

A Birding Trip to

Fuerteventura



12th to 21st December, 2022

Wednesday, 14 th December	Caleta de Fuste area	Barranco de la Torre Salinas del Carmen
Thursday, 15 th December	Caleta de Fuste area	Barranco de la Antigua Pool
Friday, 16 th December	Central mountains – family trip	Mirador Morro de la Cruz Mirador Las Penitas Mirador del Risco de las Peñas
Saturday, 17 th December	Llanos de Tindaya	
Monday, 19 th December	Barranco del Rio Cabras	Airport (downstream) end Upstream end



Fuerteventura

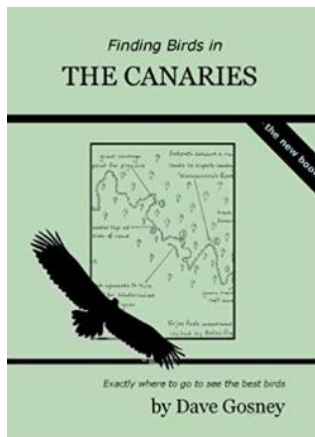
12th to 21st December, 2022

As with many trips and holidays taken in 2022, this venture to Fuerteventura was originally planned and booked in 2020, merely weeks after the pandemic and its attendant lockdowns took hold. We were lucky with both flights (Jet2) and accommodation (AirBnB) which both automatically refunded our payments once all holidays (and even freedom) had been officially cancelled. As with many trips to the island, it was primarily a family orientated break, along with the potential of good speciality birds while there. In hindsight I wouldn't particularly recommend a purely birding trip here unless it was incorporated into some island hopping to take in other habitats such as the laurel forests on Tenerife and/or Gran Canaria. I certainly enjoyed the birding I did and saw all the potential island specialities in two full morning outings and a further couple of hours out on two other mornings. However, you may have to work hard at some of the birds – I struggled with Fuerteventura Chat in the supposed productive Barranco de la Torre near to our Caleta de Fuste base, and the open plains species such as Houbara Bustard, Cream-coloured Courser and Black-bellied Sandgrouse can easily be missed (the one other birder I came across had dipped on all three at Tindaya and similarly the Chat at Caleta de Fuste, only catching up on the latter by chance near to Antigua).



The birding sites are generally in arid areas, whether that be in the barrancos (dry river beds) or on the plains (very barren with rock strewn dry flat lands and occasional bushy vegetation). Good walking shoes are a must here, as is water and a cap. I also packed a scope and tripod in our limited luggage, which was

of a much greater benefit than I had expected. Initial views of chats and bustards were too far initially for binoculars alone. With limited time, I felt that I covered the necessary areas for the birds I wanted to see – barrancos and plains for pure birding outings, added to by being on the coast at Caleta de Fuste with an enjoyable family day out in the mountains, taking in Betancuria (most appealing village but popular with tourists) and various miradors (good for raptors and only spot where I saw African Blue Tit).



There is quite a lot of useful information out there for best birding sites. The old Gosney guide still had a lot of merit, and it is useful to check for some of the recent updates to this booklet on his website (birdguides.com). I also found another site very useful – birdingplaces.eu. This has more up to date information on European sites generally, and this includes many of the more well known ones on Fuerteventura.

Wednesday, 14th December

Barranco de la Torre



With a base in Caleta de Fuste, the most obvious destination for a first look out was here, less than 5km from our accommodation. As usual, an early wake up was had (6.15am), but this proved to be no more an advantage than staying put for a while longer – first usable light wasn't until around 7.30am. Arrival at the planned parking spot found the track that snaked along the dry riverbed, and eventually some light to see stuff! The barranco does have a rough track running for a short way, but best plan is to park the car in one of the rough car parks near the shoreline and walk the length. I decided on a couple of miles, which coincided with the blot of some works above the riverbed, and also enough length to gauge the birdlife here. The reasonably surfaced track only runs for around 600m, before a sign for the nature reserve takes a right on to a rougher and more acceptable track for birding. Small rock faces are on one or the other side of the barranco for a lot of the way.

Barbary Partridge



This barranco is reputed to be one of the best places on the island to see Fuerteventura Chat, and the habitat certainly looks right for it. However, this wasn't to be on my visit there. Most of the avian chatter was from Spanish Sparrows and Collared & Rock Doves (not sure of the origin of the latter, but they certainly looked as if they might be a genuine population). That being said it was good to be in a new habitat which still offered some local, if not common, fayre. From opening the car door, Sardinian Warblers could be seen and then heard in the surrounding bushes. It didn't take long along the track for Blackcaps to be added to the warbler list, and then a little further again for the main contingent of Spectacled Warblers. This was just before the sign for the nature reserve, and the rock faces provided more variation. After a Common Buzzard, Ravens plied to and fro between these mini cliffs, and Kestrel used them as lookouts. A Hoopoe flew along the craggy face, while a Southern Grey Shrike was on wires in the lower areas. Near to the terminus of the walk, a pair of Barbary Partridges chugged in and out of the rocks and scree below one of the rock faces.



Spectacled Warbler



Thursday, 15th December

Barranco de la Antigua pool

In addition to the better known access to the Barranco de la Torre visited the day previously, there is another section a few kilometres inland which can also be accessed easily from the main highway. Still in keeping with trying for local birds from Caleta de Fuste, a couple of post dawn hours were spent trekking along this dry riverbed. It is quite easily found with a rough parking area a couple of hundred metres short of the hamlet with the palm trees. This also happens to be right on the intersection of the barranco itself. I decided on the more obvious “seaward side”, which would eventually become the Barranco de la Torre. This is next to the tiny reservoir for the hamlet, which does hold some water, and also a Grey Heron as the only species. However, there is also a small “wetland” area, which again does hold a pool with vegetation just below the buildings and right next to the parking area. A couple of Black-winged Stilts and Ruddy Shelduck were here, and it is easy to imagine this being a drinking stop off for sandgrouse.



The barranco itself has a small outcrop of cliffs to one side (the right initially, and then more imposing ones to the left further on). It was here that the birds of the day were found - not Fuerteventura Chat (elusive again despite the appropriate habitat), but an impressive pair of Egyptian Vultures. First just looked like another small white goat initially, being perched near the top of the rock face. Another bird flew by, and the pair then glided to nearby poles for a short while. Spectacled Warblers were easy in the area, and some of the singing males gave good prolonged views. Blackcaps and Sardinian Warblers kept a little more distance. A Southern Grey Shrike was very close on an overhead wire, with only other notable bird being a single Barbary Partridge near to a smallholding in the barranco where I turned back.



Egyptian Vulture

Saturday, 17th December

Tindaya Plain





Cream-coloured Courser

After a couple of attempts in barrancos for the chat, a change of scenery and more to the point habitat was in order. So why not a vast expanse of arid plains littered with stones and sparse bushes, and try to seek out a few speciality species that blend in beautifully with this?! This is the reality of looking for bustards, coursers and sandgrouse. The plain is easily found after traversing the village of Tindaya, and is one of the recommended locations for these species. The plan is that there is no real plan at all. Various tracks cut through the large plains area, and possibly best covered by driving round with occasional sorties out of the vehicle to listen for calls. The tracks are variously either with tarmac (and some potholes) or rough and unmetalled, where there are occasional raised topes to watch out for. The weather on my visit was relatively cool (15-22°C with some cloud cover), which is certainly more comfortable than direct sun with such a reflective landscape.



Berthelot's Pipit

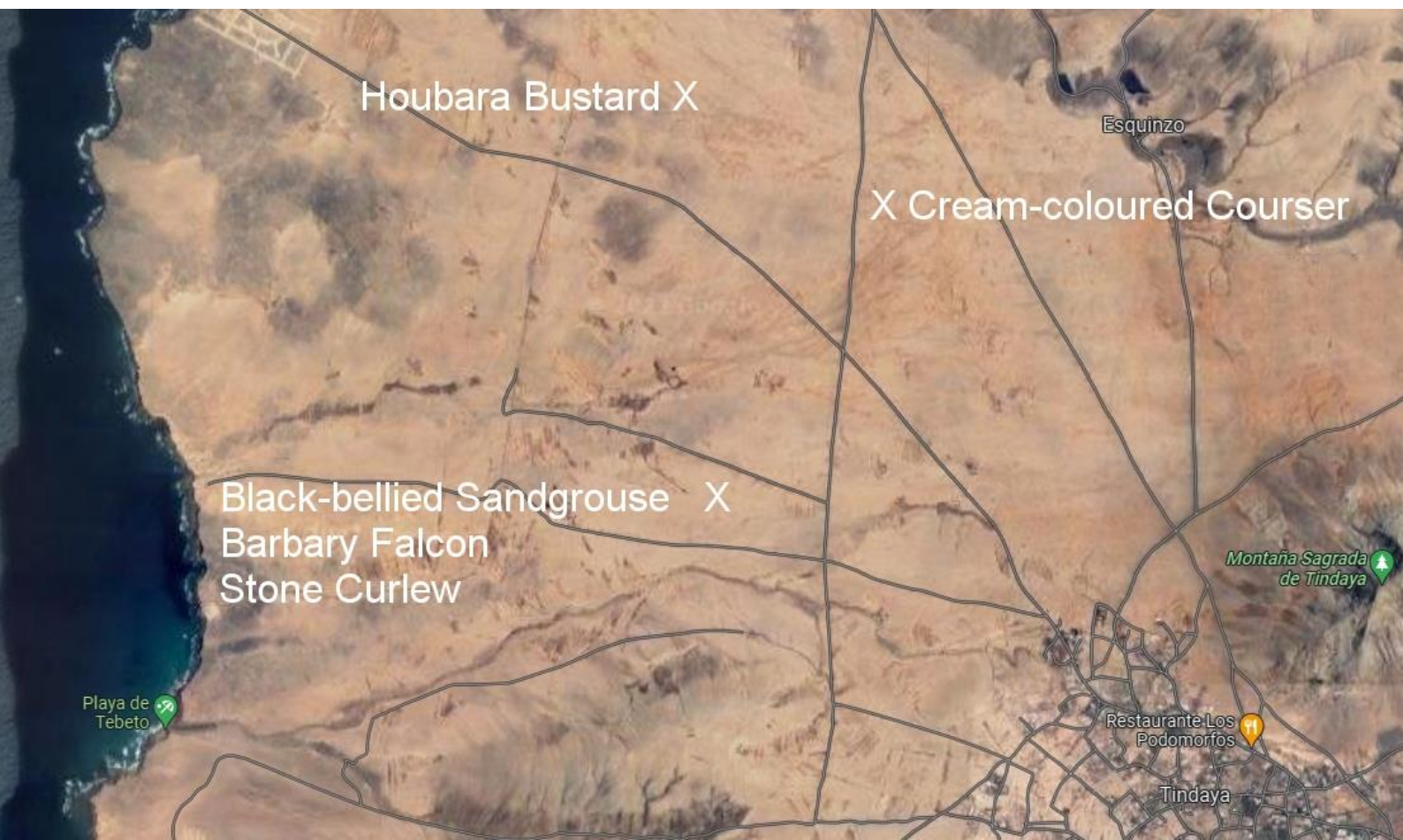
Mediterranean Short-toed Lark

Time and patience are most definitely positive attributes here. In the first hour or so, the prime birds seen were Lesser Short-toed Larks and Berthelot's Pipits, with a pair of Ruddy Shelduck overhead. Ravens were regular and quite vocal. After the central track (past the small group of fig trees) had been checked, a branch to the west was taken, and the real birding began. After a short distance, movement in the rocky surface around 100 metres away turned out to be a pair of Black-bellied Sandgrouse, which had only previously been heard and not seen after first arriving. When trying to pick these out more clearly along another track, a Barbary Falcon was spotted perched on a nearby rock. This might have been the reason that the sandgrouse had gone to ground, since a Stone-curlew also in the vicinity was virtually immobile.



Houbara Bustard

This should have been the opening of the gates to all the specialities of the habitat but driving more tracks to the west didn't add anything more. With less than an hour to go before my planned return to Caleta de Fuste, I decided to double back to a track to the east which I had a good feeling for earlier. And that was THE decision of the morning. After a couple of hundred metres, I got out of the car and scanned the area, eventually picking out a male Houbara Bustard on one of the ridges. Telescope views confirmed this, and I drove nearer to its location to eventually get decent binocular inspection. It was fascinating at times when it was walking and feeding how well it blended into the colours of the ground making even a large bird like this often difficult to pick out. With time pressing on, and happy with the bustard, I headed toward the car when a couple of calling birds stopped me when halfway there. It seemed right for Cream-coloured Courser and a check on the calls on the birding app confirmed this. But they just refused to be pinned down, until I looked up and saw one directly overhead (the calls seemed almost omni-directional). Then another lower bird was seen, and this time it was followed on its descent to a landing spot, after which the rather dapper individual was admired from a little distance.





Barbary Falcon

Stone Curlew

Monday, 19th December

Barranco de Rio Cabras

After connecting with a good selection of the plains birds at Tindaya, surely the one endemic on the island would show itself on a last look out?! This barranco, well known for the appearance of a Dwarf Bittern pre pandemic, is also reputed to offer a good selection of birds, including Fuerteventura Chat. There were even decent reports of a few pairs at the base of the barranco, just opposite the end of the airport runway. While the new roads have ended ease of access here, a good parking spot was found next to some auto businesses next to the dual carriageway. Only a short walk from here and a slide down the steep sands of the edges of the riverbed found the tunnels under the road which might also grant access. The feeling for the place was good – for the first 10 minutes, when a couple of hundred metres up the riverbed were some major works with no access beyond that point. Someone doesn't want me to see the chat!

So obvious next move was to drive the few kilometres inland, then take a left at a roundabout towards the recycle plant (Complejo Ambiental de Zurita) along a reasonable asphalt track. I parked right next to



the gate after chatting with the security guard and found the not too well marked track across the open expanse towards the barranco. This quite neatly found the descent to the riverbed below, which was sandwiched between cliffs. Seeing the multitude of pools in the base didn't exactly engender optimism – I was sure the chats preferred dry riverbeds. However, Trumpeter Finch on the descent, and a pair of Ruddy Shelduck in the first pool showed good willing. The pools to the right at the bottom even held a trio of Green Sandpipers.



Trumpeter Finch

The walk along the base of the riverbed heading “downstream” was made slowly to give time to scan the steep vegetation covered sides. New birds for the trip were made along the way, with Plain Swifts overhead, and a single Laughing Dove heading upstream. The Ruddy Shelducks made several attempts to settle on the pools but were jittery and kept moving further down the valley. After about half a kilometre of walking, a small bird was seen perched on a rock on the slope some distance away. Bins weren't quite enough for ID, but scope views finally revealed a male Canary Islands Stonechat at last. And what do they say about when one bus has come along . . . ? Turning around and combing the slope nearby found a pair of chats which seemed to be carrying food, and after some time watching these, the return trek found another pair not that much further upstream.

Before the slope/track was tackled again – uphill this time – a few more Trumpeter Finches were spotted. On the walk back over the plain towards the car, the refuse tip situated behind the recycling plant could be seen, and scope views did find an Egyptian Vulture amongst the hundreds of Yellow-legged Gulls and odd Raven.

Canary Islands Stonechat



LIST OF SPECIES

BIRDS

Ruddy Shelduck

Tadorna ferruginea

- 15 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Antigua pool (2)
- 17 Dec 2022 Llanos de Tindaya (5)
- 19 Dec 2022 Barranco del Rio Cabras (2)

Barbary Partridge

Alectoris barbara

- 14 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Torre (2)
- 15 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Antigua pool (1)
- 16 Dec 2022 Mirador Las Penitas (2)

Plain Swift

Apus unicolor

- 19 Dec 2022 Barranco del Rio Cabras (4)

Houbara Bustard

Chlamydotis undulata fuertaventurae

- 17 Dec 2022 Llanos de Tindaya (1)

Black-bellied Sandgrouse

Pterocles orientalis

- 17 Dec 2022 Llanos de Tindaya (2)

Rock Dove

Columba livia

- 14 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Torre (~60)
- 15 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Antigua pool (~20)

Eurasian Collared Dove

Streptopelia decaocto

- 13 Dec 2022 Caleta de Fuste (20)
- 14 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Torre (6)
- 15 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Antigua pool (4)
- 19 Dec 2022 Barranco del Rio Cabras (4)

Laughing Dove

Spilopelia senegalensis

- 19 Dec 2022 Barranco del Rio Cabras (1)

Eurasian Stone-curlew

Burhinus oedicnemus

- 17 Dec 2022 Llanos de Tindaya (1)

Black-winged Stilt

Himantopus himantopus

- 15 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Antigua pool (2)

Eurasian Whimbrel

Numenius phaeopus

- 14 Dec 2022 Salinas del Carmen (1)

Ruddy Turnstone*Arenaria interpres***15 Dec 2022** Corralejo (6)**Green Sandpiper***Tringa ochropus***19 Dec 2022** Barranco del Rio Cabras (3)**Cream-coloured Courser***Cursorius cursor***17 Dec 2022** Llanos de Tindaya (2)**Yellow-legged Gull***Larus michahellis***13 Dec 2022** Caleta de Fuste (3)**14 Dec 2022** Salinas del Carmen (5); Caleta de Fuste (3)**15 Dec 2022** Corralejo (2)**19 Dec 2022** Barranco del Rio Cabras (~300)**Sandwich Tern***Thalasseus sandvicensis***13 Dec 2022** Caleta de Fuste (3)**14 Dec 2022** Caleta de Fuste (16)**15 Dec 2022** Corralejo (1)**Eurasian Spoonbill***Platalea leucorodia***14 Dec 2022** Caleta de Fuste (14 on rocks in bay)**Grey Heron***Ardea cinerea***15 Dec 2022** Barranco de la Antigua pool (1)**Little Egret***Egretta garzetta***15 Dec 2022** Corralejo (1 on exposed rocks in marina)**Egyptian Vulture***Neophron percnopterus majorensis***15 Dec 2022** Barranco de la Antigua pool (2)**19 Dec 2022** Barranco del Rio Cabras (1 at refuse tip)**Common Buzzard***Buteo buteo insularum***14 Dec 2022** Barranco de la Torre (2)**16 Dec 2022** Mirador del Risco de las Peñas (4)**19 Dec 2022** Barranco del Rio Cabras (2, 2)**Eurasian Hoopoe***Upupa epops***14 Dec 2022** Barranco de la Torre (1)**Common Kestrel***Falco tinnunculus***14 Dec 2022** Barranco de la Torre (2)**15 Dec 2022** Barranco de la Antigua pool (1)**16 Dec 2022** Mirador Las Penitas (1)**Peregrine Falcon***Falco peregrinus pelegrinoides***17 Dec 2022** Llanos de Tindaya (1)

Great Grey Shrike*Lanius excubitor koenigi*

- 14 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Torre (1)
- 15 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Antigua pool (1)
- 16 Dec 2022 Mirador Las Penitas (1)

Northern Raven*Corvus corax tingitanus*

- 13 Dec 2022 Caleta de Fuste (1)
- 14 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Torre (4)
- 16 Dec 2022 Mirador Morro de la Cruz (5); Mirador Las Penitas(1); Mirador del Risco de las Peñas (3)
- 17 Dec 2022 Llanos de Tindaya (9)
- 19 Dec 2022 Barranco del Rio Cabras (7)

African Blue Tit*Cyanistes teneriffae*

- 16 Dec 2022 Mirador Morro de la Cruz (1)

Mediterranean Short-toed Lark*Alaudala rufescens*

- 17 Dec 2022 Llanos de Tindaya(5)
- 19 Dec 2022 Barranco del Rio Cabras (1)

Eurasian Blackcap*Sylvia atricapilla*

- 14 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Torre (3)
- 15 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Antigua pool (2)

Sardinian Warbler*Curruca melanocephala*

- 14 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Torre (4)
- 15 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Antigua pool (4)

Spectacled Warbler*Curruca conspicillata*

- 14 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Torre (5)
- 15 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Antigua pool (6)

Song Thrush*Turdus philomelos*

- 17 Dec 2022 Llanos de Tindaya (1)
- 19 Dec 2022 Barranco del Rio Cabras (1)

Common Blackbird*Turdus merula*

- 15 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Antigua pool (2)

Canary Islands Stonechat*Saxicola dacotiae*

- 19 Dec 2022 Barranco del Rio Cabras (at least 2 pairs)

Spanish Sparrow*Passer hispaniolensis*

- 13 Dec 2022 Caleta de Fuste (5)
- 14 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Torre (~80)
- 16 Dec 2022 Mirador del Risco de las Peñas (2)
- 19 Dec 2022 Barranco del Rio Cabras (4, 1)

White Wagtail*Motacilla alba alba*

- 19 Dec 2022 Barranco del Rio Cabras (2)

Berthelot's Pipit*Anthus berthelotii*

16 Dec 2022 Mirador Morro de la Cruz (6); Mirador del Risco de las Peñas (1)
17 Dec 2022 Llanos de Tindaya (10)
19 Dec 2022 Barranco del Rio Cabras (1)

Trumpeter Finch*Bucanetes githagineus*

19 Dec 2022 Barranco del Rio Cabras (2)

Common Linnet*Linaria cannabina*

15 Dec 2022 Barranco de la Antigua pool (2)
16 Dec 2022 Mirador Morro de la Cruz (2)
19 Dec 2022 Barranco del Rio Cabras (3, 2)

MAMMALS**Barbary Ground Squirrel***Atlantoxerus getulus*

Small groups of up to 6 or so commonly seen on rocks, both at coast and inland

North African Hedgehog*Atelerix algirus*

Only 1 seen – feeding on food and water provided for cats within Castillo Beach developments in Caleta de Fuste