

# Canary Islands Endemics 2016

## Trip Report

By Yeray Seminario

7 - 14 April 2016



The Blue Chaffinch is one of the most sought-after endemics in Tenerife

The **Canary Islands** are a volcanic archipelago with a subtropical climate and unique avifauna. The individual islands have distinct microclimates and are home to different species and endemic birds. During this trip we visited two of the seven islands: **Tenerife** and **Fuerteventura**. While Tenerife is well vegetated and has tracts of sub-tropical laurel forest, Fuerteventura, which is just 100 km away from the African coast, is effectively desert or semi desert.

This combination of landscapes gives us a chance to see all the endemic species: **Laurel's Pigeon**, **Bolle's Pigeon**, **Canary Islands Kinglet** (also known as **Tenerife Goldcrest**), **Canary Islands Chiffchaff** and **Blue Chaffinch**, which can be seen in Tenerife, and the **Fuerteventura Stonechat** (also known as **Canary Island Stonechat** or **Canary Islands Chat**) in Fuerteventura. There is also a larger number of endemic subspecies that are interesting to note, and, while some of them are quite similar to their continental counterparts, others will possibly be split as full species in the future.

**Tour Leaders:** Marta Curti, Yeray Seminario

# Itinerary

## Day 1 - 7 April

Our tour began in Tenerife. Most of the group was arriving from Whitehawk's Magical Morocco tour, and due to several delays in our flight from Marrakech, arrangements were made to meet with the rest of the participants directly at our hotel in Garachico, on the northern coast of the island. Our hotel was very comfortable and the village provided fabulous scenery and a great base for the first part of the trip. Without even unpacking we were able to add **Island Canary** (also known as **Atlantic Canary**), a Macaronesian endemic, and **Canary Islands Chiffchaff**, our first two target birds.



Canary Islands Chiffchaff can be seen all around Tenerife

## Day 2 - 8 April

Our second day on the islands began with an early morning visit to a nearby "Barranco" (ravine) to search for the region's endemic pigeons. The site was quite productive, with numerous flocks of passerines, including several endemic subspecies: **Eurasian Blackcap** ssp. *heineken*, **Sardinian Warbler** ssp. *leucogastra*, **European Robin** ssp. *superbus* and **Grey Wagtail** ssp. *canariensis*. We also saw good numbers of the endemic **Plain Swift**, Macaronesian endemic **Island Canary** and the West Canary endemic **Tenerife Blue Tit** ssp. *teneriffae*. The pigeons, however, were reluctant to show up, and only after spending some time did we get to see up to three **Laurel Pigeons** flying in front of the cliff. We would have to wait for another day to see them better and to look for the **Bolle's Pigeon**. Full list [here](#).

We then headed to one of the most popular sites to appreciate the Laurel Forest of Tenerife: Monte del Agua. It was cloudy and a bit windy, but it turned out to be a nice walk with some good birds and a nice introduction to the ecology of this relict forest. Some of the interesting birds we got to see included new endemic subspecies for us: a vocal pair of **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** ssp. *granti*,

**Common Buzzard** ssp. *insularum*, **Eurasian Kestrel** ssp. *canariensis*, **Common Raven** ssp. *canariensis* and **Common Chaffinch** ssp. *canariensis*. We also got to see some pigeons from the lookout, including **European Turtle-Dove**, **Eurasian Collared-Dove** and **Laurel Pigeon**. Another highlight of this nice walk was having very close views of a beautiful endemic, the **Canary Islands Kinglet**. You can see a great close-up picture taken by Jeanette [on the eBird list](#).

On our way to Masca, an impressive barranco with some of the most spectacular views of the Archipelago and one of the best examples of succulent scrub habitat, we got to hear and see **Barbary Partridge** during one of the many stops we made along the road to take pictures of the landscape. Our next stop, Teno Alto, is unlike any other site on the island. This is a high plateau with pasture and cereal fields. Though this is a good site for **Rock Petronia** (or **Rock Sparrow**), this species eluded us this time. However, we were able to see **Rock Pigeon** (wild), **Berthelot's Pipit**, which is a very common Macaronesian endemic on the islands, and **Corn Bunting**, among others. We also visited Punta Teno. When we stopped at a gas station for a restroom break we added **Spanish Sparrow** to our list! We were lucky enough to see up to a hundred **Cory's Shearwater** and added a single **Ruddy Turnstone**, a nice conclusion to a long day during which we visited some of the nicest locations and got most of our targets!



Berthelot's Pipit is a Macaronesian endemic that can be seen at all altitudes in all the islands

### Day 3 - 9 April

Today we would take a long drive to explore the massive crater of Las Cañadas del Teide, which dominates the center of Tenerife. El Teide, at 3717m, is Spain's highest peak, and is surrounded by extensive pine forest and volcanic lava fields. For the most part, this huge area is not particularly rich in birds, but it's certainly a highlight that no one should skip. We started the day exploring a couple of places on our way up to Teide, in particular looking for the endemic pigeons and one of the most important targets: **Blue Chaffinch**, an endemic only found in the islands of Gran Canaria and Tenerife, and certainly more abundant in the latter. On our first stop we saw good numbers of **Plain Swift**, the endemic subspecies of **European Robin**, which looked clearly darker than its



**European Robin of ssp. *superbus*, darker than the nominal form and quite different vocalizations**



**Macaronesian endemic: Island Canary, which can be quite common in gardens and orchards**



**Common Chaffinch ssp. *canariensis* can be found in the central islands of the Canaries**



**View of Caldera del Teide, an “otherworldly” scenery**

continental counterpart, and the **Eurasian Kestrel** ssp. *canariensis* was plentiful. The **Canary Islands Chiffchaff** called constantly, while we searched for our main target, the endemic pigeons. We saw several individuals passing by the cliff, and it took a few minutes before we finally got to see a **Laurel Pigeon**, perfectly perched and in the scope. Shortly afterwards, Alice found a splendid **Bolle's Pigeon** sitting in the open, which was a great start to our day!

We didn't have luck with the **Barbary Falcon** either in Teno Alto or Barranco de Ruíz, so we went to another location near Los Realejos to see if we could see these spectacular falcons. We parked the car and within seconds we saw a beautiful female soaring at eye-level, about 20 meters from us. She flew up and up, then made a swift dive so close to us, we could hear her body cutting the air like a knife. We were speechless when a second bird appeared, a male that started soaring up with her. We enjoyed the presence of these two birds with delight until they disappeared high in the sky. It was a highlight for all of us!

We kept going higher towards Teide, but made a strategic stop for an early lunch and to conveniently look for the **Blue Chaffinch**. While we were having our sandwiches I took a short walk, and there it was, a perfect male feeding next to a picnic table, where they often hang around.



Female Great Spotted Woodpecker ssp. *canariensis*

This individual gave us many chances to take pictures, while we enjoyed some of the other forest birds that were present in the area: **Tenerife Blue Tit**, **Canary Islands Kinglet**, **Canary Islands Chiffchaff** and some beautiful endemic **Common Chaffinch**.

The drive inside the Cañadas del Teide takes you to another world. The subalpine vegetation is nearly exclusive to Tenerife, and the rims, craters, and rocky lava plains are surreal. Few birds can be seen here, but endemic reptiles like the **Tenerife Lizard** *Gallotia galloti* are common here. We took tons of pictures of the incredible landscape and even got to see some of the first blooming **Teide Viper's Bugloss**.

Once we were back in the Canary Pine forest, we went to look for more forest birds. Aside from a few more **Blue Chaffinch**, after a short walk we were able to find two **Great Spotted Woodpecker** ssp. *canariensis*. That evening, we returned to Garachico, where we had a good dinner and a nice rest in preparation for our flight to Fuerteventura the next day.



**One of the best sightseeing spots in Tenerife: Barranco de Masca**



**Volcanic landscape and views of the Teide, the highest peak in Spain**

## Day 4 - 10 April

We had one last morning in Tenerife and we wanted to take advantage of it, so we went to do some seawatching near Buenavista. There were hundreds of **Cory's Shearwater**, but pretty far away, so after some minutes we decided to go to Punta Teno again. This ended up being a good decision, as the weather was better than the first time, with just a little breeze and beautiful light. From Punta Teno we saw hundreds of **Cory's Shearwater**, this time closer and with better views, as well as **Little Egret**, and **Yellow-legged Gull** ssp. *atlantis*. We also walked around the farmland and succulent scrub habitat, finding **Barbary Partridge**, our first male **Spectacled Warbler**, singing from a perch, and finally a few **Rock Petronia**, that we couldn't find in Teno Alto. See a full list [here](#).



**Cory's Shearwater can be normally seen in good seawatching spots in all the islands**

With all our targets from Tenerife we were ready for a change of scenery and headed to Fuerteventura! After our flight to Fuerteventura we settled in at our comfortable hotel in La Oliva. We still had time for a visit to Corralejo, in the north part of the island, a Natural Park with extensive white sand-dunes and Malpaís (which translates into badlands, and which means lava fields). Here we had our first **Egyptian Vulture** ssp. *majorensis*, **Common Buzzard** - which are mostly paler than their western relatives in the archipelago, two well-hidden (in the open!) **Eurasian Thick-knee** ssp. *insularum*, good numbers of **Eurasian Hoopoe**, our first **Eurasian Kestrel** from the ssp. *dacotiae*, **Barn Swallow** in migration and **Trumpeter Finch**, another target species for us on a short but lovely afternoon. Of course, it would be a shame not to mention the fabulous food we enjoyed for dinner, and as a matter of fact during all the time we spent in Fuerteventura!

## Day 5 - 11 April

Today we would explore the northwestern side of the island, hoping to see some of the desert specialties along with some coastal species. The scenery is beautiful here, even though a good portion of the area has been built up due to illegal construction. Near the little picturesque port and along the coast we saw some waders, including **Black-winged Stilt**, **Black-bellied Plover** (or **Grey Plover**), **European Golden-Plover**, **Kentish Plover** with chicks, **Common Ringed Plover**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Whimbrel**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Sanderling** and **Dunlin**. We also got our firsts **Lesser Short-toed Larks** and a bit further inland, **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** could be seen on the ground. See a [full list here](#).

In the afternoon we split our time between Los Molinos reservoir and the Tindaya Plains. Los Molinos is known for being a good spot for waterbirds, but there was not a high variety this time, though we did see impressive numbers of **Ruddy Duck**, including little ducklings. We got to see our first **Southern Grey Shrike** ssp. *koenigi* here and the very first **Fuerteventura Stonechat**, a young of the year. [Full list here](#). At the Tindaya Plains we searched for **Houbara Bustard** ssp. *fuertaventurae*, which is distinct from the continental nominal subspecies. Not before too long, as we were scanning from the road, Marta spotted an adult with two chicks! The adult female was leading the small retinue, while feeding occasionally. We had superb views with the scopes and it was certainly the highlight of the day. We would like to remind all visitors that you don't need to walk away from the roads in order to see wildlife, which is not only illegal in certain protected areas, but also a source of disturbance for birdlife. [Full list here](#).



Houbara Bustard from ssp. *fuertaventurae* on the Tindaya Plains



**Egyptian Vultures from ssp. *majorensis* have made a major comeback to the island and are now easy to find**



**Eurasian Thick-knee ssp. *insularum*, typical of the eastern islands**



**The Eurasian Hoopoe is an all-time favorite on every trip!**



**Barbary Ground Squirrel is an introduced species in the Canary Islands and most common in Fuerteventura**

Yeray Seminario / Whitehawk



The endemic ssp. of Common Buzzard (*insularum*) has distinct sandy colors

Yeray Seminario / Whitehawk



One of the target species on every trip to the Canary Islands is the charismatic Cream-colored Courser

## Day 6 - 12 April

Today we explored the southernmost part of the island, including the Jandía Peninsula, which holds some of the most impressive views of the island. We started with a full morning at Barranco de la Torre and surrounding areas. This is another protected area, and part of the trail inside the barranco is restricted during the breeding season. Nonetheless, a short walk in the permitted area provided some good birding, including our first **Laughing Dove**, a recent colonizer to the Canary Islands now in expansion. We got to see several of these beautiful small doves. Two other additions were **Pallid Swift** and a migrant **Subalpine Warbler**. [Full list here](#).



The views of the wild beach of Cofete are spectacular and worth a visit

We made a short visit to Cofete, the most spectacular beach of the island, which is currently the main location for a reintroduction project of the Loggerhead Sea Turtle *Caretta caretta*. On our way back, a stop to Morro Jable provided a couple of introduced species that hold sustainable populations: **Rose-ringed Parakeet** and **Monk Parakeet**. We drove back to La Oliva, stopping on the way at some good spots, where we spotted **Egyptian Vulture**, **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** and **Eurasian Linnet** ssp. *harterti*, among others. See a [full list here](#).

## Day 7 - 13 April

On our last full day, we needed to explore the central part of Fuerteventura. We started with Betancuria, a charming small village where we saw, among others, **Fuerteventura Blue Tit** *Cyanistes degener*, which is distinct from **Tenerife Blue Tit** *Cyanistes teneriffae* due to its wing-bar and paler color. Some authors consider the **Fuerteventura Blue Tit** the same species as the **African Blue Tit** *Cyanistes ultramarinus*. We were able to study the differences of this individual in detail and compare it to our fresh observations of blue tits in Tenerife. This was a fantastic occasion to discuss island biogeography! We continued on and took a walk along Vega del Río Palmas, which was very nice. We saw a pair of **Fuerteventura Stonechat**, among others. [Full list here](#).

In the afternoon we paid another visit to Tindaya, and we got to see the last target species we needed for the trip: **Cream-colored Courser**! Occasionally easier to see, we had to spend some time scanning the plains until Rich found one! We also saw another **Houbara Bustard** and a

spectacular male **Barbary Falcon** perched, which we we watched at leisure with the scope. [Full list of the afternoon here.](#)

## Day 8 - 14 April

We had one last morning in the Canary Islands, so we drove to a nearby barranco which turned out to be very productive, including very close views of **Barbary Partridge**, **Fuerteventura Stonechat** and **Trumpeter Finch**, among others, as well as a daring female **Barbary Ground Squirrel** with kittens. Check out the [full list](#).



**Our last day was the most successful one with the Fuerteventura Stonechat**

We dare to say that this was a great trip to this Macaronesian archipelago. We accomplished our goal of seeing all the target species and subspecies and as a native of the Canary Islands I was happy and proud to show off some of my favorite places... and food!

The group was a lot of fun to share this experience with and we sincerely appreciate their contribution to making another Whitehawk trip a success. Thanks!

I also want to send a big thanks to Juan José Ramos and Valerio del Rosario for helping with some key locations and logistics.

# Wildlife Observation List

## Birds

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| 1. Ruddy Shelduck                                 | 26. Dunlin   | 49. Fuerteventura Blue Tit                       |
| 2. Mallard  | 27. Cream-colored Courser  | 50. Canary Islands Kinglet                       |
| 3. Barbary Partridge (ssp. <i>koenigi</i> )       | 28. Yellow-legged Gull (ssp. <i>atlantis</i> )                           | 51. Common Chiffchaff                            |
| 4. Cory's Shearwater                              | 29. Black-bellied Sandgrouse   | 52. Canary Islands Chiffchaff                    |
| 5. Grey Heron                                     | 30. Rock Pigeon  | 53. Eurasian Blackcap (ssp. <i>heineken</i> )    |
| 6. Little Egret                                   | 31. Bolle's Pigeon   | 54. Subalpine Warbler                            |
| 7. Egyptian Vulture (ssp. <i>majorensis</i> )     | 32. Laurel Pigeon  | 55. Sardinian Warbler (ssp. <i>leucogastra</i> ) |
| 8. Eurasian Sparrowhawk (ssp. <i>granti</i> )     | 33. European Turtle-Dove   | 56. Spectacled Warbler                           |
| 9. Common Buzzard (ssp. <i>insularum</i> )        | 34. Eurasian Collared-Dove   | 57. European Robin (ssp. <i>superbus</i> )       |
| 10. Houbara Bustard (ssp. <i>fuertaventurae</i> ) | 35. Laughing Dove  | 58. Common Redstart                              |
| 11. Eurasian Moorhen                              | 36. Plain Swift  | 59. Fuerteventura Stonechat                      |
| 12. Eurasian Coot                                 | 37. Pallid Swift   | 60. Eurasian Blackbird                           |
| 13. Eurasian Thick-knee (ssp. <i>insularum</i> )  | 38. Eurasian Hoopoe  | 61. Grey Wagtail (ssp. <i>canariensis</i> )      |
| 14. Black-winged Stilt                            | 39. Great Spotted Woodpecker (ssp. <i>canariensis</i> )                  | 62. Berthelot's Pipit                            |
| 15. Black-bellied Plover                          | 40. Eurasian Kestrel (ssp. <i>canariensis</i> and ssp. <i>dacotiae</i> ) | 63. Corn Bunting                                 |
| 16. European Golden-Plover                        | 41. Barbary Falcon   | 64. Common Chaffinch (ssp. <i>canariensis</i> )  |
| 17. Kentish Plover                                | 42. Rose-ringed Parakeet   | 65. Blue Chaffinch                               |
| 18. Common Ringed Plover                          | 43. Monk Parakeet  | 66. Trumpeter Finch                              |
| 19. Little Ringed Plover                          | 44. Southern Grey Shrike (ssp. <i>koenigi</i> )                          | 67. European Goldfinch                           |
| 20. Common Sandpiper                              | 45. Common Raven (ssp. <i>canariensis</i> )                              | 68. Eurasian Linnet                              |
| 21. Common Greenshank                             | 46. Lesser Short-toed Lark (ssp. <i>polatzeki</i> )                      | 69. Island Canary                                |
| 22. Whimbrel                                      | 47. Barn Swallow   | 70. Spanish Sparrow                              |
| 23. Ruddy Turnstone                               | 48. Tenerife Blue Tit  | 71. Rock Petronia                                |
| 24. Curlew Sandpiper                              |  |  |
| 25. Sanderling                                    |  |  |

## Mammals

1. Barbary Ground Squirrel
5. European Rabbit

## Reptiles

1. Tenerife Lizard
2. Atlantic Lizard