

Canary Islands

8–15 September 2011

Participants

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Plain Swift

Leader Peter Lansdown

Day 1: The group met at London Gatwick and boarded a flight to Tenerife South Airport. We collected our minibus, accessed the motorway and drove half way around the island to our comfortable apartment hotel in Puerto de la Cruz on the north coast, a journey which produced 10 Yellow-legged Gulls, five Plain Swifts and a Southern Grey Shrike. After checking in, depositing our luggage and taking a short break, during which 15 Plain Swifts and 10 Island Canaries were seen, we set off to visit Valle Molino Reservoir. In total, 10 Yellow-legged Gulls and 50 Plain Swifts were seen during the drive and at our destination. The concrete-banked reservoir itself was not particularly productive for birds but the nearby fields, bushes and scrub gave us two Little Egrets, eight Barbary Partridges, which flushed from the flat roof of a disused building, a Pallid Swift, five Sardinian Warblers, five Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, three African Blue Tits and 20 Island Canaries.

Day 2: Before boarding the minibus we saw two Rose-ringed Parakeets, three Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, an African Blue Tit and three Island Canaries as well as some of the 150 Plain Swifts we were to record during the day. We set off up steep roads with numerous hairpin bends, finally taking a break near Mirador de La Palma, where we saw a Tenerife Kinglet, and heard two more, and saw an African Blue Tit. We continued up the mountain and across the island's centre, passing extensive lava flows and the conical top of Mount Teide which, at 3715m, is the highest mountain in the whole of Spain, before dropping down to Vilaflor. In the fields and bushes to the south of the village we encountered four Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, two African Blue Tits and six Island Canaries then began our return journey. We saw 10 Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, a Tenerife Kinglet and two African Blue Tits in the pine forest to the north of Vilaflor, then five Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, nine exquisite Blue Chaffinches and four Island Canaries in the thinner pine forest at Las Lajas. In a small group of bushes in the otherwise bare landscape near Siete Canadas we found a Southern Grey Shrike then we headed back to our hotel via the lush laurel forest at Chanajiga. Thankfully, the beautiful day continued, with the traditional late-afternoon low cloud nowhere to be seen, and, in addition to three Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, two African Blue Tits and two Island Canaries, we saw seven Bolle's Pigeons and a Laurel Pigeon, though the latter was glimpsed by only some of the party.

Day 3: Having seen five Plain Swifts, three Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, an African Blue Tit and five Island Canaries around the hotel we set off for Mirador de Las Gimonas, where we watched a Yellow-legged Gull, 10 Plain Swifts,

two Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, an African Blue Tit, an Island Canary and our primary target, three much appreciated Laurel Pigeons. So, with the two endemic pigeons now having been seen both in flight and at rest by the whole group, we drove to Faro de Teno for a seawatch which produced 200 Cory's Shearwaters, three Manx Shearwaters and 15 Yellow-legged Gulls. While searching the scrub there we discovered two Berthelot's Pipits and two Spectacled Warblers, while two Peregrine Falcons and two Yellow-legged Gulls were at nearby Punta del Fraile. The day's final destination was Garachico, where a seawatch just to the west of Roque de Garachico gave us 50 more Cory's Shearwaters and two more Yellow-legged Gulls.

Day 4: We recorded three Rose-ringed Parakeets, two Plain Swifts, three Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, two African Blue Tits and 12 Island Canaries before leaving Puerto de la Cruz for the extensive laurel forest at Monte del Agua. Here we found four Bolle's Pigeons, two Laurel Pigeons, three Plain Swifts, 20 Pallid Swifts, a Canary Islands Chiffchaff, two Tenerife Kinglets, three African Blue Tits and three Island Canaries. Just south of Santiago del Teide we saw two Sardinian Warblers, two Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, three African Blue Tits and five Island Canaries. Next we drove to the attractive port of Los Gigantes, climbed aboard our chartered boat and sailed through fairly calm coastal waters and into the rougher waters off Punta de Teno before returning to Los Gigantes. The voyage as a whole produced 200 Cory's Shearwaters and 10 Yellow-legged Gulls, while the bonus birds, in the shape of 22 Great Shearwaters and a Manx Shearwater, were seen off Punta de Teno.

Day 5: Around the hotel and during our clockwise drive to the south-western corner of the island we saw 10 Yellow-legged Gulls, five Plain Swifts, three Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, an African Blue Tit, eight Southern Grey Shrikes and five Island Canaries. On our long walk to Faro Punta de La Rasca and back, we found 20 Plain Swifts, a Pallid Swift, 18 Berthelot's Pipits, a Spectacled Warbler and four Southern Grey Shrikes, while a seawatch from the point gave us 200 Cory's Shearwaters and 40 Yellow-legged Gulls. We moved east along the south coast to Amarilla Golf, where we saw a Little Egret, two Eurasian Hoopoes and six Berthelot's Pipits, then to Golf del Sur, where two Cattle Egrets, three Barbary Partridges, a Eurasian Hoopoe, two African Blue Tits, five Spanish Sparrows and an Island Canary awaited us. At El Medano, following a Berthelot's Pipit near the car park, we discovered a juvenile Curlew Sandpiper and two juvenile Semipalmated Sandpipers amongst a variety of waders on the lagoon.

Day 6: Following our early-morning flight from Tenerife North Airport to Fuerteventura we collected our vehicle and set off for El Cotillo. The journey itself proved to be very eventful as we saw the first of the 1000 Yellow-legged Gulls, six Eurasian Hoopoes, 20 Berthelot's Pipits and 12 Southern Grey Shrikes we were to see during the day as well as, more importantly, three Cream-coloured Coursers and a welcome pair of Canary Island Chats. Near El Cotillo we found another of our target birds: a fine adult Houbara Bustard. In the Fimapaire Valley we discovered a juvenile Montagu's Harrier, a Peregrine Falcon, three Barbary Partridges, another pair of Canary Island Chats, two Spectacled Warblers and 30 Spanish Sparrows. On the approach to Los Molinos Reservoir we were pleased to find 14 Lesser Short-toed Larks, 20 Spanish Sparrows and 20 Trumpeter Finches, while the reservoir itself produced 105 Ruddy Shelducks, a juvenile Curlew Sandpiper and a juvenile Pectoral Sandpiper. After seeing a Spectacled Warbler at Casas de Escaque we caught the evening flight back to Tenerife North Airport, where, after a modest effort, we picked out a perched Barn Owl in the headlights.

Day 7: After watching three Canary Islands Chiffchaffs and two Island Canaries around the hotel we headed for the pine forest at La Caldera, where we recorded five Plain Swifts, 15 Pallid Swifts, three Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, 20 Tenerife Kinglets (with the majority being heard only), two African Blue Tits and two Blue Chaffinches. Our next destination was the capital of Tenerife, Santa Cruz, the prettiness of which failed to make up for its nightmarish traffic and car parks. Nevertheless, we did manage to find two Rose-ringed Parakeets, 10 Plain Swifts, four Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, an African Blue Tit, three Island Canaries and an excellent cup of coffee there. At nearby La Laguna we saw five Plain Swifts, two Canary Islands Chiffchaffs and two African Blue Tits and discovered a male European Serin feeding with 10 Island Canaries.

Day 8: Despite there being no time for birding, we did see three Island Canaries near the hotel, six Plain Swifts and a Southern Grey Shrike on the drive to Tenerife South Airport and a Berthelot's Pipit and a Canary Islands Chiffchaff at the airport itself, where we boarded our return flight to London Gatwick.

Further species seen (with, respectively, in brackets, the number of days recorded and the maximum daily total) were Grey Heron (2, 9), Mallard (1, 1), Eurasian Sparrowhawk (2, 3), Common Buzzard (5, 4), Common Kestrel (8, 12), Common Moorhen (2, 10), Common Coot (2, 70), Common Ringed Plover (1, 6), Sanderling (1, 27), Dunlin (1, 1), Whimbrel (2, 3), Common Redshank (1, 1), Common Greenshank (1, 2), Common Sandpiper (1, 4), Ruddy Turnstone (1, 7), Great Black-backed Gull (1, 1), Sandwich Tern (2, 2), Rock Dove (8, 500), Eurasian Collared-dove (8, 25), Great Spotted Woodpecker (2, 3), Eurasian Swallow (1, 1), Grey Wagtail (4, 3), European Robin (4, 5), Northern Wheatear (1, 1), Eurasian Blackbird (8, 20), Blackcap (1, 1), Spotted Flycatcher (1, 3), Pied Flycatcher (3, 6), Common Raven (2, 27), House Sparrow (4, 8), Common Chaffinch (3, 2), European Goldfinch (2, 3) and Eurasian Linnet (1, 10).

The Birdfinders record total of 69 species included all six of the Canary Islands endemics and all three of the additional Macaronesian endemics which occur on the islands as well as the hard-to-see-elsewhere Houbara Bustard.

Birdfinders will be repeating the tour in September 2012.

Peter Lansdown