



Participants: John & Ann Rayner; John & Jenny Tromans

This was a short break with our non-birding wives, based in Caleta de Fuste and seeking some winter sun, so definitely not a full-on birding holiday. Our approach to birding was easy and relaxed and was mainly confined to about an hour before breakfast (dawn at 07.50) and another hour or so around 17.00 - 18.00. Also, one three-quarter day proper birding and, of course, any snatched moments on other days. Nevertheless we saw all our targets with the exception of Barbary Falcon. We hired a car and drove 620 miles, managing to get to all corners of the island except the extreme south beyond Costa Calma. The weather did not quite work out as expected possibly due to the furthest reaches of the shifting polar vortex which had much of North America in its icy grip. Instead of English summer temperatures we experienced mainly typical spring weather with reasonable daytime temperatures of about 16 - 18 degrees. We had to dodge a few heavy rain showers but luckily, always when travelling in the car and we invariably managed to emerge into sunshine again. Nor did we experience the relentless strong winds that gives the island its name. We found the best restaurant in Caleta de Fuste to be simply called "15"

with a rolling blackboard menu of 15 dishes based on how often each dish was ordered, the least popular dropping off every so often.

We managed with "A Birdwatchers' Guide to the Canary Islands" (Clarke and Collins), a rather inadequate tourist map, some detailed Google Earth printouts and made use of the many trip reports on the internet.

The bird photographs were mainly taken by John Tromans and the views by John Rayner.

Day 1. From the hotel windows there was a large flock of 27 Ruddy Shelduck on Fuerteventura Golf Club course.



Ruddy Shelduck - Fuerteventura Golf Club

We then acclimatised and simply walked north along the beach towards Caleta de Fuste where we found many waders roosting on the rocks and Sandwich Terns roosting on buoys (the only seabird of the trip, apart from the ubiquitous Yellow-legged Gull).

Day 2. Started with a moonlit visit to Barranco de la Torre, as it was only 10 minutes from the hotel.



Barranco de la Torre

Here we found our first pair of the endemic Fuerteventura Chats, 2 Egyptian Vultures and the widespread and abundant Hoopoes, Berthelot's Pipits, Spectacled Warblers and Southern Grey Shrikes.





Fuerteventura Chat - male : Barranco de la Torre



Fuerteventura Chat - female : Barranco de la Torre



Egyptian Vulture : Barranco de la Torre

Behind the hotels were loads of roosting waders and terns on coastal rocks with minimum counts of 29 Kentish Plovers, 47 Ringed Plovers, 15 Sanderlings and 32 Sandwich Terns. A drainage channel next to Hotel Elba provided further waders in the shape of Greenshank, Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit, Little Ringed Plover and Common Sandpiper plus a few Common Blue butterflies.



Kentish Plovers : Caleta de Fuste





Greenshank : Caleta de Fuste



Little Ringed Plover : Caleta de Fuste

Later that day we drove around the north of the island. Nothing much on orangey-red rocks of Antigua plains but at Rosa de los Negrines near La Oliva, Jenny found us our first Houbara Bustard. It was quietly preening close to the track and had tail fanned. Eventually it became aware of our presence and slinked away with neck held horizontally to the ground.



Houbara Bustard : Rosa de los Negrines

The rest of the day was spent non-birding but some Yellow-legged Gulls at El Cotillo presented photograph opportunities as they waited for fish to be gutted.





'Atlantis' Yellow-legged Gull : El Cotillo

Day 3. Another early visit to Barranco de la Torre gave repeats of yesterday's birds plus Barbary Ground Squirrel and Rabbit to start (and finish) the mammal list. Trumpeter Finches overflying were new for the list.



Barbary Ground Squirrel : Barranco de la Torre

After a leisurely breakfast we explored to the south visiting Gran Tarajal, Punta de la Entallada Faro and Paraja. The lighthouse area looked perfect for Barbary



Falcon though there were none today but we did find 2-3 Yellow-browed Warblers at Paraja.



Punta de la Entallada

Day 4. Another early start spending an hour on the old road at Triquivijate. This was quite productive with more Chats and Southern Grey Shrikes, our first Linnets, many Berthelot's Pipits and 3 Barbary Partridges.



Barbary Partridges : Triquivijate

A quick visit to Fuerteventura Golf Club added Spotted Redshank to the wader list whilst a few Plain Swifts wheeled over the hotels. Then we headed south as far as Costa Calma, where only an unidentified 'small' white was noteworthy. The sandy track past the wind farm heading towards La Pared did not reveal any Cream-coloured Coursers but had a very photogenic Southern Grey Shrike. The cliffs at La Pared made a splendid picnic site as Atlantic breakers crashed onto the rocks below.



Parque Natural, La Pared



Southern Grey Shrike : Parque Natural, La Pared





Atlantic breakers, La Pared

A late visit to Fuerteventura Golf Club was productive with all of the morning's waders still present, plus a pre-roost of 30-40 White Wagtails, 27 Ruddy Shelducks, c70 Yellow-legged Gulls, 1 Spoonbill and, best of all, excellent close views of a 1st winter Red-throated Pipit. It appeared, from talking to other groups, that the island currently held 4-5 Red-throated Pipits and up to 9 Yellow-browed Warblers. Add to this the 4 Olive-backed Pipits from 2013 and one wonders just how many 'sibes' overwinter on the island.

Day 5. A pre-dawn start today with the main aim to get Black-bellied Sandgrouse before breakfast. Acting on received information we headed for a goat farm to the south of Embalse Los Molinos. Lots of Ruddy Shelduck (36) here and 2 Egyptian Vultures, more pipits, shrikes, larks etc. but no sandgrouse. Perhaps we were there too early as most birders we bumped into seemed to find them later in the day. Later, we decided on a trip to the mountains as the weather was fine and visited the pretty but touristy Betancuria. Here we found a singing Blackcap, another Yellow-browed Warbler and African Blue Tit. Representing the insects were at least 5 Monarchs.



Betancuria



African Blue Tit : Betancuria





Monarchs : Betancuria

On the twisting mountain FV30 road to Paraja is a parador overlooking the dam at Las Penitas, beyond which lies the distant white dot of the famous hermitage. Berthelot's Pipits, Spanish Sparrows, Ravens and Barbary Ground Squirrels are habituated to visitors here and easy to photograph.



Las Barranco de las Penitas



Spanish Sparrow : Las Penitas mirador



Berthelot's Pipit : Las Penitas mirador





Raven : Las Penitas mirador



Barbary Ground Squirrel : Las Penitas mirador

Day 6. Birders day out! An early start was made through heavy rain, which quickly dried up. Passing the windmill at Tefia, our targets were Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Houbara Bustard and Cream-coloured Courser. But we again arrived at a goat farm, this time to the north of Embalse de los Molinos (near Las Parcelas) a little too early and all we found amongst the goats were Ruddy Shelduck, Trumpeter Finches and Lesser Short-toed Larks. Nice enough though.



Tefia windmill



Goat farm : near Las Parcelas

Moving on from here to the tracks to the NW of Tindaya we initially failed to locate the metalled surface track and ended up on a delightful dirt track that ran almost parallel. Here Trumpeter Finches abounded and Lesser Short-toed Larks were in song flight overhead. Best of all we found our first Cream-coloured Courser at point blank range, before relocating to the tarmac track.





Cream-coloured Courser : Tidaya

Back on the tarmac track almost the first bird we found was a confiding Houbara Bustard on the road in front of us and, using the car as a hide, it allowed close approach. And we found another 2 Cream-coloured Coursers as well.



Houbara Bustard : Tindaya

Back at the goat farm we were surprised to at last find 4 male and 1 female Black-bellied Sandgrouse feeding amongst the goats. But not as surprised as when the owner came over and asked if we spoke English. When we explained what we were doing he kindly invited us into the farm for closer photographs. He also insisted on showing JR his mountain goats of which he was especially



proud. A young lad who spoke English, Spanish and French and clearly felt undervalued as a goat-herd.



Black-bellied Sandgrouse : near Las Parcelas

After another visit to Betancuria, which added Geranium Bronze to the butterfly list, we travelled back to Caleta de Fuste to locate the female Ring-necked Duck on Las Salinas Golf Course (record shot only).





Ring-necked Duck - female : Las Salinas Golf Course

Day 7. Pre-breakfast at the usual haunts - Fuerteventura Golf, Elba Hotel channel and Barraco de la Torre with more good views of now familiar birds.



Spectacled Warbler : Barranco de la Torre

The rest of the day was spent around Corralejo with its expansive dune system and views over to Lanzarote. Loads and loads of common waders here with Bar-tailed Godwit and Grey Plover new for the list.



View towards Lanzarote



Whimbrel : Corralejo





Bar-tailed Godwit : Corralejo

Day 8. No birding today. Just breakfast, car hire return, uneventful flights and back home to a chilly 4° C.

John Rayner  
31st January 2014