



Mass Audubon Tours  
*supporting conservation here and abroad*

## **Photography and Natural History in Death Valley and the Mojave Desert**



**March 10 – March 17, 2012**

*with naturalists and photographers, Bob Speare and John Green*

Death Valley: this foreboding yet intriguing name belies the hidden wonders of this two million-acre national park. From the Badwater Basin, 282 feet below sea level, to the 11,049-foot height of Telescope Peak, this park and surrounding areas of the Mojave Desert offer a diverse and exciting world to discover and photograph.

With adequate winter rains, spring wildflowers decorate the landscape with every color of the rainbow. Nearly 1,000 different species of plants have been recorded in the diverse habitats of the Death Valley, including 19 species of cacti and 23 species endemic to the park. More than 380 springs in the park provide habitat to five species of Desert Pupfish, relict populations from a wetter time in the region's long history. The valley is a geologist's paradise, with nearly two billion years of history recorded in the rocks that tell of times of great inland seas while volcanic features bear testimony to centuries of dynamic change. As the light passes over these unique layered formations, the colors, textures, and patterns create powerful landscape photos.

We will walk amid sand dunes, water-sculpted canyons, salt pans, hidden springs and cool mountain forests, observing and taking photos of the landscape, looking for wildlife (Ring-tailed Cats, Kit Foxes, Kangaroo Rats, Black-tailed Jackrabbits, and Desert Bighorn Sheep), and listening for sounds of desert birds (Gambel's Quail, Rock Wrens, Western Kingbirds, phoebes, and flycatchers). Photographic opportunities abound, particularly in the magical, subtle light of dawn and dusk.

Another Important Bird Area we will visit is Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, home to endangered Devil's Hole Pupfish. Our journey ends with a trip up the scenic loop road up Mt. Charleston, where we find more classic species of the Western Mountains such as Steller's Jays, Clark's Nutcrackers and possibly Northern Goshawks. The average temperatures in March are in the 70s to 80s (though cooler in the mountains) – so shed your winter gear and join us as we explore the spectacular Mojave Desert in the spring.

## **DAY-TO-DAY ITINERARY**

### **Day 1 – Saturday, March 10: Arrival in Las Vegas / Mojave Desert / Pahrump**

Plan to arrive in Las Vegas no later than 3:00 PM, when we will gather as a group to drive northwest to the small town of Pahrump. Pahrump lies in a well-watered basin (by Mojave Desert standards) where abundant underground springs keep local vegetation green. Here we enjoy simple lodgings away from the hustle and bustle of Las Vegas and we are well positioned for an early start to Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, a Nevada Important Bird Area. Meet your guides and fellow travelling companions at a welcome dinner this evening. *Lodging at (2 nights) Best Western Pahrump Station or similar (D)*

### **Day 2 – Sunday, March 11: Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge**

We start the day exploring a 23,000 acre wonderland of spring-fed wetlands that provide stark contrast to the more abundant alkaline desert uplands. **Ashville Meadows holds one of the highest concentrations of endemics for a single location in the U.S.** – biologists have cataloged 24 endemic animal species. The most famous of these is the tiny and very local Devil's Hole Pupfish, which exists in the wild at a single limestone cavern managed by Death Valley National Park within Ash Meadows Refuge. While managed populations exist in man-made habitat that mimics this cavern, this species is a textbook example of extreme geographic isolation and is important to our understanding of evolution, having resided in isolation in this area for at least 30,000 years.



We plan to spend the full day at this refuge, established in 1984. This site provides an **excellent introduction to Mojave Desert ecology** and the host of fascinating adaptations of the flora and fauna. We walk the Crystal Springs Interpretive Boardwalk trail, a quiet two-track road closed to motorized vehicles, and take a scenic drive to springs and marsh wetlands. Refuge biologists will meet with our group to detail current research, management and restoration projects.

Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge is a desert oasis, providing habitat for rare fish, plants, snails and insects. Clear spring pools and streams support seven species of fish; four are native and endangered. If boardwalk construction is completed, we hope to walk into the colorful Point of Rocks area where pupfish are particularly active and visible. In addition, there are over 239 different species of birds which have been recorded on the refuge. While songbird migration is typically later, during April and May, we are here at a good time to see breeding plumage waterfowl, overwintering waders and early migrants. During the winter, marshes and reservoirs support the largest variety of water birds. Resident Southwestern species such as the mesquite-loving Crissal Thrasher, colorful Verdin, displaying Phainopepla, and noisy Lucy's Warbler will likely command our attention. While not easy to see, the refuge's 27 species of mammals includes coyotes, Black-tailed Jackrabbits, Desert Cottontails, and the supremely desert adapted White-tailed Antelope Squirrels. Desert Bighorn Sheep are occasionally observed at Point of Rocks.

Ash Meadows will offer some very unique photo opportunities including beautiful landscapes incorporating the spring pools against the harsh dry desert, a number of bird and other wildlife encounters as well as close-ups of some of the unique wildflowers of the Mohave Desert. *Lodging at Best Western Pahrump Station or similar (B,L,D)*

**Day 3 – Monday, March 12: Death Valley National Park (DVNP)**

From Pahrump we travel west to enter Death Valley National Park on the south end where Badwater marks the lowest elevation in the Western Hemisphere. En route, we pass through the community of Tecopa, which is known for its hot springs. The hot springs are part of the geothermal complex found in Death Valley and provides habitat for migrating shorebirds and waterfowl. In a small wetland we may see Wilson's Phalarope, Spotted Sandpiper and American Avocet.



Tecopa is also home to the extensive China Ranch Date Farm where, in addition to looking for birds, we can try their famous Date milkshakes. This family-run farm has built nature trails that wind amidst large cottonwood and willow trees. If time allows, we'll walk down a trail to colorful Amargosa Canyon, where an underground river creates wildlife habitat. Enjoy local art and lunch at a fun restaurant in Tecopa or Shoshone, the location determined by the luck we've had with our birding and when we leave China Ranch. Surprisingly there are several fun local establishments for us to choose from! In Shoshone, we visit a small museum which chronicles local Death Valley history and displays the remains of a prehistoric Mammoth.

The surrounding area may be the hottest place in the world with temperatures reaching over 120+ degrees for more than thirty days each summer. Walk out on the saltpan here, to marvel at the immense sense of space! We continue through the park's scenic landscape to the date palm oasis at Furnace Creek. Enjoy dinner tonight at the Ranch's Steakhouse.

Photo opportunities for today include hummingbirds and Gambel's quail at China Ranch, and our first amazing landscapes and close-ups at Death Valley National Park. *Lodging (4 nights) at Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley National Park, CA (B,L,D)*





**Day 4 – Tuesday, March 13: DVNP Sand Dunes / Mosaic Canyon / Artist's Drive**

We start early in the morning, when the light is dramatic, with a walk among the amazing sand dunes. As we explore, we will look for fresh animal tracks. We then drive a short way to **Mosaic Canyon to hike and take photos in a tapestry of rock colors and patterns.** In this cooler, shaded ravine we can learn about the complex geology revealed in the rock walls. This is a good place to find Rock Wrens which nest in the area.

We return to our lodgings for lunch, a mid-day break, and – if you wish – a swim in the pool. Trees around the facility may harbor Northern Mockingbirds, wintering Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Hermit Thrushes, and more. Later in the afternoon we take in the exhibits of the park's main visitor center and then drive a scenic drive to Artist's Point, stopping for photos and to enjoy the cooling air and the spectacular late afternoon light. This is a great opportunity to capture the amazing colors of the rocks as they play off the late afternoon light. American Pipits, Horned Larks and Common Ravens may be visible in this open habitat, as well as a variety of lizards. Dinner tonight is at your leisure. *Lodging at Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley National Park, CA (B,L)*

**Day 5 – Wednesday, March 14: DVNP: Salt Creek / Mountain Vistas / Wildrose Canyon**

Salt Creek, one of Death Valley's major drainages, is home to the unique Desert Pupfish as well as a host of interesting birds and aquatic invertebrates. We take a boardwalk trail through the area. Those who wish for a longer hike can continue up the drainage, while photographers may want to linger to photograph on a macro scale the delicate plant and animal life that flourishes along the banks. Raptors, migrants, and waders often frequent this small valley. With luck we may find Northern Harriers, Common Yellowthroats, American Avocets, and Greater Yellowlegs, as well as other species.

From here we continue to the **mountains of Death Valley.** The higher elevations offer a cool respite from our days on the valley floor. We visit points of scenic and biological interest as we gain elevation. Enjoy a walk on the scenic trail towards Wildrose Peak, where we find conifer-loving birds such as Juniper Titmouse, Red-naped Sapsucker, Townsend's Solitaire, Mountain Bluebird, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Mountain Chickadee. At this elevation in early March, we may encounter snow! Listen for calls of Pinyon Jay and Common Raven, which may fly in to investigate our picnic lunch. Learn more about local mining history as we visit the picturesque remains of charcoal kilns left from the boom-and-bust endeavors in Death Valley. Dinner tonight is at another of the park's restaurants: an early dinner as we head for home. *Lodging at Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley National Park, CA (B,L,D)*

**Day 6 – Thursday, March 15: Zabriski Point / Dante's View / Titus Canyon**

We start the day with a trip to Zabriski Point and Dante's View, where we can scan the entire panorama of Death Valley. In this dramatic setting, we outline the geologic events that created this stunning environment and you'll have time to take some spectacular photographs in the morning light. In patchy desert shrubs we look for wintering White-crowned Sparrows, and newly arrived Ash-throated Flycatchers, Western Kingbirds and Green-tailed Towhees. Gambel's



Quail and possibly another quail relative, the Chukar are year-round residents which should make an appearance.

After a mid-day break, we head to the mouth of **Titus Canyon** which is cut deep into the Amargosa Mountains. We then walk into this remote and boldly sculpted canyon where we read the geologic story in the rock walls and, for those who wish to hike up a way, look for the rock art of early cultures along the waterways. Plants in this canyon exhibit many adaptations to the environmental extremes. Tonight we celebrate our explorations with a lovely dinner at the Furnace Creek Inn. *Lodging at Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley National Park, CA (B,L,D)*  
*Creek* *Photo by Greg Smith – Salt*

**Day 7 – Friday, March 16: / Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area / Mt. Charleston**

Today we depart Death Valley National Park in time to visit a gem of protected area 15 miles west of Las Vegas. Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area is a geologic wonderland known for its fanciful red, gray and cream colored rocks. The multi-colored layers are part of an escarpment where uplift forces have lifted the range to 8000 ft. in elevation. Six hundred million years of Earth's history are here on display. A 13-mile loop road leads us to scenic highlights and an excellent Visitor's Center. We'll choose trails to explore according to our energies and plan to visit and photograph some interesting rock art panels.

We will have a picnic lunch, then drive up the Mt. Charleston road towards the local ski area, where we may encounter light snow at this time of year. We are on the look-out for typical birds of the Mountain West. Almost 12,000 ft. Mt. Charleston is the centerpiece of the Charleston Mountains; Bristlecone Pines grow on its flanks as do White Firs, Limber and Ponderosa Pines. Some 30 endemic plant and animal species have been described here to date; biologists are censusing this Nevada Important Bird Area to catalog additional species as this 'island' mountain range has likely been isolated from similar habitat for 30,000 years. Steller's Jays and Clark's Nutcrackers check us out as we explore several picnic areas. This is also the realm of the Northern Goshawk which we hope to find. Enjoy an early farewell dinner at the delightful Mt. Charleston Hotel near the ski area. *Lodging at Courtyard Marriot (or similar), Las Vegas (B,L, D)*

**Day 8 – Saturday, March 17: Mt. Charleston and depart**

This morning, we will head out early, returning to Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area catch the morning light. We will be on the lookout for any species we might have missed (Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, Ash-throated Flycatchers, Abert's Towhees, perhaps) and take time for some more photos. We'll provide group transport to the airport late morning so travelers can catch flights home departing ~ noon. (B)

**Tour Price:** \$2990 from Las Vegas, based on double occupancy. This cost includes all accommodations, meals as specified in the itinerary, professional guide services, transportation on tour, park and program entrance fees and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour cost does not include: round-trip transportation from your home city to Las Vegas, portage, personal services such as laundry, telephone, or beverages from the bar.

Single supplement is \$795 (limited to 2)

Group Size: Maximum of 14, minimum of 7

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## About Your Guides

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**Bob Speare**, Director of Wildwood and the Monadnock Conservation Center in Rindge, New Hampshire, has led numerous trips for Mass Audubon including Belize, Baja California, Big Bend in Texas, the Mojave Desert, and Death Valley. Throughout the East he has led many trips to areas from Cape May to Newfoundland. Beyond birds and other aspects of flora and fauna, Bob likes to focus on wetland and desert ecology, butterflies, reptiles, and amphibians. He also enjoys sharing his passion for photography on tours and presents workshops on digital photography across the state.



**John Green**, interpretive naturalist and nature photographer, has led natural history trips from Newfoundland to Florida, and west to Arizona. He is skilled in bird and plant identification, and an expert in “birding by ear”. John also possesses a working knowledge of many mammals, insects, reptiles and amphibians. He operated the nature travel company *Naturethics* for 11 years. Since then he has been presenting his slide shows to civic and nature groups, and teaches workshops in nature photography and bird identification. He resides in Belchertown, Massachusetts.

*All Photos by Bob Speare or Greg Smith*



**RESERVATION / APPLICATION FORM** (2 SIDES)

**Passenger 1 Name as shown as passport:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Nickname for Name tag:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Passenger 2 Name as shown as passport:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Nickname for Name tag:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Work: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Room Preferences**

\_\_\_\_ I request single accommodations where available and will pay the single supplement.

\_\_\_\_ I would like to be assigned a roommate. If one is not available, I will pay the single supplement.

**Personal Information:**

\_\_\_\_ I/We are non-smokers. (If you are a smoker(s), please check here \_\_\_\_ and note that smoking is limited to outdoors in non-group spaces)

\_\_\_\_ I have a food allergy (Yes / No). If Yes, please list: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ I prefer a special diet (Yes / No). If Yes, please list: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ I am allergic to medications, insects other: List \_\_\_\_\_  
(you are required to carry your own Epi-pen and necessary medications)

\_\_\_\_ Is there anything else we should know about your health that might impact your ability to participate comfortably on this trips? Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

**Deposit:** Please find my enclosed **check** \_\_\_\_\_ or please **charge** \_\_\_\_\_ my credit card for the deposit:

**VISA** **MC** **Card #** \_\_\_\_\_ **Exp.** \_\_\_\_\_

Checks should be made payable to "Massachusetts Audubon Society"

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY, PLEASE NOTIFY:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: Work/Daytime: \_\_\_\_\_ Home or Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

**Release and Assumption of Risk**

I would like to participate in the birding and nature tour named above (the “Tour”) organized by Massachusetts Audubon Society, Inc. (“Mass Audubon”). I am aware that participation in a Mass Audubon tour involves risk, including, but not limited to, the hazards of living in and traveling over unpredictable terrain often in remote areas without adequate medical facilities, exposure to disease and infection, being subject to the forces of nature, and travel by airplane and motor vehicle.

In addition, I understand and acknowledge that, if I participate in the Tour, one or more of the risks described above or set forth here could result in or cause bodily injury or death to me or damage to personal property of mine: Physical exertion, Travel by foot, plane, train, auto, vans, bus, boat or other conveyance, Consumption of food and beverages, Civil unrest, terrorism, banditry, or criminal activity, High altitude, Inadequate medical facilities or service.

I acknowledge that I have received and read carefully information describing the Tour, including, but not limited to, the Terms and Conditions and the paragraph in the Terms and Conditions entitled “Your Responsibility”. I acknowledge that the enjoyment and excitement of touring is derived, at least in part, from the inherent risks incurred by travel and activity beyond the accepted safety and routine of life at home or work, and that part of the reason I have decided to participate in the Tour is to experience this enjoyment and excitement. I further acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to discuss with my medical provider the medical risks involved in the Tour. I have also had the opportunity to research the Tour and to understand fully the risks involved.

Therefore, notwithstanding the risks of participating in the Tour set forth and as described above, and in consideration of Mass Audubon permitting me to participate in the Tour:

1. I agree to assume and accept all risks associated with this tour; and
2. I hereby release and forever discharge and covenant and agree not to sue, and agree to indemnify and hold harmless, Mass Audubon and its Directors, Officers, Employees and agents (collectively the “Releasees”), and each of the releasees from and against and in regard to any and all Claims, demands, actions suits, losses, costs, damages, and expenses and any and all liabilities and obligations, which I shall or may have against the Releasees or any one or more of them arising out of, or in connection with, my participation on the tour.

I agree that this release and Assumption of Risk shall be (a) binding upon me and my heirs, executors, legal representatives, successors, and assigns, and (b) deemed a contract made under seal under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and shall be governed by, and construed and enforced in accordance with, the internal laws of said Commonwealth without regard to its principles of conflict of laws.

I have carefully read, understand, and voluntarily sign this release and assumption of Risk.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Travel with the Massachusetts Audubon Society**  
208 South Great Road, Lincoln, MA 01773  
800-289-9504



## TERMS & CONDITIONS

**APPLICATIONS, RESERVATIONS, DEPOSITS:** Early applications are strongly encouraged. Trip rosters usually must be finalized 4 months before departure! All applications must be accompanied by a completed reservation form and a \$500 deposit. Deposits can be by check or credit card (Visa or MasterCard). We reserve the right to decline your application. In the case of questionable health, we reserve the right to require a physician's certification to affirm you are capable of the activities. Final payment is due 90 days before the departure date. Final payment must be by check or money order.

**RATES:** All tour prices are based on double occupancy. If you would like us to find you a roommate, we will do our best, but cannot guarantee a share. If we cannot find a share, you will need to pay the single supplement. All forms and fares are accurate at the time of publication, April 2011, but are subject to change at any time prior to departure. It is our policy to only pass on the actual amount of any increases in airfares or land costs such as those increases due to the devaluation of the dollar. Rarely, a price increase may be called for if the group falls below the minimum, as listed in the itinerary.

**FLIGHTS: You, the traveler, are responsible for booking and paying for your own international flights.** Once you reserve your space, we will provide you with suggested flights and tell you which flights our leaders will take. You may book flights directly with the airline, online, or with a travel agent. Please be aware that most tickets are non-refundable, therefore you should not book your flight arrangements until you have checked with us to be sure the tour has the minimum number of participants for the trip to go. We ask that you provide us with your flight details so we can be sure to meet you at the airport upon your arrival.

**PHOTOS:** Mass Audubon reserves the right to make use of any photograph taken on the tour. We guarantee that no photos of a comprising nature will be used. If you have questions or concerns, please contact us.

**TRIP INSURANCE:** A brochure and application for optional trip cancellation, illness and baggage insurance will be sent to you upon registrations. We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself. Mass Audubon does provide Medical Evacuation Coverage as part of the tour price.

**CANCELLATION Policy: If you need to change your booking, you must inform us immediately in writing.** All cancellations must be done in writing and are effective upon receipt in the Massachusetts Audubon Travel Office. Cancellations received up to 121 days prior to departure will be refunded deposits less a \$300 per person fee. For cancellations between 120 and 90 days prior to departure, all deposits will not be refunded. There are no refunds for cancellations 90 days or less from departure. We strongly urge all travelers to purchase trip cancellation insurance. You will be sent information from the Massachusetts Audubon Society upon receipt of your deposit.

**Your Responsibility:** Although every precaution is taken to safeguard you and your belongings, group travel trips by their nature involve a certain amount of risk. Trip participants should understand that the domestic and international trips sponsored/operated by Massachusetts Audubon Society (Mass Audubon Tours) - hereafter collectively "M.A.S." - involve known and unknown risks. M.A.S. assumes no responsibility for injuries, death, financial losses or damage to clients' property caused by or occurring during participation in any of the travel trips sponsored/operated by M.A.S. Trip participants must assume responsibility for having sufficient skill and fitness to participate in the trips and activities offered or sponsored by M.A.S. Trip participants must also certify that they have no medical, mental or physical conditions which could interfere with their abilities to participate in the activities and/or trips they are participating in and they must assume and bear the cost of all risks that may be created, directly or indirectly, by any such condition. It is the responsibility of trip participants to have in place adequate insurance to cover any injury, damage or emergency transportation costs related to their travel and/or participation in trip activities and/or to bear the costs of such injury, damage or emergency transportation costs. Because of the risks associated with the travel trips sponsored by M.A.S. we urge all trip participants to supplement their own insurance with travel or vacation or emergency response types of insurance. M.A.S. requires that all trip participants acknowledge and assume these risks by reading and signing an M.A.S. Release and Waiver and Assumption of Risk contract prior to departure.

**CONDITIONS OF TRAVEL:** Travelers will be provided with an itinerary and trip preparation information. It is expected that travelers will read this information prior to trip departure. Travelers will be responsible for completing an application reservation form, including the personal information and a release of liability. (see attached) Travelers will be expected to abide by the terms set for in the invoice. During the tour, travelers are asked to respect and follow the directions of their guide and leader.