



Birding the Valleys of Dreams Tuesday 05 – Wednesday 13 December 2023

Northern Israel is an incredible place for early winter birds and wildlife

People are often amazed at how small Israel really is. Less than 500 kilometres tip to toe and only 70 at its widest, this ancient land boasts an amazing combination of history, culture and of course nature. Despite its small size, Israel is blessed with breath-taking landscapes and natural habitats, pristine deserts, stunning valleys, abundant wildlife and plentiful natural beauty.

Because of its unrivalled position connecting the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa, Israel is not only a crucial migration corridor for hundreds of species, but also hosts many African, Asian and Mediterranean species at the limits of their range. Expect an enviable mix of species from various continents, overlapping with each other in a unique and hugely varied environment.

Israel is a modern, comfortable and safe country to visit, offering fantastic infrastructure, great accommodation and famous hospitality following unforgettable days in the field.



Black-shouldered Kite © Mark Pearson

Our tour will be co-led by Yorkshire Coast Nature's [Mark Pearson](#) and an expert guide from BirdLife Israel (part of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel – SPNI). The SPNI is the largest environmental NGO in Israel and works tirelessly to conserve birds and their habitats in Israel and beyond. Our long-standing, close relationships with our friends at BirdLife Israel allow us to enjoy the very best options with the very best co-guides available. It's important to note that all proceeds from the trip will go directly into nature conservation, so you will not only enjoy an amazing birding holiday, you will also be taking an active role in saving the birds and wildlife you see. Our program includes all the famous winter birding sites in the North of the country, as well as some best-kept secrets, and cultural and historic sites; this is Israel, after all!

Daily program

Day One

Departure London Heathrow by BA165 at 07:50. Arrive Ben Gurion airport at 14:35

After meeting our guide at Ben-Gurion airport, we will head North along the Mediterranean coast towards the region of Ma'agan Michael. We will spend the morning exploring the area and getting acquainted with the more common species. This area is dominated by fish ponds that stretch alongside the beautiful beach. It won't be long before we see our first Western Marsh Harriers and Greater Spotted Eagles. It will be hard to ignore the many White-breasted and Pied Kingfishers, White Pelicans, Great Egrets, Black and White Storks, Eurasian Spoonbills and Glossy Ibises, as well as many shorebird species, at close quarters. In the early afternoon we will drive northeast to the legendary Hula Valley, arriving in time for dinner and a wrap up of the day's adventures. Overnight at Gonen Cottages.



Egrets, Herons and Gulls, a water bird paradise © Mark Pearson

Day Two

After breakfast we will head up to the Golan Heights in the direction of Gamla. The impressive canyon and its surroundings are home to several pairs of Griffon Vultures. Besides the vultures we will look for the resident pair of Bonelli's Eagles, and in most winters, one or two Black (Cinereous) Vultures are present. The area also hosts Little Swifts and large concentrations of finches, as well as Woodlarks, Zitting Cisticolas and Blue Rock Thrushes, and with a little luck we should find Finch's Wheatear and the rare Long-billed Pipit.

After lunch we'll descend back to the Hula Valley and visit the world famous Hula Valley Nature Reserve. The reserve is the oldest protected area in the country and is part of the historic Hula Lake. Dominated by large Papyrus reed beds and flooded meadow habitats, towards evening large numbers of raptors (including many harriers of various species) congregate here to roost. Overnight at Gonen Cottages.

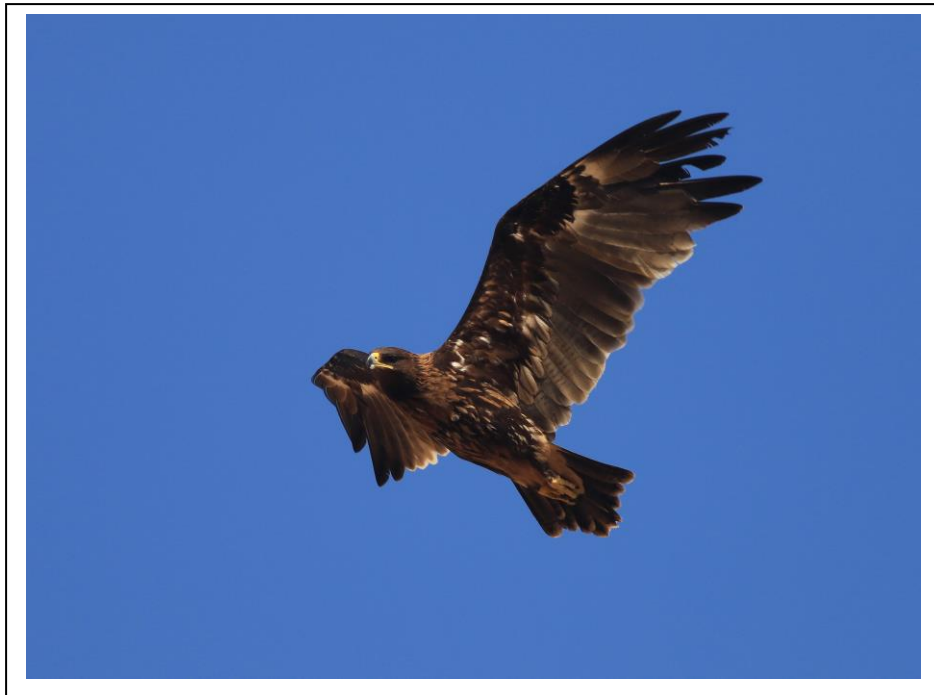
Day Three

A very early departure for our exclusive sunrise date with the Cranes at the Hula Valley Agmon Park. The park is of international importance for wintering Cranes with up to 40,000 spending the winter here. We will join a special tour in the Tractor-towed mobile hide, and get very up close and personal with the Cranes - a truly magical experience! Following the mobile hide trip we will head back to our hotel for breakfast and check out, after which we will return to the park, spending most of the day there.



Cranes in the Hula Valley © Mark Pearson

This area is a magical refuge for tens of thousands of waterbirds and birds of prey. We will spend the day leisurely exploring the vast fields, flooded areas and canals. This is the peak time of year for birds of prey such as Greater Spotted and Eastern Imperial Eagles, White-tailed Eagles, Merlins, Peregrines, Pallid, Marsh and Hen Harriers, Long-legged Buzzards and a healthy population the elegant Black-winged Kite. In the afternoon we will start heading south along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, arriving in Kfar Ruppin in time for dinner at the wonderful Jordan Valley Birding Centre, our base for the next three nights.



Great Spotted Eagle © Mark Pearson

Day Four

Our day begins with a pre-breakfast stroll around the grounds and perimeter of Kibbutz Kfar Ruppin. The scrubby areas around the kibbutz are great for some of the more elusive specialities such as Dead Sea Sparrow, Desert Finch and more. It will be hard to miss the low flyovers of egrets, storks, raptors and Pygmy and Great Cormorants. Following breakfast, we will head out to explore the bird-rich Bet Shean Valley. This low-lying, arid area is dominated by agricultural fields and fishponds. The valley is one of the most impressive places for birding in Israel (and that's saying something!), hosting many thousands of wintering species including large numbers of Black Storks, White Pelicans, gulls (including Pallas's and Armenian), various herons, many wader species and plentiful birds of prey. Birding heaven!

Many rare and localised passerines are also found here and we will keep an eye (and an ear) open for Citrine Wagtails, Clamorous Reed Warblers, Dead Sea and Spanish Sparrows, Penduline Tits, Oriental Skylarks and more. Raptors will also play a major role and we should expect Black and Black-winged Kites, buzzards, Greater Spotted

Eagles, Harriers, falcons and more. After a full day in the field, we will head back for a delicious home-cooked dinner and daily summary at the Jordan Valley Birding Centre Lodge, which is where we will spend the night.



Dead Sea Sparrow © Mark Pearson

Day Five

Following breakfast, we will drive the short distance to the Gilboa mountain range. The mountains are dominated by high Mediterranean vegetation and conifer woodland, and our targets here will be mountainous species like Blue Rock Thrush, Long-billed Pipit and Finsch's Wheatear. This area is also home to a healthy population of Mountain Gazelles, a beautiful and globally-threatened antelope.

After exploring Mt. Gilboa, we will descend to the Yizre'el Valley and explore some more fishponds and reservoirs, where we can expect a wide range of waders, gulls and songbirds. In the evening we will set out on a night drive in the Kfar Ruppin area, searching for owls and nocturnal mammals such as Indian Porcupine, Golden Jackal, Wild Boar and more. Overnight at the Jordan Valley Birding Centre.

Day Six

Following breakfast we will head out for another tour of the fishponds and fields of Tirat Zvi at the southern part of the Bet Shean Valley. Here too we should expect huge numbers of waterfowl, gulls, storks, pelicans and birds of prey. After checking out at the lodge we will start driving south along the Jordan Valley, where the lush landscape will soon change and become drier and more desert-like. We will stop at several key spots along the way on our way to the Northern Dead Sea area. We will then spend some time birding the fields and date plantations near Kibbutz Kalia, our base for the next couple of nights.

Day Seven

We will start the day with a pre-breakfast walk through a small and picturesque Wadi

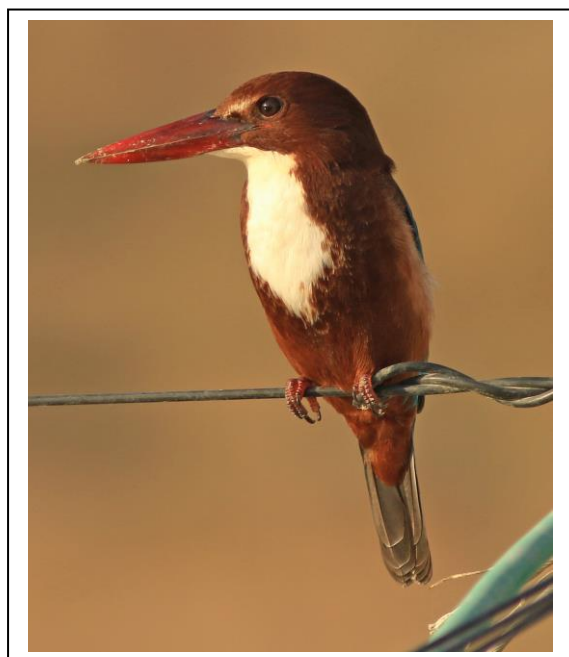
near the Kibbutz, keeping our eyes open for desert species such as Arabian Green Bee-eater, Tristram's Starling, Fan-tailed Raven and more. After a home-cooked breakfast at the Kibbutz we will head south along the Dead Sea, visiting several beautiful sites in the Judean desert including a breathtaking look-out over the Dead Sea, and we'll explore a remote Wadi which is home to many interesting species such as Sand Partridge, Striolated Bunting, White-crowned Wheatear, Desert Lark, Arabian Babbler and more. We will scrutinise the bushes for wintering Cyprus Warbler and with luck we may also find Streaked Scrub Warbler and Sinai Rosefinch. In the evening we will visit nearby date plantations in search of the enigmatic Pallid Scops Owl. Overnight at Kalia.

Day Eight

Our last day in Israel will begin with a visit to the famous Jerusalem Bird Observatory (JBO). This is one of our most important birding centers in Israel and the only one on the world on parliament grounds! We will visit the ringing station, observe birds in the hand and learn about the incredible work being done here to unite communities and inspire a passion for nature. Following our visit to the JBO we will head west to the Judean plains and search for the endangered White-headed Duck which winters in Israel. After our relaxed session on the plains, we'll drive the short distance to Ben Gurion airport where our tour concludes.

Day Nine

Morning at leisure. Early afternoon transfer to airport for your return flight home. Departure Ben Gurion airport by BA164 at 16:25. Arrival Heathrow at 19:45.



White-throated Kingfisher and Bluethroat © Mark Pearson

WHAT TO EXPECT:

CLIMATE & WEATHER: With a mostly Mediterranean climate, Israel experiences long, hot and dry summers and short, mild winters. Average annual temperatures and precipitation levels vary from year to year and between regions of the country, but in general, Israel is cooler and wetter in the upland areas of the center and north, such as at Jerusalem and the Golan Heights and progressively warmer and drier farther south, and around the Dead Sea.

December is typically a nice time to be in Israel as the heat of summer is gone but the chillier weather of late winter will not yet have arrived. We should expect mild to warm days and pleasantly cool nights and mornings. Temperatures in the valleys and around Tel Aviv and the coastal plain may rise to the mid 20's by day, dropping into the low 10's at night. In Northern Israel and around Jerusalem it can be cool, especially in the early morning and in the Golan Heights it can be breezy with temperatures in single digits. Although Israel does not receive large amounts of rain, December is within the damper time of the year, particularly in the north; should we encounter a cold front, participants should be prepared for some overcast and damp conditions and cooler temperatures.

CLOTHING: This tour is very casual and we suggest you bring primarily field-type clothing, which will be appropriate for most if not all occasions (including a good jacket for the mountains etc.). However, smart-casual attire for evenings may be the preferred style of dress for some.

FOOTWEAR: For footwear, we recommend a good trail-walking shoe or light hiking boot when in the field. Trainers are suitable for some locations but will not keep your feet dry and can become soiled from muddy conditions at others.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry services will be available for an extra charge at most of the accommodation. Please be aware that while laundry service is good, it can be expensive.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure is required. Please make sure that you have at least three blank pages in your passport for entry stamps. Visas are not required for entry by UK citizens for stays under 90 days.

ELECTRICITY: The electrical current in Israel is 220V. Electrical outlets are primarily of the type H socket, a type unique to Israel, featuring three ungrounded 4mm pins assembled in a triangular formation. This socket also accommodates the Type C European plug with two round pins. You will need to bring a Type H plug adapter in order to plug in your device or appliance.

INTERNET: WiFi is available at all accommodation.

LANGUAGE: The main languages spoken in Israel are Modern Hebrew and Arabic, although English is used widely as well.

TIME: Israel time is two hours ahead of UK time.

INSECTS AND OTHER CRITTERS: Not a problem in Israel, especially in the cooler months. There are many species of snakes in Israel but they are rarely encountered between October and March. Mosquitos can be present in low-lying areas but in very small concentrations and are never at disturbing levels. Those worried will get by with the basic repellants.

PLACES: Limited to eight clients

Please email info@yorkshirecoastnature.co.uk to book and/or make enquiries

THE COST

Per person sharing twin or double room	£4534.00
Single Room Supplement	£ 528.00

Cost Includes:

- International flights with direct British airways flight in economy class from London Heathrow. Departures from regional UK airports, Premium economy and Club class fare is available on request.
- Accommodation with private facilities as mentioned in the itinerary.
- Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- Service of an experienced tour leader from UK and a local bird watching expert guide.
- All transfers and sightseeing arrangements.
- Entry fee to monuments and places of interest
- 100% protection of your payment by our ATOL and ABTA Licenses

Cost does no include:

- Any expenses of a personal nature
- Tips and Gratuities
- Travel insurance