

TENERIFE 4th to 10th JUNE 2011

by John Rayner



Another budget holiday: this time an attempt to see as many Canary Island and Macronesian endemics as possible, plus a few other key targets, on the island of Tenerife. To make life more interesting we also sought out endemic sub-species. We chose late dates for our visit because these endemics are present all year round and this timing maximised our chances of finding scarce seabirds on the Tenerife to La Gomera ferry. The downside was that the overall number of species present was reduced outside of the migration season. Although we only went for 7 days we did consider a one-way inter-island flight to Fuerteventura for Houbara Bustard and Fuerteventura Chat, with the additional enticement of a 9 hour return ferry journey and the possibility of White-faced Petrel. This would have been perfectly feasible as we saw all the endemic and near-endemic species within the first two days but we eventually decided to leave Fuerteventura for another day.

Travel Arrangements

On this occasion there were only two participants, John Rayner (travelling from Manchester) and Doug Smith (travelling from Newcastle). We used Jet2.com as they flew from our respective home town airports and were cheap. We reduced costs further by declining all the usual add-ons; Jet2 insurance, pre-booked seats, in-flight meals, in-flight drinks, duty free, headphone hire, film hire, scratch cards etc (is there nothing they won't sell?) and took hand luggage only (a reasonable 10 kilos). This brought the flight cost from Manchester down to £112.

A Ford Fiesta was booked through Carhire3000 with Goldcar for £84. Accommodation was a large, self catering apartment in the Marino Hotel Tenerife on the Costa del Silencio, excellent value at £100.

We went as foot passengers (40 Euros return) on the Los Cristianos to La Gomera ferry travelling with the slower Naviera Armas (a crossing of about 80 minutes) rather than the Fred Olsen Express.

Maps, Guides and Recommended Trip Reports

The map we used, the 1:50 000 Tenerife, Freytag & Berndt, has some fine detail and is probably the best available, but was unwieldy to use in the car as it is massive and printed on both sides.

We took 'A Birdwatchers' Guide to the Canary Islands' (Tony Clarke & Dave Collins) and 'Where to watch Birds in Tenerife' (Eduardo Garcia del Rey). But these guides were published 12 -15 years ago and are now a little dated. We found many sites changed beyond recognition, for example, all usual access routes to Punta de la Rasca lighthouse are now behind locked gates or blocked off with new and massive tented banana plantations and El Fraile reservoir, accessible as recently as January 2011, is now fenced off. Such is the rate of change.

These Internet reports are from the last 3 years and give useful information on species seen, sites visited and changes to site directions plus the location of the current best site for Laurel Pigeon:

Tenerife and La Gomera – 25th March to 1st April 2008 - Neal Warnock (Surfbird.com)

Tenerife, Canary Islands – 10-13 December 2009 – Nick Littlewood (Travelling Birder.com)

Tenerife and Fuerteventura – 12-19 May 2009 – Stefan Magnusson (Travelling Birder.com)

Tenerife – 11-18 September 2010 – Richard Sutton (Surfbirders.com)

Tenerife – 8-22 August 2008 – Phil Lindley (Surfbirds.com)

Tenerife – Feb 2008 – Richard Bonsor (Surfbirds.com)

Tenerife – 22-29 January 2011 – Gary Westdean (Travelling Birder.com)

4th June

Late afternoon flights but as DS's flight was delayed by 3 hours JR managed a bit of birding around the Reina Sofia airport. This quickly produced the first sightings of the abundant and widespread **Canary Islands Chiffchaffs** and **Plain Swifts**, the endemic sub-species of **Blackbird** (ssp. cabrae, not much different to ours) and a singles of **Barbary Partridge** and **Turtle Dove**.

5th June

An early start was called for as we headed to the north of the island to a site not found in the books, but gleaned from internet trip reports (see above). Mirador la Grimona is approximately 5 kilometres west of Puerto de la Cruz and is just west of a series of tunnels on the TF5. Within seconds of getting out of the car a **Laurel Pigeon** flew, and then landed, halfway up the mountain slope opposite affording excellent scoped views. There were 2 -3 birds present and they put on a bit of a show over the next half hour. Our first of many **Canaries**, the extremely bright and aptly named sub-species of **Robin** (ssp. superbus) and a sub-species of **Cory's Shearwater** (ssp. borealis) were also in the area.

Buoyed by this early success we headed back to the mountain village of Erjos where we quickly found the endemic sub-species of **Grey Wagtail** (ssp. canariensis), but it took some effort to find the correct track to the Bolle's Pigeon site. Problems arose mainly from the disappearance of the 'Casa Forestal' sign, which is mentioned in both guides and has been used as a prominent landmark in the past. We chose to walk through the pine forest rather than drive and thus had close views of **Canary Island Kinglet**, **African Blue Tit** and the sub-species of **Chaffinch** (ssp. tintillon, a much drabber bird than those in Britain). We chose to walk further than the famous rock with the green rain gauge (N.B. the gauge cannot be seen from ground level) and on to the next bare cliff face. This, surrounded as it is by pristine laurel forest is ideal habitat for **Bolle's Pigeon** and again we quickly had both flight and scoped perched views. It is worth noting that on two subsequent days as we passed Erjos it was shrouded in thick cloud, so on this occasion we were lucky with the weather.



Above: Laurel Pigeon site



Above: rain gauge rock with cliffs in background



Above: male Island Canary

6th June

Another early start as we drove to the interior of the island before crowds of tourists got there. **Barbary Partridges** were perched up roadside and another pair walked across the road with a chick. The first of dozens of **Berthelot's Pipits** were noted before we arrived at Las Lajas picnic area. Here were **Blue Chaffinches**, **Canaries**, **Canary Islands Kinglets** and the endemic sub-species of **Great-spotted Woodpecker** (ssp. canariensis), the latter sporting quite dusky underparts. **African Blue Tits** were nesting under the eaves of a stone building and with their black and white head pattern, blue mantle and lack of wing bars they looked very different to Eurasian Blue Tit. Insects were also flying with the golden-honey coloured female Canary Blue catching the eye and Canary Lizards warmed up in the early sun.



Above: Barbary Partridge



Above: La Lajas picnic site



Above: male Blue Chaffinch



Above: female Blue Chaffinch



Above: African Blue Tit



Above: female Canary Blue



Above: Canary Lizard

In the afternoon we took the 14.00 ferry from Los Cristianos to the nearby island of La Gomera. As we had already seen both pigeons well we did not need to take the car to reach the pigeon strongholds on La Gomera and so travelled as foot passengers. In Los Cristianos harbour we saw our only Common Tern of the week. The 80 minute outbound sea watch produced 35 **Cory's Shearwaters** and 1 **Bulwer's Petrel** but the 17.00 return was better, as predicted, with 156 **Cory's Shearwaters** and a minimum of 6 **Bulwer's Petrels**. Sadly Little Shearwater proved more difficult and was our only bad miss of the trip. On La Gomera itself a flock of **Plain Swifts** held a single **House Martin**.

7th June

With no more endemics left to find we concentrated on new areas and firstly explored the plateau on Guaza Mountain. **Grey Herons, Blackcaps** and loads of **Berthelot's Pipits** were seen on the way up, the browner juveniles contrasting with the greyer adults. More sub-species were recorded on the plateau with **Spectacled Warblers** (ssp. *orbitalis*), a **Southern Grey Shrike** family party (ssp. *koenigi*), **Hoopoes** (ssp. *pulchra*) and 2 **Stone Curlews** (ssp. *distinctus*) but Trumpeter Finches proved to be elusive. Bath Whites were abundant.

We finished off the day by struggling to find access to Punta de la Rasca lighthouse. Eventually we did this by parking by the football pitch in El Fraile (at the bottom of Calle Fuerteventura) and walking along the coast, skirting a new and enormous banana plantation tent. Cory's were plentiful and **Pallid Swift** was new.



Above: Guaza Mountain plateau



Above: juvenile Berthelot's Pipit



Above: Bath White

8th June

Another trip to the northwest today but first we called in at Lago Abama where there was nothing on the water and just a lone **Little Egret** to add to our tiny list. As we passed Erjos was in thick cloud and rain and we were thankful that today was not a pigeon day. Roque de Garachico is given as a Little Shearwater breeding site so we sussed it out. There was a breeding colony of over 200 **Yellow-legged Gulls** (ssp. atlantis) but no trip report we could find has ever reported seeing Little Shearwaters from here and we chose to go further west.

So we headed for Punto de Teno and, like everyone else, ignored the 'Road Closed' signs. Here it was extremely windy but, unfortunately, it was blowing a strong off-shore easterly so, although this is reputed to be the premier sea-watching point on Tenerife, the prospects of seabirds coming close inshore seemed quite remote. This was supported by the fact that only a few distant Cory's were present. However, we quickly found one of our remaining targets with two screaming **Barbary Falcons** putting on a nice display around the sea cliffs at Punta del Fraile (viewed from the west car park - see del Rey site guide). There was still a lack of general activity on the sea and we made the decision to head back south to Punta de la Rasca in the hope that the winds would be more favourable in the south. Passing Erjos again the clouds had lifted slightly so we called in to Erjos Ponds adding **Coot** and **Moorhen** to the trip list. (wowee!)

At 19.00 near El Fraile we set up for the last hour of sea-watching and observed a good passage of **Cory's**, with approximately 300 per hour heading east but, unfortunately, nothing rarer. More **Plain Swifts**, **Berthelot's Pipits**, **Southern Grey Shrikes** and **Spectacled Warblers** were found in and around the euphorbia scrub.



Above: Barbary Falcon site at Punta del Fraile



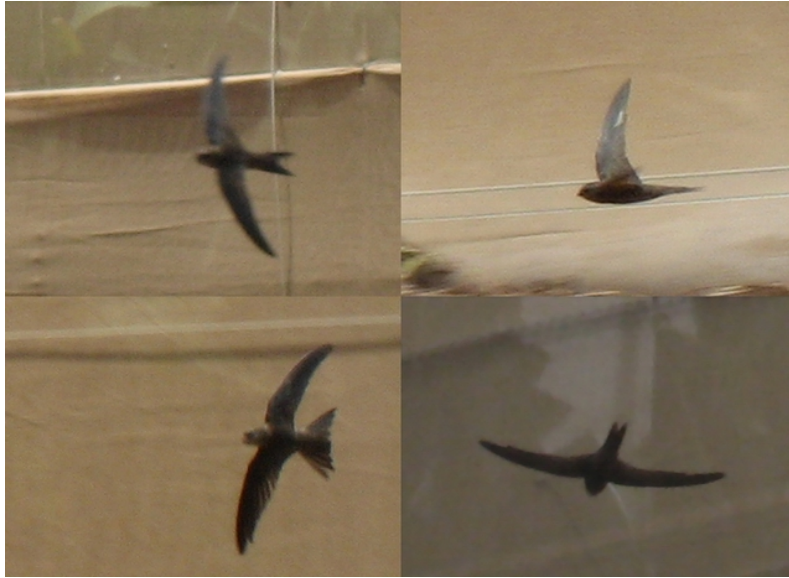
Above: Punta del Rasca



Above: Yellow-legged Gull



Above: Southern Grey Shrike of the race *Koenigi*



Above: Plain Swift

9th June

A speedy trip to the northeast today as it was motorway all the way to Los Rodeos airport area. This is supposed to be a Lesser Short-toed Lark site but the vegetation looked too high, perhaps it is better in winter. Apart from birds already noted we found **Corn Buntings** and at least 4 **Quails** were heard.

After a little further exploration of the area we headed back south to Amarilla Golf Course reservoir. Here a female Wood Duck might have been a special find if it had not been accompanied by a feral Mallard type.

But Ten Bel Plaza is the place for introduced species. Here there were more than twelve **Ring-necked Parakeets** and 7 **Monk Parakeets**, with two pairs nesting in large, untidy bundles of twigs. Also 2 **Nanday Parakeets** and a few **Barbary Doves** mixed in with the **Collared Doves** plus **Hoopoes** and the ubiquitous **Spanish Sparrows**.



Above: Monk Parakeets



Above: Spanish Sparrow



Above: Hoopoe

10th June

In addition to yesterday's finds the reservoir at Amarilla Golf now held a Muscovy Duck to reduce the credentials of the Wood Duck even further. There was one new bird in the form of an adult **Night Heron** and this proved to be the last new bird of the trip. The rest of the day was spent photographing birds at Las Lajas, taking the cable car up Mount Teide, which stands at an impressive 3718 metres and preparing for our uneventful evening return flights.



Above: mountain flora near Las Lajas



Above: Teide Bugloss (*Echium wildpretii*)



Above: Mount Teide

And so ended an enjoyable few days of relaxed birding. All our main targets were duly ticked off with the exception of Little Shearwater and many endemic sub-species were recorded. The sub-species missed were Trumpeter Finch, Long-eared Owl, Lesser Short-toed Lark and Rock Sparrow - but some of these are easier on Fuerteventura. Perhaps that will be the next trip.

John Rayner, June 2011

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