

Eilat Spring Migration Festival 2012

Client quote "Pretty much faultless!! Leaders were excellent" H & B.W April 2011

NOW FULLY ESCORTED FROM THE UK!!!

Eilat and the surrounding areas are known worldwide as one of the best Western Palearctic destination for birders. The dramatic outline of the Rift Valley serves as a corridor for millions of migrants every season. The variety of habitats promises an incredible range of species of many families. Besides the migrant birds that dot the bushes and fill the skies, Southern Israel is also home to many exciting near eastern species that can be hard to come by anywhere else in the region.

Eilat and Southern Israel – birding overview

Nestled in the southern tip of Israel, Eilat is placed between the magical blue waters of the Red Sea and the Eilat mountains, an extension of the massive granite ridges of Sinai.

The relaxed city of Eilat itself, provides habitats for many migrant and local species and birds can be seen from your hotel balcony or during a stroll through the city's gardens and parks. At your doorstep you will find Laughing Dove, Yellow vented Bulbul and the beautiful Palestine Sunbird to name a few.

Eilat North Beach is at the northern end of the Red Sea and therefore an important sea watching location. Migrant herons, ducks, gulls and terns mingle with near tropical species like White-eyed Gull, Western Reef and Striated Herons and Pied Kingfisher.

The North Beach regularly produces astonishing rarities and has hosted many new species for the region.

Bordering the city from the west are the Eilat Mountains, home to species like Little Green Bee-Eater, White-crowned and Hooded Wheatears, Sand Partridge, Desert Lark and Barbary Falcon. Every spring up to 2 million soaring birds pass over the Eilat Mountains and on a good day thousands of raptors and storks can be seen. The pools and reservoirs north of the city are an important stopover site for hundreds of thousands of shorebirds that migrate to and from their Eurasian breeding grounds.

Any visit to the famous K19 and K20 pools can produce a mouth-watering list of waders and other species. Moving north up the rift valley, the developing Southern Arava region is dotted with fields, plantations, pools and reed beds that host highly localized residents like Namaqua Dove and Indian Silverbill. During the spring the agricultural areas are full of migrating pipits, wagtails, wheatears, hirundines, buntings and larks. The open desert areas of the Southern Rift Valley and the Southern Negev Plateau hold exciting residents like Trumpeter Finch, Desert Wheatear, Spotted and Crowned Sandgrouse and more. These areas are also important sites for rare and nomadic Desert Larks which peak during March. Temminck's and Hoopoe Larks require searching for and previous springs have produced sightings of the rare and unpredictable Thick-billed, Dunn's and Black crowned Finch Larks.

The 6th International Spring Migration Festival is organized by the Israel Ornithological Center and the IBRCE (International Birding and Research Centre

Eilat), aims to bring together birders from all around the world again. Illustrated reports of the first five Festivals plus species lists can be found on the festival website, 219 species were recorded during the week in 2007 including a first for Israel. 2008 produced an even higher total of 238 species including a wealth of highly desired rarities such as Caspian and White-tailed Plovers, Turkestan Shrike, Black Bush-Robin and Thick-billed Lark. 2009 produced 221 species with the rarity highlights including Crested Honey Buzzard, Caspian Plover, Black Bush Robin, Bimaculated Lark, Asian Buff-bellied Pipit, Asian Desert Warbler, Hill Sparrow, Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, Cinereous Bunting and much more. 2010 scored 248 species and 2011 came in with 224 species recorded. Migration does not get any more exciting than this!

To cash in on the wealth of birds around, many bird related activities will take place. These will include a choice of free, fully guided tours to the best sites in the region led by field experts, ringing demonstrations, identification workshops, lectures and optional extra tours targeting specific species and regions.

The Festival centre will be The Isrotel Yam Suf Hotel in Eilat, a very comfortable 'resort' hotel, and the evening activities, including the opening banquet and lectures will be held there. The hotel is conveniently located by Coral Beach, away from the town centre and main tourist area. All rooms have private facilities and the hotel has gardens, pools, a bar and restaurant.

Festival visitors can explore the area in a number of ways during the week:

First, several top birding sites are reachable on foot from the hotel, North Beach, Shulamit and other Parks and the southern salt pans. Every day several fully guided minibus tours will leave the hotel, these tours are led by Israel's top birding guides and some of the previous festival's best birds are found on these tours. Participants are welcome to choose from several different morning and afternoon tours which are all included in the price of the festival package.

In addition to the above, several Specialty tours will be on offer during the week.

These tours are longer excursions targeting specific regions or species.

Full day specialty tours will cost cUS\$100pp and shorter specialty trips cost from cUS\$60pp. Examples include full day trips to the Western Negev & Nizzana and a full day to the Dead Sea region. Specialty species trips will include night tours to see Hume's Owl and Nubian Nightjars and specific excursions to find Arabian Warbler, Macqueen's Bustard, sandgrouse and various difficult-to-see larks. A selection of optional excursions and activities for non-birders will also be available like snorkeling and diving tours and a trip to world famous Petra.

The Festival headquarters will provide up to date information, sighting boards, rarity alerts and give any additional help that might be needed exploring the region. Every evening you will be invited to enjoy lectures, talks and slideshows from professional local birders and a detailed summary of the day's sightings.

The group flights and entire event will now be escorted by WildWings Leader Dave Fell, who has birded the Eilat area three times in the past.

Holiday Information

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Eilat. Evening opening banquet and welcome.

Days 2-7: Six full days birding in southern Israel.

Day 8: Depart Eilat.

Dates: 25th March – 1st April 2012

Leaders: Dave Fell, Jonathan Meyrav and team.

Cost: The basic cost is £829 per person sharing a twin room at the Hotel Yam Suf.

Single Supplement: £275

Deposit: £200 per person

OR You can book the package of Birding Excursions only (which includes the evening events) if you have your own accommodation. The full week's programme will be £335 per person, 3 days is available for £209 per person. (All excursions operate from and to the Yam Suf Hotel.

Price includes: Accommodation in standard twin-bedded rooms with private facilities on a bed and breakfast basis at the Isrotel Yam Suf, bird checklist and the services of local English speaking expert guides and WildWings leader, six days guided-birding shuttle bus pass, attendance at evening lectures and presentations including the welcome banquet.

Price excludes: Flights to Eilat via Tel Aviv (currently available from London Heathrow from £475 return, depart 24th March at 2230 and arrive Eilat 1215 on the 25th, return on the 1st from Eilat at 1415 and arrive back at Heathrow at 2050), extra nights in Eilat (twin share £75pppn, single £105prpn, travel insurance, optional specialty excursions (1 FREE PER PERSON IF YOU BOOK BY 31/12/11!), lunches, dinners, drinks and items of a personal nature.

Hotel Yam Suf - Half board supplement £99 per person for the week. Superior (pool deck) rooms available for £69 per room per night.

The birding excursions are actually booked in Israel, we can take requests in advance. Payments for all optional extras will be made locally.

For more detailed information, including a potential species list, the 2011 and previous Festival reports, planned festival timetable and full accommodation details, please visit the special website:

www.eilatbirdsfestival.com