

Tenerife



Spain



8th to 11th March, 2004



Tuesday, 9 th	Hotel area Las Lajas picnic site Punta de la Rasca	7:30 - 8:30 13:30 - 16:00 17:00 - 18:00
Thursday, 11 th	Laurel Forests West of Erjos Cliffs to the West of Buena Vista Amarilla golf course	7:30 - 11:00 12:00 - 12:45 15:00 - 15:30

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Introduction



Destination for our business conference of 2004 was the South of Tenerife. Free time around the business sessions was limited to the first afternoon (9th), and the morning / early afternoon of the departure day (11th). This turned out to be sufficient time to see more or less all of the island specialities that can be seen at the time of year we were there. This is not too much of a stretch, since there are a limited number of species on Tenerife, and the distances required to be covered are not great. In addition to travelling for these sought after species, I also walked around the area of the hotel when time allowed (usually first thing in the morning and late afternoon).

We were based in the Mare Nostrum resort, which is located on a slightly more up market section at the eastern end of Playa de las Americas. The hotel is large and comfortable, but, surprisingly for its size, has very little vegetated ground. However, it is based on the seafront, so passage of shearwaters can be seen from the doorstep, as well as some of the more common and expected birds. I had the use of a car for the two free periods available and this was essential to see the more remote species. Playa de las Americas is in the more barren and unwelcoming (bird wise) part of the island, but the roads are generally very good, with ample provision of petrol stations.

The two main locations I visited were:

Higher altitude Canarian Pine forest. This is unbelievably easy to both find and bird. I spent some hours at the well known Las Lajas picnic site, on the C821 ascending eventually to Mount Teide. It is only about 9km up from Vilaflor, and cannot be missed on the left hand side of the road. The benefits of this site are that the trees are not too densely packed, and the water taps act as a magnet for thirsty birds – plentiful numbers and easy to see. I saw all the birds that I hoped for here in close proximity – Blue Chaffinch, Canary, Great Spotted Woodpecker, and African Blue Tit. There is even a small café for the lean times!

Laurel Forests. There are one or two known locations for staking out birds in the laurel forests, which are only found in the rugged, wetter North of the island. I chose the most

well known, which has a rough track leading from the village of Erjos. Again, this track is easily found, being on the left hand side of the road, opposite the first house in the village when approaching from the South. It has to be noted that this track is very rough in places. I took it very carefully first thing in the morning, taking about half an hour to cover 5km. A 4x4 is ideal. Another thing that needs to be known about the forest is that it can be very cold waiting for the pigeons to appear early in the morning. I spent some time at the well known rock (4.6km along the track from Erjos), but had a much better time 0.8km further on, where a small clearing on a bend in the road gave good views of the slopes behind. I had both the endemic pigeons from here, and that was up until leaving late morning.

I also visited the approach to **Punta de la Rasca**. This track was very good, yielding Barbary Partridge, Southern Grey Shrike, Hoopoe, Spectacled Warbler, and plenty of Berthelot's Pipits. It is also quite ugly, which is certainly no bar if birds are to be found, but I also have a suspicion that the gates on entry (located next to the main road), are locked at some time, since there is a lot of working activity within the first open area, and the gate did have a lock hanging from it.

For reference, I found the trusty old Gosney guide to "Finding birds in the Canary Islands" still more than adequate, supported by one or two of the more recent Internet trip reports. The new Collins "Guide to the birds of Britain and Europe" (red and black edition) covers all the species of the Canaries, as well as descriptions of some of the subspecies. A good map is essential – I used the Rough Guide Map (1:120,000) which is detailed and durable.

SITES

Hotel area

(Day 1)

First job of the day was to finalise all the details for the hire car, which was quite straight forward, since the conference agency had already organised the paperwork (Niza Cars was used – they seem to be a popular hire company on the island, and have an office on the opposite side of the road to the Mare Nostrum Resort). This left about 15 minutes before we met for the first work session of the morning, resulting in a quick walk around the beach-front boundary of the hotel. The first birds seen were actually as I was parking the car, with a male Blackbird on top of one of the palm trees, and a couple of Spanish Sparrows being eyed up by a subsequently chastised cat.



The hotel is predictably based right on the seafront, which is populated by teems of happy morning joggers. Even within this short morning walk, it was nice to see one or two Canarian specialities. Amongst the numerous Collared Doves was a female Blackcap, and singing Canary Islands Chiffchaff. The latter species is very easy to pick up, having the basics of nominate Chiffchaff song, but much more melodic, and not restricted to the repeated double syllable. There was also a male Blackbird here, supposedly a distinct subspecies, but it looks very similar to those seen elsewhere in Northern Europe. I was a little surprised to see up to 10 Cory's Shearwaters over the calm sea, flying from West to East, and quite close to the shore.

Las Lajas picnic site

The morning business session ended a little earlier than expected, so there was even more time to head out for an afternoon birding slot. I left the hotel at around 1 o'clock, and it took about 50 minutes to ascend the winding roads towards Mount Teide, and to find the Las Lajas picnic site. This left hand turn was in the region of 9km up from the town of Vilaflor, and proved impossible to miss, sporting a large wooden sign on the main road, and small restaurant visible from the road. The pine trees here are abundant, but not too densely packed, leaving plenty of light and space to see the birds.



I parked the car in shade just beyond the restaurant, and as soon as I opened the car door, heard calling Great Spotted Woodpeckers and singing Canary. Not much work needs to be put in to see the birds here, and although there is only a limited variation in types of birds, these are either local species or subspecies in most cases. They are all also in good numbers, and in time relatively easy to see. Great Spotted Woodpeckers are the most noticeable, drumming and calling from all directions. Blue Chaffinch is one of the best known Canaries endemics, and this site lives up to its reputation as one of the best places in the world to see them. Some of the males are very vocal, as well as being very approachable – they are very difficult to miss. One of the drinking taps provided on the picnic site was found very quickly.



One fascinating fact about these continental countries is that their taps are always dripping – no complaints, since they do attract the birds. Not only did Blue Chaffinches and African Blue Tits visit this, but the Great Spotted Woodpeckers were also less shy than expected, and invited themselves down for a drink. Canaries were heard regularly early on, but were quite difficult to see, but some individuals eventually displayed themselves at close quarters, with the tinkling call giving away their location. This elevation above the sea is also a lot more comfortable, with cooling

winds keeping the temperatures down, despite the unbroken blue sky above. There were also only a few people around the picnic area (1-2 dozen), but they were somewhat swallowed up by the size of the site, and didn't interfere with the birds.

Sitting a short distance from the drinking taps is a good plan, since many of the species are happy to visit despite human presence. As time passed here, the most common bird at the dripping tap turned out to be Canaries. About 20-30m from the tap, a pair of calling Turtle Doves eventually landed on the ground.

Punta de la Rasca

The track to this headland is situated in what is actually a bit of a desolate shambles. When I first turned on to it from the main road, there were lorries plying to and fro on a working site, alongside some covered banana plantations – it didn't look inviting at all! I drove to where there was supposed to be locked gate and a barrier, which both seemed to be absent, reaching some buildings, where a curious rotund Spanish chap wasn't too happy for me to be around. I doubled back towards the entrance, and parked about 100m away from these buildings. A pair of Barbary Partridges appeared from the scrub in



front of me before I even had a chance to open the car door, but took flight soon after.

Despite the unappealing look to the place, one or two more local specialities were present, including the Partridges. In fact, there is a much more picturesque area just to the West of the main track. The whole area is good for Berthelot's Pipit, which were not as numerous as I had expected, but very easy to see nonetheless, calling almost constantly. Kestrels are equally as obvious, with ~6 birds flying to and from some small cliffs. Southern Grey Shrikes, at least 2 birds, were using lookout posts for their hunting forays, with

one having a go at a pair of Berthelot's Pipits. After a little walking and searching, Spectacled Warblers started to show themselves. They were generally quite elusive in the undergrowth, but occasionally found more exposed perches.

As if to emphasise that good birds can be found in the less luxuriant sites, a Hoopoe flew across me on return to the car, and landed in the open, this being just after I had been able to get within a few metres of a Southern Grey Shrike.

Laurel Forests to the West of Erjos

(Day 2)



The journey from Playa de las Americas to this site was not particularly long in terms of distance (only 45km to the turn off the main road on to the forest track), but did take almost an hour due to winding roads and early traffic. Even finding the entrance to the motorway from the resort proved to be a little bit of a test. The track through the forest, all the way up to the large rock viewpoint, was predictably slow and tortuous, with some large rocks and ruts at regular intervals in the poor maintained surface. However, slow progress was the only way to proceed. The 4½km took half an hour to cover.

Despite the sky being absolutely clear on the South of the island, progression on the journey to here became more cloudy as the higher elevation laurel forests were reached. However, arrival at the site revealed quite good visibility over the valleys and slopes. There was quite a wind blowing though, and the temperatures were very cool at this height. The calls of the abundant Canary Islands Chiffchaff are constant, with occasional calling Canaries. I ignored the more obvious large rock with the wind gauge on the top, and rounded the corner down below to a smaller rock, which looked as if it had better views of the forests. A Buzzard over early on was a cause for optimism. It only took a short time for a couple of Canary Islands Kinglets to be heard, and they eventually appeared next to where I was stood. They were very active, and passed through quickly. Next flyover was a female Sparrowhawk.

It took over half an hour of waiting and watching from the rocky outpost to see the first Bolle's Pigeons, which flew from the side and above me in a group. The tail pattern was obvious and distinctive, as they flew on to a spot in the valley below. By this time, a group of forestry workers had arrived to clear the path down into the forest from the track – they were surely doing a good job in keeping the paths in good repair, but the intrusion and noise at this otherwise peaceful time of the morning was off putting. The decision was thus made to walk a little way up the track. I found an open corner about



0.8km along, and this had a good view of the slopes above. On the way to this area, it was evident that a good number of pigeons were perched in the branches just above, but they were usually seen as just a flap of wings and silhouette through the canopy. Chiffchaffs were continuing to call continuously, with additional vocalisations from African Blue Tits, Kinglets, and Canaries. A Robin was found, but it didn't look any different from the more familiar British birds.

I set up camp at the open bend in the road for some time, since it felt as if it had good potential. There were more fly through pigeons here, and one or two seemed to have the darker underparts and white tail tip of Laurel Pigeon, but were usually too fast to identify. After yet another uncertain bird, a Laurel Pigeon landed in a quite bare tree which was against the open cliff face above. With a telescope trained on the bird, the characteristic long neck and dark plumage could be discerned. As the Chiffchaff activity increased, a few birds were singing and scrapping almost within arm's length. More Buzzards were overhead, with a pair of Ravens circling over the tops.

It was shortly after 10am when I tore myself away from this very productive part of the forest, after having seen yet more flypast Laurel (~3) & Bolle's (1) Pigeons. As I was packing the bag, I looked up to find that the clouds had totally disappeared from the tops of the hills, revealing spectacular views of snow-capped Mount Teide behind.

Cliffs West of Buena Vista



It was now considerably warmer, being much more temperate rather than hot. Walking back to the car, I came across a local birder, who informed me of a good site for Barbary Falcon, just to the West of Buena Vista. He also reassured me of the state of the track further on, since this was the best direction to take. However, as I progressed towards the village of El Palmar, the track broke down almost completely. The inevitable puncture occurred at this point, but this was soon repaired, so I continued on towards Buena Vista, and turned off on the westerly road in the Teno direction. A short way along here is a three part tunnel, where I parked just after the end of the final tunnel. Looking back eastwards into what was a strong wind, a Kestrel was gliding past early on. However, it took some time for the Barbary Falcons to both show eventually. Looking very pale against the dark rock, one was seen to enter the nest chamber far below.

Amarilla Golf Course



The journey back to civilisation along the western road to Santiago was incredible. There were some very steep and winding parts of the road, and unfortunately a lot of traffic, but with some spectacular scenery (the reason for the traffic and tourists). I also managed to add a new tyre to the car with some ease on the main road back. This left a little time to visit one of the golf courses to the East of Los Cristianos. I plumped for Amarilla, which is the usual luxuriant green surrounded by some very rough scrub, which actually looks quite desolate. This area is supposed to be good for larks, but I only turned up plenty of Berthelot's Pipits, a pair of Kestrels, and a couple of singing Spectacled Warblers near the 17th green. Just as I was about to reach the car in the main golf course car park, a trio of Iberian Yellow Wagtails popped their heads up above the rubble.

SPECIES SEEN

Cory's Shearwater

Calonectris diomedea

This is probably the only seabird of interest that is likely to be seen at this time of the year. However, I was still surprised by the numbers, with birds past the hotel constantly early morning and late afternoon.

Little Egret

Egretta garzetta

2 birds on the rocky shoreline in front of the hotel on the 10th (one morning, one late afternoon), and 2 in the water tanks on the approach to Amarilla Golf Course

Sparrowhawk

Accipiter nisus granti

Female over the rock lookout at the laurel forest

Buzzard

Buteo buteo insularum

~10 birds over the laurel forest. At one time, 3 birds were circling together over the higher peaks

Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus canariensis

Quite common - ~10 on both the 9th and 11th

Barbary Falcon

Falco pelegrinoides

A pair were seen at a nest site on the cliffs above Caleta Anden, to the West of Buenavista del Norte. The site was very easily found – through the third of the three tunnels leading to Punta de Teno, and park 100m along and look back. The nest site was not so obvious, but both birds appeared together after about half an hour and landed in the nesting chamber

Barbary Partridge

Alectoris barbara

This is probably not too uncommon a bird on the island, but seems to be hard to catch up with. I was lucky that the pair I saw appeared in front of the car just after I had parked on the track to Punta de la Rasca

Ringed Plover

Charadrius hiaticula

3 birds on the exposed rocks in front of the hotel

Whimbrel

Numenius phaeopus

1 on the rocky shoreline around the corner from the hotel

Turnstone

Arenaria interpres

1 on rocks in front of the hotel

Yellow-legged Gull

Larus michahellis atlantis

Common on the coast

Turtle Dove

Streptopelia turtur

These had been heard calling for some time in the conifers around the Las Lajas picnic site before showing themselves. A pair of birds were then found strutting around on the ground, feeding amongst some of the picnic tables. What was probably the same pair was found on the ground again a little later



Bolle's Pigeon

Columba bollii

After waiting for about half an hour on the large rock overlooking the laurel forests, 3 birds in a group whistled past, and landed somewhere in the valley below. The tail pattern is quite marked, and very different from that of the Laurel Pigeons seen later. A good number of pigeons were seen briefly, or clattered out of the trees, but only one further bird could be identified as Bolle's

Laurel Pigeon

Columba junoniae

The numbers seem were quite a surprise, since reports I had seen seemed to indicate that these birds were in vastly lower numbers on the island than Bolle's, and the site I visited had few reports. However, the lookout that I frequented for some time 0.8km from the large rock had at least 3 birds which could be identified, with one or two others

that may have been Laurel, due to the impression of a darker bird. One was even kind enough to sit in the semi-open for some time

Collared Dove

Streptopelia decaocto

Very common around the resorts

Monk Parakeet

Myiopsitta monachus

These very noisy, albeit introduced, birds were seen and heard frequently around Playa de las Americas. Most guaranteed time seemed to be just after 8 in the morning, presumably when they were coming in from roost. In total, about 17 were seen on the 10th, and 3 on the 9th

Hoopoe

Upupa epops

A single bird flew across in front of me and landed on the ground on the track to Punta de la Rasca



Great Spotted Woodpecker

Dendrocopus major canariensis

These were very easy to see at the Las Lajas picnic site. As soon as I left the car, birds could be heard calling in the area, and the first one was actually in the tree directly above the car, chipping away at a pine cone. During the couple of hours I spent at the site, woodpeckers were more or less constantly heard, usually calling, but also frequently hammering on favoured tree stumps. They were also flying to and fro constantly. One of the dripping taps was a very good spot to get close, since the birds were not nearly as timid as I had been led to believe. When seen well, the most obvious difference with this island subspecies to British birds is the much darker underbelly.

Berthelot's Pipit

Anthus berthelotii berthelotii

I had expected these to be a lot more common, or obvious, than they were – in other words, easily seen around the resorts. However, when the more open wastes away from habitation were visited, they became a much more common bird. All the birds I saw were either at the Punta de la Rasca track (~12) or the open scrub alongside the Amarilla golf course (~8). Once the correct habitat is found, they are very evident with their constant calling, and very approachable



Yellow Wagtail

Motacilla flava iberiae

These were the last birds seen at the Amarilla golf course. The area had been turning up mainly Berthelot's Pipits and Spectacled Warblers (in small numbers), until I heard the distinctive call while returning to the car. A single bird was quite close, although jumpy, and when I followed it behind a mound, it flew off with 2 other birds

Canary Islands Kinglet

Regulus teneriffae

The only birds I saw were a few in the laurel forests, and they were usually more easily heard than seen. My impression of these was that they were very similar to nominate Goldcrests, having very little white above the eye, with longer bills. It was difficult to see the wing patterns on the constantly foraging birds

Blackbird

Turdus merula cabrarae

This is supposed to be another distinct subspecies, but the males I saw didn't seem to be

any different to the ones we have in Britain. The literature seems to point to size (barely smaller than nominate), and slight differences with colour of bill in the female and perhaps shade of the plumage. A couple of males were seen occasional around Playa de las Americas, but most were seen in the hills of the North-west (~6 on the 11th)



Canary Islands Chiffchaff

Phylloscopus canariensis

These are very common, particularly in the laurel forests, where they could be heard calling almost constantly, but are even in the built up areas. A walk around the resort of Playa de las Americas usually turned up a few birds, usually when a few bushes or trees were passed. A pair were even building a nest just in front of the hotel. A group of 3 to 4 were trying to establish territories more or less at arms length in the clearing of the laurel forests. While I was waiting and watching for the endemic pigeons, these birds were constantly battling and chasing each other. Main differences with Chiffchaff seemed to be the song (bubbly "chup-chup-chup" repeated) and the lighter coloured legs

Blackcap

Sylvia atricapilla heineken

A pair of these birds were building a nest at the same site in front of the hotel as the Chiffchaffs, and were collecting fibres from the same palm tree trunks. First bird seen was the female of the pair on the first morning, but the male was more frequently seen after this

Spectacled Warbler

Sylvia conspicillata orbitalis

These were found in exactly the same habitat as the Berthelot's Pipits – at Punta de la Rasca (6) and the Amarilla golf course (2). However, they preferred to stay in the bushes and scrub, as opposed to the open areas for the pipits, and were not quite as approachable. Yet, they were easy to find, since they were singing at this time of the year, and this was quite often from perches at the tops of the vegetation

Robin

Erithacus rubecula superbus

Another subspecies, although the bird I saw in the laurel forests didn't look any different from the nominate

African Blue Tit

Parus teneriffae

This species has just been recently split from the nominate *Parus caeruleus*, and the birds seen in Tenerife are noticeably different. They have a much darker cap, and the wings have no white on them, making the appearance of these birds much darker and more dapper than their northern counterparts. They were also very easy to see, with particularly close views of the birds at the Las Lajas picnic site, where some came to the dripping tap (~20 here). They were a little more distant at the laurel forest (~10)



Southern Shrike

Lanius meridionalis koenigi

These were only seen from the track on the approach to Punta de la Rasca, where at least 2 birds were obvious

Raven

Corvus corax tinginatus

2 over the tops at the laurel forest, and 1 near the Barbary Falcon nest site, again over the tops

Spanish Sparrow

Parus hispaniolensis

Very common around the resort of Playa de las Americas, with some birds building nests

Chaffinch

Fringilla coelebs canariensis

Only one seen, and this was very briefly at the corner of the track through the laurel forest where I spent some time scanning the peaks for the endemic pigeons

Blue Chaffinch

Fringilla teydea teydea

Of all the specialities of the island, this is probably the one I was looking forward to seeing most, and they didn't disappoint. The Las Lajas picnic site is reputed to be the easiest place in the world to see these birds, and my visit did nothing to refute this claim. ~25 birds were eventually seen here, and they are very obvious, singing and calling most of the time, as well as being so used to the presence of people here that you can get very close to them. As with the other birds of the site, one of the dripping taps proved very good for these birds



Male



Female

Island Canary

Serinus canaria

Some of the reports seemed to suggest that these birds would take a little finding, but that was certainly not true when I was there. They were very easy to see and hear at the Las Lajas picnic site, and as with the other birds, occasionally came to one of the dripping taps that I had staked out. They were also regularly seen at the laurel forest. Eventual numbers were ~20 at the Las Lajas picnic site, and ~10 at the laurel forest



TOTAL SPECIES = 32