination within the Verde Valley, such as Dead Horse Ranch State Park.

Throughout our mornings we'll weave simple mindful birding practices into our observations, discovering how careful attention often reveals behaviors, sounds, and ecological relationships, and also fosters a sense of personal well-being and deeper connection to the natural world.

Our leisurely pace allows time to observe feeding behavior, birdsong, activity, and the intricate relationships between water, insects, vegetation, and the birds that depend upon them. These landscapes also offer an opportunity to explore the importance of springs and healthy watersheds in sustaining biodiversity throughout the Verde Valley.

Lunches and dinners each day will be off property and offer an opportunity to explore the wonderful cuisine of the Sedona area and the spectacular scenery.

The afternoons offer time to relax at Briar Patch Inn, enjoy optional spa services (not included in the tour fee), or journal beside Oak Creek. Depending on weather and bird activity, the afternoons may include additional guided birding or personal time at Briar Patch Inn: hammocks, swimming hole, afternoon tea and cookies?

Optional evening activities may include mothing (viewing moths attracted to special lighting), stargazing, or quiet reflection beside the creek. We'll conclude on Sunday with a celebratory farewell dinner and an opportunity to share favorite birds, memorable moments, and reflections from our time together.



The brilliant Vermilion Flycatcher is one of a number of flycatchers we'll see on this tour. It's a fairly common bird in the southwest US, but the combination of flaming red feathers and interesting behaviors make it a favorite among birders. Photograph by guide Chris Benesh.

Day 5: Mon, 19 Apr. Farewell to Sedona. Before breakfast, early risers may wish to enjoy one final stroll around the Briar Patch Inn grounds, where the morning chorus offers a fitting close to our retreat. After breakfast we'll gather for final reflections before departing for Flagstaff or continuing on other adventures in northern Arizona.

We hope you'll return home with a sense of renewal and wellness, inspired by the memorable connections made with the birds and other members of the retreat. We hope you'll carry with you a sense of curiosity, attention, and appreciation for birds—qualities that can continue to enrich your birding and inspire you wherever your travels may lead.

About Your Guides

Chris Benesh grew up studying natural history in California, where he was inspired by his father to take up birding as a teenager. After earning a degree in zoology from UC Santa Barbara in 1987, Chris moved to Austin to join the Field Guides staff. Since then, his life has undergone a wonderful transformation. The intervening years at Field Guides have taken him to many corners of the world and across both the Arctic and Antarctic circles! Chris takes an interest in nearly anything that flies, and you might catch him sneaking a peak at a passing aircraft, or stopping to examine a butterfly or odonate. You might also notice him getting especially excited at the sighting of a rare or wonderful mammal (heck, he can get excited about a squirrel). Chris's passion for education has led to his serving on the Arizona Bird Committee, leading the occasional workshop, presenting at birding conventions, and—we must add—thoroughly explaining in admirable detail the nuances of flycatchers to tour participants and colleagues alike.

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for Chris's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

Holly Merker has found awe in the natural world since childhood, especially through birds. Although she spent countless hours watching the family bird feeder, it was in her early twenties that she set out to explore every bird in her neighborhood, county, and eventually state. That curiosity has continued to expand, leading to devotion to conservation, education, and guiding birding experiences across the United States and internationally.

In her early thirties, Holly was diagnosed with cancer, forcing her to slow her style of birding. During treatment, she discovered that quietly observing birds naturally anchored her attention in the present, calming her mind and pain in ways remarkably like the mindfulness practices she was learning as a cancer patient. Holly credits birds with helping to restore her health and wellbeing, and now helps others discover the healing potential of connecting with wild birds.

Drawing on her degree in Art Therapy from Arcadia University, Holly combines her clinical background with extensive training in nature-based and mindfulness practices. She is certified as both a Nature and Forest Therapy Guide (ANFT) and Practitioner (FTH), has completed certificates and training in Wellness Counseling (Cornell University), Mindfulness Mentoring (Banyan), Mindfulness Meditation Teacher Training (MMTCP), and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Holly serves in Board roles for multiple conservation organizations, including the Frontiers in Ornithology Association, which she co-founded to help inspire the next generation of conservationists.

A leading global advocate for Mindful Birding, Holly is the co-author of two books exploring the wellbeing benefits of birds, including the award-winning *Ornithotherapy: For Your Mind, Body, and Soul*. She is co-host of *The Mindful Birding Podcast*, founder of the Mindful Birding Network, and a co-author of scientific research examining the relationship between birds and human health and wellbeing. Her work has been featured by British Vogue, AARP, The New York Times, Philadelphia Inquirer, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Psychotherapy Networker, and many other media outlets.

Holly Thomas believes birds have a remarkable capacity to draw us into the present moment. Through mindful birding, she invites people to explore how paying attention with curiosity, openness, and kind awareness can foster a deeper connection with birds and the natural world.

With the good fortune to grow up in a family of birders, her lifelong love of birds and early introduction to mindfulness through her father's meditation and yoga practice gradually found a shared expression. She began to notice that the sense of ease, wonder, and presence she experienced while birding was remarkably similar to what she encountered on the meditation cushion. That realization became the foundation for her work in mindful birding—an approach that brings together birding, mindfulness, and a deep appreciation for the natural world while inviting people to discover how birds can become a gateway to greater well-being.

A lifelong student of both science and contemplative practice, Holly studied Zoology as an undergrad and then earned a PhD in Physiology from the University of California, Berkeley, and remained there as a researcher, studying stress and the inflammatory response, exploring how our bodies recover from injury and how we can support health and well-being. Today, she brings that scientific perspective to mindful birding, integrating insights from the science of attention, stress, resilience, and nature connection with the experience of observing birds.

In addition to her lifelong personal practice, Holly is a certified mindfulness meditation teacher (MMTCP), a Registered Yoga Teacher RYT® 500, a Therapeutic Art Life Coach, and has completed training in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Brain Longevity®. She leads multi-day mindful birding retreats, offers programs for birding festivals and organizations across the country, is a founding member of the Mindful Birding Network, and co-hosts *The Mindful Birding Podcast*.

Whether guiding experienced birders or those discovering birds for the first time, Holly delights in co-creating experiences that nurture curiosity, deepen attention, foster well-being, and cultivate an appreciation for the many ways birds remind us of our relationship with the living world.

Financial Information

FEE: \$2925

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$825

DEPOSIT: \$300

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: October 17, 2026

LIMIT: 14

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Caroline Lewis. Caroline 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: This tour begins and ends in Flagstaff, Arizona.

Arrival: Please plan to arrive in **Flagstaff** no later than **2:00 p.m. on Day 1, April 15, for the 2:30pm shuttle.** (arrival time in Flagstaff is dependent on flight operations, and subject to change).

Departure: We will depart Briar Patch Inn at **12:00 p.m. on Day 5, April 19,** for Flagstaff. The drive to the airport is approximately 35–45 minutes, with an expected arrival before **1:00 p.m.** We recommend booking departing flights for **2:30 p.m. or later.** If you need to depart earlier, you will need to make your own transportation arrangements to the airport.

DOCUMENTS: A valid photo ID (such as a REAL ID-compliant U.S. driver's license or passport) is required of all passengers boarding domestic flights within the U.S. Non-US citizens should consult the consulates of each destination for current entry requirements.

LUGGAGE: 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 are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

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.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: **The tour fee is \$2925 for one person in double occupancy from Flagstaff.**

It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 4, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 5, all ground transportation, 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 Flagstaff, airport taxes, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for the tour is \$825 for those requesting a single room. 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 LIMITS: Our limits are firm and we don't exceed the limit by one to accommodate a couple when only one space remains open. However, on occasion, we will send along a guide in training on a tour. In these cases, one seat in the

van or bus will be taken by the guide in training. Our guides will have a rotation system within the vehicle so that clients share the inconvenience equally. We hope this minor inconvenience will be more than offset by the advantages of having another guide along.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact us at fieldguides.com/contact-us/. Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please submit your deposit of \$300 per person; see <https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/> for our Payment Options. **Full payment of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or by October 17, 2026.** We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 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.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and full payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the full tour fee is non-refundable, which would include the full deposit if the final payment has not yet been paid. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (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 that 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 airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to protect your investment in case of injury or illness to you or an immediate family member before or during a trip. Because we must remit early and substantial deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer refunds for cancellations outside of our Cancellation Policy. If a participant is unable to join or continue a tour due to illness, all related expenses will be their responsibility, and no refunds can be issued for missed days. Please wait to purchase insurance until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate, as most policies are non-refundable.

For full details, visit our Trip Cancellation Insurance page at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/>.

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 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. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible 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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