

# Canary Islands

14–21 July 1998

**Participants:**

**John and Odette Booth**

**John Boys**

**Richard and Julia Coomber**

**Alan Davies**

**John Wheeler**



**Picture: Berthelot's Pipit**

**Leader: Vaughan Ashby**

**Day 1:** We left London Gatwick on time and we arrived at Tenerife on schedule. The hire vehicle had luggage limitations but despite it being rather cramped, we still got to the hotel before the transfer bus and were therefore able to have an evening meal!

**Day 2:** After a 07.30 breakfast we left the resort of Playa Paraiso and headed straight to the pigeon site at Erjos seeing our first 'endemic', Plain Swift, en-route. Driving the 5km down into the valley along a rough track into the Laurel Forest, we were extremely lucky as this area is frequently shrouded in low cloud, but the sun shone strongly all day for us. We had a number of good sightings of Bolle's Pigeons at very close range but only half the group managed brief distant views of Laurel Pigeon. Canary Island Chiffchaffs were abundant and although the song was slightly different, the most noticeable feature was a distinctly longer bill than Common Chiffchaff. Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Common Buzzard showed well as did the distinctive endemic race of Blue Tit which may be split off before too long with three different groups present in the Canary Islands. There were several brief sightings of Tenerife Kinglet but not everyone managed to see one. On the butterfly front, Cardinal was the most noticeable. Driving back out of the valley, we stopped close to the road where we encountered several Island Canaries, the sixth endemic to be seen and it was only early afternoon of the first day! After stopping for a pleasant lunch, we headed up the slopes of Mount Teide through the Canarian Pine forests where several European Turtle-Doves were seen. The drive through the 'lunar' landscape of the lava fields was spectacular and eventually we arrived at the picnic site of Lajas, where we were pleased to note that it was virtually deserted. Almost immediately we had several sightings of the distinctive race of Great Spotted Woodpecker and it didn't take us long to find our first Blue Chaffinch. A drinking pool has been created here and we were able to watch Island Canary, Blue Chaffinch and Great Spotted Woodpecker all coming down to drink and bathe. Despite much searching, we could find no more Tenerife Kinglets so we headed back down the mountain and around the concrete jungles of Los Cristianos and Playa de Las Americanas to our hotel for the evening meal.

**Day 3:** After breakfast we headed out towards the airport stopping en-route at some waste ground where we saw our first Berthelot's Pipits while we were looking for a Southern Grey Shrike. Eventually we re-found the shrike which, was of the distinctive *koenigi* race. Moving on towards Punta de la Rasca, we saw our first Hoopoes of the tour and in the process of getting lost trying to find the right road, saw Spectacled Warbler, Blackcap and an unidentified weaver sp.! Eventually arriving at the entrance to the point, we saw several more Spectacled Warblers but unfortunately the Long-eared Owl roost appeared to have been deserted because the trees were dying. Walking down to the point we diverted to a small reservoir where a couple of Spoonbills were a surprise find plus Grey Heron and good numbers of Common Coot. At least five adult Little Ringed Plovers were present with two young but there was no sign of other waders. Continuing to the point a Turtle Dove was seen on the telephone wires. At the lighthouse, good numbers of Cory's Shearwater were passing and up to 10 Common Terns were seen around several fishing boats. By now it was hot so we decided to take a lunch break in nearby Las Galletas and whilst eating overlooking the beach, we saw more Common Terns and a couple of Whimbrel flying past and feeding in the rock pools and a Eurasian Collared-Dove. By the time we had finished lunch and the obligatory ice cream, it

was quite late so we decided to return to the hotel. En-route however, we checked out the La Gomera ferry times and everyone was introduced to the less pleasant tourist aspects of Tenerife with tightly-packed featureless hotels. Back at the hotel, some decided to relax whilst others spent some time seawatching recording plenty more Cory's Shearwaters and Yellow-legged Gulls and a distant pod of whales thought to be either Long-finned or Short-finned Pilot, vigorously pursued by tourist boats.

**Day 4:** Driving back up into the mountains our first stop was the Zona de Recreativa San Jose de Los Llanos where we all had excellent views of a number of Tenerife Kinglets together with Common Chaffinch, Canary Island Chiffchaff, family parties of Blue Tits and a European Robin of the distinctive local race. Cardinal butterflies also performed well. Continuing on to Icod, we briefly looked at the Dragon Tree before driving high into the mountains on a tortuous road where on several occasions we managed to get lost! Eventually we arrived at Chanajiga and were rewarded with some spectacular views as there was no cloud. Although Bolle's Pigeons did not give such good views as before, Laurel Pigeon gave exceptionally good views so every member of the group was happy. Common Buzzards were soaring high over the valley and Canary Island Chiffchaffs were common but there was little else of note except for the butterflies which included Indian Red Admiral, Canary Blue and Canary Speckled Wood. Making tracks towards Santa Cruz, we stopped at a motorway service area for a drink before arriving at the port to board our ferry. It departed 40 minutes late at 18.40 but very shortly after we were watching good numbers of Cory's Shearwaters. Surprisingly, it wasn't long before we picked up a Bulwer's Petrel, which gave incredibly good and prolonged views so that everyone could see every feature on it. We were accompanied by one or more Bulwer's Petrels for most of the crossing until it got dark and a couple of Little Shearwaters gave more distant views. The real bonus bird of the tour however, was a White-faced Petrel seen briefly but at extremely close range below us as it disappeared behind the back of the ship. It was certainly the topic of conversation over the evening meal that night!

**Day 5:** There was a major problem when the ship arrived in Fuerteventura and we lost nearly an hour and a half disembarking. We headed straight to 'Willis's' Barranca where at first all we saw were Common Buzzard and Common Raven. Eventually however, we found a female Canary Island Chat, which gave excellent views. Reaching the dam, the only birds of note were a few Berthelot's Pipits so we headed back down the valley where we found a male Canary Island Chat. Moving on across the plains towards Triquiviate we saw more Canary Island Chats including two adult males. Even better however, were the three Cream-coloured Coursers that gave exceptionally good views. Eventually we arrived at the village where Spanish Sparrows were common. Driving down another track, it first appeared birdless until after several miles we encountered a large flock of Lesser Short-toed Larks, which allowed us plenty of time to see all their identification features. Still no sign of Houbara Bustards however, so we doubled back on another track and whilst stopping to check out a few swifts which turned out to be Plain, were pleased to find a small flock of Trumpeter Finches in various plumages. A mile or so later we made another stop and walked into the plain looking for Black-bellied Sandgrouse but although they proved elusive, we did see three Stone-Curlews. By now it was getting late so we drove via La Olivia, seeing a small group of House Martins on the way, to check out the site for Houbara Bustard for later in the evening and on to Cotillo for a very enjoyable lunch watching the local youths jumping off the rocks into the sea! Exploration along the coastal plain to the south of Cotillo only gave us yet more Berthelot's Pipit and we again failed to find the elusive Houbara Bustard, seeing only a couple of Common Ravens. Driving back to La Olivia we were still too early for the bustards so we explored an area of cultivation where we were delighted to find a Houbara Bustard in a field. Although it promptly flew off it gave good flight views. Almost at the same time, Richard flushed a covey of about a dozen Barbary Partridge and after careful stalking everyone eventually had good views of them. Returning to the bustard roost site, we immediately saw two birds walking around in the fields below us and spend the next three-quarters of an hour watching at least three different birds performing. Although by now we were all tired, this was undoubtedly the highlight of the day, and we drove back to Puerto del Rosario for our evening meal in high spirits. We left Fuerteventura on the ferry at midnight.

**Day 6:** There was very little light for a seawatch before we arrived in Gran Canaria at 08.00. We were then given the shock news that we would not be leaving until 18.00 whereas we should have been back in Tenerife at 12.00! At first it was thought that there was a problem with the ferry but eventually it was discovered the tickets issued by the agency in London had the incorrect time on them. As the minibus was trapped on the vehicle deck we walked off the ship to try and hire another but unfortunately we couldn't get one the same size. As there were no special birds to look for on Gran Canaria, we decided to spend the day in Las Palmas, which was very pleasant and even added Rose-ringed Parakeet and House Sparrow to our lists! Eventually we departed at 19.00 but saw only a few Cory's Shearwaters and a distant Bulwer's Petrel before it got dark. We arrived in Tenerife at 22.00 and were back in the hotel by 23.00.

**Day 7:** We decided against another ferry journey to La Gomera today as we had already had good views of all the seabirds and pigeons. Instead we visited Punta de Teno. En-route we stopped several times in the mountains where there were superb views but no sign of Rock Sparrows just plenty of Plain Swifts, Island Canaries, a single Pallid Swift and a couple of Sardinian Warblers. The village of Masca was especially picturesque. As we drove out towards the point we made several stops to look for Barbary Falcon but without success. At the point the entrance to the lighthouse area was locked making the angle for seawatching difficult. The wind was also very strong but nevertheless, there were some spectacular movements of Cory's Shearwater with probable several thousand birds present. In amongst them were just a handful of Little Shearwaters, which wouldn't come as close to the shore. Driving back to Garachico for lunch we watched another Spectacled Warbler in the bushes below the restaurant. Driving back into the mountains we saw both Common Buzzard and Eurasian Sparrowhawk and 10 European Goldfinches. Next we stopped at a viewpoint over a small reservoir where Common Moorhen and Eurasian Linnet were added to the list. As it was our last full day some members of the group wanted to see the spectacular volcanic

landscape around Mount Teide again so we drove up to the base of the present cone where the flora was as spectacular as the landscape. By now it was quite late so we headed back to the hotel for our evening meal.

**Day 8:** Our final day so we transferred our luggage to one room and two of the group decided to stay behind to relax. The rest of us returned to the picnic site at Lajas, once again passing through the spectacular lava fields. Although there was nothing new to be seen, it was very pleasant watching and photographing Canary Island Chiffchaff, Blue Chaffinch, Island Canary, Tenerife Kinglet and Berthelot's Pipit again all at close range as well as Blue Tit and Great Spotted Woodpecker. The lunch was good but sadly they had run out of ice cream!. Eventually we had to return to our hotel, pick up our luggage and return to the airport, seeing Plain Swifts again on the way. The flight left some 40 minutes late and we arrived back at Gatwick in the early hours the next day.