

Canary Islands

8–15 September 2010

Participants:

Mike Baker
Dennis Hodges
Jean Millen
Perry Smale
Roger Terrell
Neil Westwater



Blue Chaffinch

Leader: Peter Lansdown

Day 1: The tour began with a flight from London Gatwick to Tenerife South Airport, where we saw three Plain Swifts and a Berthelot's Pipit before collecting our minibus. We quickly accessed the motorway and drove half way around the island to our comfortable apartment hotel in Puerto de la Cruz on the north coast, seeing three more Plain Swifts en route. After checking in and depositing the luggage, it was back into the minibus for the short journey inland to Cruz Santa Reservoir. A total of nine Plain Swifts was seen during the drive and at our destination, while the concrete-banked reservoir and surrounding fields also produced a Little Egret, eight Yellow-legged Gulls, two Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, three African Blue Tits and ten Island Canaries. Ten Cory's Shearwaters were observed near the hotel on our return.

Day 2: After a slightly delayed start, caused by the fifteen Plain Swifts, two Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, two African Blue Tits and two Island Canaries we watched before boarding the minibus, we set off up steep, twisting roads and across the island's centre, seeing fifty Plain Swifts on the journey. We passed 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 into the pine forest near Vilaflor. Our first stop in the forest produced a Canary Islands Chiffchaff, two Tenerife Kinglets, an African Blue Tit and three splendid Blue Chaffinches, while two Canary Islands Chiffchaffs and three Blue Chaffinches showed themselves at a second locality nearby. During lunch at the well-known Las Lajas picnic area we were treated to superb views of five more Blue Chaffinches and another Island Canary. We returned across the barren mountain terrain to mixed forest habitat at La Caldera, where we saw two Canary Islands Chiffchaffs and an African Blue Tit. We ended the day looking for the two endemic pigeons in the laurel forest at Ladera de Tigaiga. Although we were unsuccessful as far as pigeons were concerned, we did see fifteen Plain Swifts, three Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, two African Blue Tits and an Island Canary before our birding was curtailed by the arrival of thick mist.

Day 3: Two Canary Islands Chiffchaffs and three Island Canaries were seen near the hotel before we set off westwards along the north coast to Mirador de Las Grimonas, where flight views were obtained of at least three single Laurel Pigeons before two birds obligingly gave us prolonged perched views. We also

saw eight Plain Swifts and an African Blue Tit at this steep, tree-lined coastal site. There were two Plain Swifts and three Berthelot's Pipits near the lighthouse at Punta de Teno, while a sea-watch there produced twenty Cory's Shearwaters and ten Yellow-legged Gulls. We ate our picnic lunch at nearby Punta del Fraile, where we quickly located two majestic Barbary Falcons on the impressive, dark sea-cliffs. A fruitless search for Rock Petronia in the hill-country at Teno Alto was enlivened by twenty Plain Swifts, three Berthelot's Pipits, four Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, two African Blue Tits and a total of forty-two Island Canaries. After what proved to be the steepest, most zig-zag, up-and-down drive of the entire week, we arrived in the picturesque port of Los Gigantes, where we saw two Little Egrets and forty Yellow-legged Gulls and chartered a boat for a pelagic later in the tour.

Day 4: Before even boarding the minibus we saw a Sardinian Warbler, two Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, an African Blue Tit and two Island Canaries. We travelled clockwise by motorway to the south-west corner of the island and undertook a long sea-watch from the lighthouse at bleak Punta de la Rasca. This produced some 250 Cory's Shearwaters and twenty-five Yellow-legged Gulls. Other birds in the immediate area included three Little Egrets, ten Plain Swifts, two Berthelot's Pipits, a Southern Grey Shrike and fifteen Spanish Sparrows, while a further forty Plain Swifts and two Southern Grey Shrikes were seen from the minibus during the day. From Punta de la Rasca we drove to the fairways and greens of Amarilla Golf, where ten Plain Swifts, a Eurasian Hoopoe and four Berthelot's Pipits awaited us and where we discovered a Canary Islands rarity: a superb male Black-eared Wheatear of the black-throated form. We saw a Sardinian Warbler, two Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, an African Blue Tit and three Island Canaries at nearby Golf del Sur and two Berthelot's Pipits near the lagoon at La Mareta.

Day 5: We left the hotel well before dawn for Tenerife North Airport and boarded the day's first flight to Fuerteventura. At Fuerteventura Airport we picked up our minibus and headed south to the arid Barranco de Torre, seeing 150 Yellow-legged Gulls en route. Our main target species was the island endemic Fuerteventura Chat; we found three in total here as well as a Lesser Short-toed Lark, three Berthelot's Pipits, two Spectacled Warblers, a Sardinian Warbler, twenty-five Spanish Sparrows and three Trumpeter Finches. Back at the minibus we had great views of a really smart Cream-coloured Courser before we set off for Casas de Escaque. Here we saw two Southern Grey Shrikes but could not locate a Houbara Bustard: the birds were undoubtedly keeping their heads down to avoid being spotted by the various armed hunters walking and driving across the plain. We saw three more Southern Grey Shrikes on the journey to Los Molinos Reservoir and, although the reservoir itself was bone dry, the adjacent area of semi-desert produced nine Black-bellied Sandgrouse, 120 Lesser Short-toed Larks, five Berthelot's Pipits, five Spanish Sparrows and ten Trumpeter Finches. Our next birding was in the Fimapaire Valley, where we located two Eurasian Hoopoes, two Berthelot's Pipits, three Fuerteventura Chats, a Spectacled Warbler and three Southern Grey Shrikes. Hitting a sharp protruding kerb-stone in Villaverde, suffering the resulting puncture and discovering the lack of a jack and tool-kit meant a long unscheduled stop, during which we saw a Eurasian Turtle-dove and enjoyed a tray of teas and coffees supplied by a very kind German lady who lived nearby. Eventually, in a replacement minibus, we drove to La Oliva for a last-gasp forty minutes' search for Houbara Bustard, which sadly was unsuccessful. Next came a speedy drive to Fuerteventura Airport, the day's last flight to Tenerife North Airport, a drive to Puerto de la Cruz and a fairly late arrival at our hotel.

Day 6: Five Plain Swifts, a Sardinian Warbler, a Canary Islands Chiffchaff and two Island Canaries were logged before we set off for Monte del Agua, seeing fifteen Plain Swifts and ten Island Canaries on the way. From a vantage point deep in the laurel forest we saw two Bolle's Pigeons, two Laurel Pigeons, twenty Plain Swifts, two Canary Islands Chiffchaffs and an African Blue Tit. Next we drove to Los Gigantes and, after a pleasant lunch-break at the harbour, climbed aboard our chartered boat. Unfortunately from a birding perspective, the sea was flat calm. We headed out in the direction of Gomera, seeing very few birds, then turned north towards Punta Teno where, eventually, we encountered much rougher water and at last witnessed some seabird activity. In total we saw 200 Cory's Shearwaters, a Great Shearwater and eighty Yellow-legged Gulls and counted nine Little Egrets as we sailed back under the imposing sea-cliffs to Los Gigantes.

Day 7: This morning's birds in the vicinity of the hotel produced a Sardinian Warbler, a Canary Islands Chiffchaff and three Island Canaries. Our first stop of the day was in the island's capital, Santa Cruz, where ten Yellow-legged Gulls and four Canary Islands Chiffchaffs were seen during our unsuccessful hunt for the introduced Monk Parakeet. We then took the motorway along Tenerife's south coast and headed inland to the high pine forest, seeing fifteen Island Canaries on farmland en route. There were five Barbary Partridges and two African Blue Tits at our first stop in the forest, while at Las Lajas picnic area fifteen Plain Swifts, five Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, a Tenerife Kinglet and sixteen Blue Chaffinches entertained us during lunch. We passed through the lava fields and close to the cone of Mount Teide before tackling the hairpin bend-ridden descent to Puerto de la Cruz, where we saw thirty Yellow-legged Gulls during our second fruitless search of the day for Monk Parakeet, this time at the Loro Parque. A single Cory's Shearwater from the hotel balcony was the final noteworthy bird of the day.

Day 8: An early start on the journey home meant that there was little time for birding today, although we did see a Canary Islands Chiffchaff and an Island Canary before we set off and ten Yellow-legged Gulls, a Plain Swift, a Berthelot's Pipit and a Southern Grey Shrike from the minibus as we circled the island on the motorway on our way to Tenerife South Airport. Eventually, after a delay apparently attributable to an unofficial strike by French baggage-handlers, we boarded our flight to London Gatwick.

Further species seen (with, respectively, in brackets, the number of days recorded and the maximum daily total) were Manx Shearwater (1, 15), Grey Heron (4, 1), Eurasian Sparrowhawk (2, 1), Common Buzzard (5, 3), Common Kestrel (8, 10), Peregrine Falcon (1, 1), Common Moorhen (1, 10), Common Coot (2, 10), Little Ringed Plover (1, 1), Grey Plover (1, 1), Sanderling (1, 4), Whimbrel (3, 20), Common Greenshank (1, 1), Common Sandpiper (1, 2), Ruddy Turnstone (1, 2), Rock Dove (8, 200), Eurasian Collared-dove (8, 40), Great Spotted Woodpecker (2, 7), Eurasian Swallow (2, 10), Grey Wagtail (4, 2), European Robin (2, 2), Eurasian Blackbird (7, 15), Blackcap (1, 1), Willow Warbler (2, 1), Common Raven (3, 11), House Sparrow (1, 2), Common Chaffinch (2, 3) and Eurasian Linnet (1, 1).

The tour total of just 55 bird species included all six of the Canary Islands endemics and all three of the Macaronesian endemics, which occur on the islands.

We also noted mammals (Rabbit, Barbary Ground Squirrel, Shortfin Pilot Whale and Bottle-nosed Dolphin), reptiles (Canary Lizard, Haria Lizard and Turkish Gecko), butterflies (Large White, Small White, Clouded Yellow, Cleopatra, African Grass Blue, Indian Red Admiral, Cardinal, Canary Grayling, Canary Speckled Wood and Monarch) and dragonflies (Emperor Dragonfly, Scarlet Darter and Red-veined Darter). The reptiles and butterflies in this list include four Canary Islands endemic species, three Canary Islands endemic sub-species and one Macaronesian endemic sub-species.

Thanks are due to Mike Baker, Dennis Hodges, Jean Millen, Perry Smale, Roger Terrell and Neil Westwater, who contributed in no small measure both to the bird-finding and to the relaxed, amiable atmosphere during the week.

Birdfinders will be repeating the tour in 2011.

Peter Lansdown