

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Fuerteventura Canary Islands

14th – 21st March 2012

Participants

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Leader

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Report by David Collins

Our holiday was based at the Hotel Oasis Casa Vieja in La Oliva

www.oasiscasavieja.com/en/

All the photos in this report were taken during the holiday week by Lesley and David Lord except the interior shot below which is from the hotel's website.

Front cover photo – a traditional stone-built windmill
standing testimony to the agricultural heritage of the island.



As with all Honeyguide holidays, part of the price of the holiday was put towards a conservation project, in this case for La Sociedad Española de Ornitología (SEO), the Spanish Ornithological Society, and its work in the Canary Islands. The conservation contribution this year of £40 per person was supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust.

We posted the Honeyguide cheque to SEO's office in Tenerife, and SEO kindly delivered information about their work in the Canary Islands to the hotel during the holiday. Juan Antonio Lorenzo, SEO's project co-ordinator, wrote to say:

“Con relación al cheque por su donativo, se lo agradecemos enormemente e invertiremos la totalidad del mismo en las acciones que hagamos en las Canarias.”

“With regard to the cheque for your donation, we greatly appreciate it and we will invest all of it in the actions we do in the Canaries.”

This year's donation brings the total given to SEO since the first Honeyguide holiday in Spain in 1991 to £13,879. The total for conservation contributions from all Honeyguide holidays was £76,684 by the end of March 2012.

Fuerteventura
14th – 21st March 2012

Itinerary

Wednesday 14th March – fly to Fuerteventura and arrive at Hotel Oasis Casa Vieja, La Oliva. Afternoon walk in local vicinity.

Thursday 15th March – pre-breakfast at La Oliva fields; Los Molinos Reservoir and barranco in the morning; Cotillo area in the afternoon.

Friday 16th March – pre-breakfast at La Oliva fields; walk in Rio Palmas valley in morning; lunch at Castillo de Lara pine forest; afternoon at Antigua windmill area and Tindaya plain.

Saturday 17th March – morning at Catalina García lagoon and La Lajita; lunch at Costa Calma; afternoon at Gran Valle, Morro Jable, Los Gorriones and Costa Calma Depuradora.

Sunday 18th March – pre-breakfast at La Oliva fields; morning at Parque Holandes, lunch in Corralejo harbour; afternoon on shore near Majanicho.

Monday 19th March – morning at lagoon at Roso del Taro and around Caleta de Fustes Golf Course; lunchtime at mouth of Barranco de la Torre; afternoon at Los Alares pond and Catalina García.

Tuesday 20th March – morning at Los Molinos Reservoir; lunch in Pájara; afternoon at sandy plain near La Pared/Costa Calma.

Wednesday 21st March – pre-breakfast at La Oliva. Return to the UK.

Daily Diary

Wednesday 14th March: arrival and walk near hotel

Despite arriving on three separate flights, the travel arrangements worked well. The flights all arrived within an hour or so, and the airport was largely empty so we had no problem meeting up. After loading the minibus, we drove inland to our quiet hotel on the outskirts of the village of La Oliva. Once we had settled into our delightful rooms, we met for a light lunch and introductory briefing in the sunny courtyard.

Thus refreshed, we set out in beautiful warm sunshine for a leisurely walk along the track behind the hotel. The track picks its way through the outskirts of the village to start with and then crosses an old lava field (*malpais*), with the cinder dome of Montaña Arena nearby. We were soon familiarising ourselves with some of the common local birds. There were noisy flocks of handsome Spanish sparrows among the houses, and spectacled warblers churring from the low scrub beyond. Several southern grey shrikes gave good views, and a hoopoe sang close by on a stone wall. In among the lava walls there were lots of Barbary ground squirrels, and we stopped frequently to watch them (and they to watch us). Collared doves were common, but there were also two laughing doves which proved to be the only ones of the trip. Among the collared doves we noticed one that was very pale, with white fringes to its feathers. It was only after the holiday had finished that I realised this was actually an African collared dove, a species which is now established in the Canary Islands.

Fuerteventura had had its driest winter since records began, just a few millimetres of rain had fallen since the previous May, and it was immediately apparent that we would not be seeing many flowers during the trip. Even so, false tobacco *Nicotiana glauca* was in flower, and we noticed two succulents. *Kleinia nereifolia*, a bizarre relative of the ragwort, is common on the island, but the stone-like *Caralluma burchardii*, a succulent member of the milkweed family, is a rare species confined to a few places in the Eastern Canary Islands and the Moroccan coast. Another species noted was the attractive introduced grass *Pennisetum setaceum*.

We walked far enough to enjoy expansive views over the north of the island to distant Lanzarote. Then we headed back, enjoying our first group of trumpeter finches just before we reached the hotel.

After freshening up we met in the quiet lounge to do the log call and have a well earned drink. Then we moved through to the restaurant to enjoy the first of our many good meals here.

Thursday 15th March: Los Molinos Reservoir and Cotillo

On the southern edge of La Oliva there is a farm which always has a few green fields and is highly attractive to birds. It was just a few minutes' drive from our hotel, and we planned to visit it regularly before breakfast. This morning we spent a rewarding hour familiarising ourselves with more of the local birds. Most surprising, perhaps, was a pair of ruddy shelducks, which were present throughout the week. Although the first ruddy shelduck in Fuerteventura was only found in 1994 (by yours truly), it is a common bird on the island these days and is to be found in the most unexpected places.



La Oliva fields and mountain.

Among the crops there were lots of Berthelot's pipits and lesser short-toed larks, one of which was in song flight just above our heads. In with them we found a few wintering meadow pipits and skylarks and a group of about ten corn buntings. More colourful were several more trumpeter finches, flocks of linnets (the males of the endemic race are an incredible red on the breast) and two migrant wheatears.

After breakfast we drove south to the reservoir at Los Molinos. Given the lack of rain, I wasn't sure whether there would be much water in it, so it was a pleasant surprise to find that it was fuller than usual! There were quite a few ruddy shelducks out on the water, including several very young goslings, and many more adults resting on the far bank. In all we counted at least 140 of these lovely birds, perhaps more than in the whole of Morocco. Among the rafts of coot we picked out the two female ring-necked ducks, American birds that had been blown across the Atlantic the previous autumn, and have been present here ever since.

There were at least a hundred hirundines over the lake, mostly house martins with a few swallows and at least one sand martin. There were plenty of swifts too, although we had to look closely to confirm that they were a mixture of pallid and the slightly smaller and darker little black (or plain) swift, which is endemic to the Canary Islands.

Around the lake margins there were small numbers of waders, including wood, green and common sandpipers, black-winged stilt and greenshank. Other migrants included a male yellow wagtail of the Spanish race (black ear coverts), while several willow warblers flitted about on the dam and among the rocks. Perhaps best of all though were two adult Egyptian vultures that flew low overhead, and our first two Fuerteventura chats of the week just below the dam.

As we climbed back into the bus we noticed a small warbler in nearby bushes. Close views confirmed that it was the first of a number of subalpine warblers we were to see during the week. Then we drove down the valley to eat our packed lunches by the shore. Perhaps the same pair of Egyptian

vultures gave even better views, and in the bright green saltbush just upstream from the beach we had wonderful views of another male Fuerteventura chat.

After lunch we drove north to the lighthouse at Cotillo. There were Kentish plovers and little egrets on the rocks, and a steady passage of Cory's shearwaters offshore. In the late afternoon we searched for houbara bustards on the stony plain south of Cotillo. Despite scanning from numerous vantage points along the track, we failed to spot any. In fact the area was almost completely devoid of birds. The whole area was very desiccated after the prolonged drought, with no flowers and presumably very few invertebrates. Clearly we needed to look elsewhere!

Friday 16th March: Río Palmas valley, Antigua and Tindaya plain

We visited the fields at La Oliva again before breakfast, but there was a cold wind and we soon headed back for breakfast. The only birds of note were three fine male Spanish yellow wagtails and a wheatear. Back at the hotel there was a willow warbler among the hibiscus.

After breakfast we drove south to the mountain area around Betancuria. We spent the morning in the relatively lush Río Palmas valley, with its palm trees and tamarisk groves. We parked by the barranco and walked down to the Las Peñitas Reservoir. Although the reservoir is almost always dry now (as it was today), there is always a trickle of water in parts of the barranco, and the thick growth of tamarisks and palm trees is attractive to a range of birds. No sooner had we left the van than we had great views of our first African blue tit of the holiday. With its deep blue back and black cap it is quite a different bird to the normal blue tit we are so familiar with at home, and it made quite an impression on the group.



A male yellow wagtail of the blue-headed race *flava*.

Our next bird was a splendid male blue-headed wagtail feeding on the edge of the stream. We had wonderful close views of this striking bird, noting the blue ear coverts that distinguished it from the Spanish yellow wagtails we had seen earlier at La Oliva. As we were watching it we were distracted by the appearance of another Fuerteventura chat. Sardinian warblers scolded us from the tamarisks as we walked down to the dam, which is set in a deep rocky gorge. There were a few pools of water below the dam, where we watched a little ringed plover feeding. Then we headed back up the valley, noting the presence of wintering robin and song thrush before we reached the minibus.

From Río Palmas it was only a short drive to our lunch stop at a picnic site among scattered pine trees at Castillo de Lara. We had purposefully chosen a weekday so had the place to ourselves. From our picnic table we could hear the distinctive song of the canary somewhere in the forest above us, and we were visited by a delightful and very tame pair of African blue tits. If only we had had our cameras ready!

Having finished lunch, we could still hear the canary singing somewhere up the forest track, and there was no option but to climb higher to see whether we could find it. After a short while we came to level ground where pigeons were coming to drink at a leaky pipe. This seemed like a good spot to stake out. Several turtle doves were among the thirsty birds that had been drawn to the pipe, and two Barbary partridges flew out over the trees. The canary was playing hard to get though, and now that we had gained a bit of height, it seemed to be singing from the picnic site! We walked back down the slope and eventually managed to see both members of the pair.

On the way back over the mountains I had hoped to stop at the café at the mirador. This is perched on one of the highest mountains on the island, and has spectacular views to the north as well as providing easy access to a range of mountain flowers. Unfortunately the mirador was undergoing refurbishment, and the track leading to it was closed to traffic. I decided to try the café at the Antigua windmill instead, so we drove on.

Amazingly, this café was closed too, so we had to do without refreshments. Still, the gardens around the windmill are well landscaped, and are often attractive to migrant birds. There were lots of willow warblers and chiffchaffs feeding on the flowers high in what looked like an arboreal cactus (actually the Asiatic *Euphorbia trigona*), and among them we found a sedge warbler. None of us could remember seeing one in a succulent before, but its rusty colouring and bold eye-stripe actually looked rather good set against the bright green organ-pipe stems! It took quite a bit of effort for everyone to see it, involving some rather indelicate balancing on a wall for some.

Making our way back to the minibus we heard the unmistakable calls of a stone-curlew coming from the other side of the road. We retrieved our telescopes and crossed the road to see whether we could see it. To our surprise the first bird we saw was not a stone-curlew but a black-bellied sandgrouse. In fact there were several feeding among the low saltbush, and we spent quite a bit of time stalking them and making sure that everyone had good views. In the end we counted ten. But where were the stone-curlews? Retracing our steps we finally spotted our quarry hidden among the stones and shrubs. In fact there were two, and we got excellent close views.

The sandgrouse and stone-curlews would have made an excellent end to the day, but I was determined to have another try for houbara bustard on the way home. Before reaching the hotel we turned off on a narrow road that crosses the extensive coastal plain west of Tindaya. We stopped and scanned from various vantage points, but only succeeded in spotting another pair of black-bellied sandgrouse and a group of lesser black-backed gulls (our only ones of the week). After an hour or so the lure of a cold glass of beer was starting to overcome our interest in seeing a houbara, so I turned the bus round and stopped for one last look. Eureka! Two houbaras were feeding on the margin of a dry 'field' about a hundred yards away. If we had got out of the bus they would have run off, but by staying inside we all had great views of them feeding undisturbed. When we were all satisfied, we headed back towards the hotel, but we had barely gone five hundred yards when another houbara ran across the road in front of us. We ground to a halt and watched as it walking past us, allowing Lesley to photograph it at close range.



A rare and elusive Houbara bustard.

Saturday 17th March: the far south

We had a long journey ahead of us today so we decided against the early morning birdwatch. Nevertheless, there were two migrant tree pipits in the hotel grounds, so there was something to look at before we started out.

Our first stop was at the lagoon at Catalina García, south of Tuineje. This small lake is normally an excellent spot for waterfowl and other birds, but sadly there was hardly any water left because of the drought. Nevertheless we drove down the rough track and onto the dam to view the muddy puddle that remained. There were lots of rather agitated little ringed plovers crowded into the last bit of water, with single Kentish and ringed plovers among them. Other waders were single greenshank and common sandpiper, and three snipe. The tamarisks around the pool held a good range of passerines, including two more subalpine warblers and a male Sardinian warbler, while Dixon and Valerie had really close views of a handsome male spectacled warbler.

On the way to the Jandía peninsula we stopped briefly at the golf course at the south coast resort of Las Playitas. There were a few ruddy shelducks and a green sandpiper at the small lake, but of more

interest were the warblers in the roadside landscape. In particular, as we had noticed around the hotel, several were feeding in the bright yellow *Aloe vera* flowers. They included another subalpine warbler and a common whitethroat as well as several willow warblers.

Our lunch stop was under the dense shade of trees at Costa Calma. There were no picnic tables today, but plenty of handy rocks to sit on. A flock of fifteen remarkably tame tree pipits kept us company, hunting insects among the leaf litter almost at our feet.

Pressing on towards Jandía, we stopped briefly for a comfort stop at the La Lajita zoo. Here we saw four red-vented bulbuls around the car park, including two singing males. This species is not native to the island, but appears now to be establishing itself as a wild bird in at least two different areas.

There were four cattle egrets on the saltmarsh by Morro Jable lighthouse, and on the other side of the road there were two ring-necked parakeets and five monk parakeets in the palm trees. Both species now have established populations on most of the Canary Islands. Offshore were several gannets and a Sandwich tern.

Having purchased postcards, we then headed further west onto the dirt track that leads to the far western end of the island. We did not fancy the long, dusty drive to the point, but went as far as Gran Valle, where we stopped to photograph the cactus-like succulent Jandía spurge, which is found only in this small area of Fuerteventura. Offshore some of the party saw another gannet, this one diving for fish.

Heading back towards civilisation, we were surprised to see a very tired looking purple heron flying in over the town of Morro Jable. This is a very scarce migrant in Fuerteventura, and a bird we were very lucky to see. We pulled up on the side of the road near a stand of *Araucaria* trees where it had seemed to drop down, but we were unable to see it.

Our next stop was at the isolated hotel at Los Gorriones, which nestles within an island of large trees and shrubs and is an attractive place for migrant birds. At first it seemed virtually birdless, but there was plenty to see in a rather ragged stand of conifers on a slope opposite the hotel entrance. They were mostly Spanish sparrow and linnets, but there were also plenty of willow warblers, and Richard spotted something different among them, which proved to be a Bonelli's warbler. We found a second one nearby, and our second sedge warbler of the week gave brief views. Then Richard caught a glimpse of a bird with a flash of red disappearing into the trees, which could only have been a redstart. We searched for it in vain, but walking down towards the beach the bird flew out into the open. It was in fact a superb male black redstart, and our only sighting of the week.

Before the long drive home we stopped one last time, at the sewage treatment works above Costa Calma. As we pulled up a single bee-eater flew over, although sadly it did not stay around long enough for us to get good views. The only other bird of interest was another subalpine warbler.

On the way back we took the direct route via Pájara, passing through the desiccated and entirely uninhabited mountains in the south-west of the island. The scenery was much admired by those members of the party who were still awake after a long but very rewarding day! It was getting dark by the time we reached La Oliva, dark enough for a Kuhl's pipistrelle to flit in front of the bus, although only Lesley and the driver were fortunate enough to see it. This is the only species of bat recorded on the island.

We decided to leave the log call until tomorrow and after a quick wash and brush-up headed straight for the restaurant.

Sunday 18th March: the north

After a long day yesterday, today was a more relaxed affair with short distances between sites. We decided to forgo the early morning excursion again, but nevertheless we were out in the fields south of La Oliva by 9.30. The birds in the crop fields were much the same as before, but in the bare field beyond we finally spotted our first cream-coloured coursers of the trip. At first there seemed to be just two, but as is so often the case with this species, the more we looked the more we found. The final

tally was six. They stayed on the far side of the field, though, so we needed telescopes to pick out the head pattern.

Now we drove towards the east coast via the isolated village of Vallebrón, which nestles among the highest mountains in the north of the island. Our next stop was at the settlement of Parque Holandés, which is a rather up-market residential area near the coast. Its well established gardens often hold good numbers of migrants. On this occasion, however, we saw little except for a particularly handsome male subalpine warbler. The exotic plants were interesting, though!

Our luck was no better at Corralejo. The rocky shore north of the port can be a good place for waders, but today there were very few, just a couple of whimbrels and a ringed plover. The tide was unusually high, and most of the waders were clearly roosting somewhere along the coast. To brighten our spirits we decided on a leisurely lunch of fresh fish in one of the harbour-side restaurants. After all, it was Sunday, and we thought we had earned a bit of a treat. The fish was delicious, and we even added a species to our growing list from our table on the patio when Lesley spotted three turnstones on nearby rocks.

Thus refreshed, we drove to another area of the north shore at Majanicho, where a few dwellings surround a sandy cove. Sadly, there were no birds here either, so we adopted another technique. We drove a few hundred yards along the shore and sat on the rocky beach with our cool box close to hand to wait for the birds to come to us. And sure enough they did. Offshore there was a constant passage of Cory's shearwaters, and as the tide began to fall, more and more birds appeared on the rocks nearby. In the end we saw seven species of waders, including three bar-tailed godwits, four Kentish plovers and a small group of sanderlings. Best of all though was a little egret 'dancing' in a small rock pool. With wings outstretched it pranced wildly to and fro across the pool like a ballerina, presumably to confuse the fish (rather than to entertain us). The technique obviously worked as we twice saw the performance rewarded with a catch.

Before returning to the hotel we drove into the sandy wasteland near Lajares in the hope of better views of cream-coloured coursers, but none were seen. For the moment at least we would have to make do with the slightly distant views we had had earlier in the day.



Cream-coloured courser; and scanning for birds.

After yesterday's long day, today we made sure we were back in time for the braver (female) members of the party to have a quick dip in the hotel pool. Then we met in the bar a little earlier than usual based on the meagre excuse that we had two days' log call to complete.

Monday 19th March: the south-east

Although it is often bone dry, a birdwatching couple we had bumped into at Catalina García reported that the lagoon at Rosa del Taro was full of water. So today we made a visit to the lagoon our first priority. Finding our way out of the village of Tetir, there were suddenly three hoopoes fighting on the road in front of us. There were no other vehicles about so we stopped to watch them. Two, presumably rival males, were having a pitch battle. They circled wildly round each other with wings flashing black and white and their lovely crests flicking agitatedly up and down. The third bird generally kept a little distance, but occasionally provided at least moral support by dashing in and contributing briefly to the battle. Eventually, all three flew over a wall and disappeared from sight, still evidently engrossed in their dispute.

When we arrived at the lagoon, we could see that there was indeed plenty of water in it. Unfortunately though, it was surprisingly cold and windy. In fact, it was probably around 60^oF, but we had already become accustomed to somewhat higher temperatures and it was quite an effort to even get out of the bus! Sheltering as best we could from the wind we could see the inevitable pair of ruddy shelducks, and a few coots and moorhens on the water and in among the surrounding giant reed. A group of hopeful Muscovy ducks came to see whether we had anything to give them, but we were more interested in the small birds flitting about round the reedy margins. In particular, there was a pipit feeding round the water's edge in among the reeds almost at our feet, but it was very skulking and difficult to get a good view of. It had a rosy flush to the breast and unusually strong streaking on the upperparts, so looked suspiciously like a red-throated pipit. Nevertheless, when it flew it gave a call that was much more like meadow pipit. There were lots of willow warblers and at least two sedge warblers calling from the reeds, but it wasn't long before we headed back to the shelter of the minibus.

After a brief look for cream-coloured coursers on a plain east of Triquivijate, we continued to the resort at Caleta de Fustes. A marbled duck had been seen on and off throughout the winter at a lake in the golf course complex. We drove round the apparently deserted complex, trying to find a way to view the said lake, but in the end gave up. We did add mallard to our list – not much consolation perhaps, but actually a rarer bird in Fuerteventura than marbled duck, and quite exciting for the leader! More tangible consolation was provided by an unscheduled stop for coffee and delicious cakes at the best café in Fustes.

From Fustes we drove the short distance south to the mouth of Barranco de la Torre, with its palm trees and tamarisks. We walked a few hundred yards down the barranco to some 'fields' among the palms, but they were bone dry and birdless. We had lunch in the warm sun in the shelter of the tamarisks, where at least two more subalpine warblers and a Sardinian warbler were skulking. As we finished lunch and were preparing to drive on, a heron flew in and landed out of view behind an earth bank. Looking over the bank, we discovered that it was our second purple heron of the week. We could see its impossibly long, thin head and neck snaking above the low scrub.

A few kilometres upstream, the main dam across Barranco de la Torre held no water at all, although there were hundreds of what looked like yellow balls scattered across the dry surface. These were the fruits of the poisonous gourd *Citrulus colocynthus*. We had a discussion as to how the plant distributes its seeds given that it is so poisonous that nothing would eat it. Perhaps by rolling we thought, but how would they disperse between barrancos? It subsequently occurred to me that a football team would come in handy there. In reality, the seeds are probably eaten by birds once the poisonous pith has withered away, but one suspects that rolling is a useful additional means of dispersal.

We were disappointed to find no water, and therefore no birds, but we could see that there was at least some water at a spot a little further down the barranco. Unfortunately it was not easy to find, the whole area being a mass of dirt tracks leading nowhere. At last though, we did find our way there, and we were very glad we did – it proved to be one of the highlights of the week. As we stepped out of the minibus we could see a flock of about 20 black-winged stilts. Unfortunately these were flushed when a motorbike came along the track, but everything else stayed put. Although it was only a small area of water, it held a great selection of birds. Close views of wood, green and common sandpipers allowed us to practice our identification skills, and there were both white and Spanish yellow wagtails and several tree pipits among the ever-present Berthelot's on the muddy margins. Trumpeter finches



Southern grey shrike – a few were seen every day.

and linnets came to drink from the tiny inlet stream, giving good close views. But best of all was a magnificent male white-spotted bluethroat, which came out of the marginal vegetation to feed in full view on the mud just in front of us. When he turned towards us the shining blue upper breast, white spot and red line beneath were quite dazzling, and gasps of admiration were frequent. But he was not the only handsome bird on display. In the false tobacco behind him a fine male redstart came into view from time to time, and as we were about to leave a male woodchat shrike put in an appearance. It was a very colourful combination indeed.

We still had time for one more site before heading home, and we decided to revisit the lagoon at Catalina García to see whether any new birds had turned up since our visit a few days before. We passed through courser territory on the way, but again failed to catch up with any. To our surprise we noticed rain clouds brewing to the east, and as we drove south through Tuineje it was raining enough to need the wipers on. It was still raining a little when we got to the lagoon, where the muddy puddle had noticeably shrunk further since our earlier visit. We stopped just long enough to note that the birds were much the same as before, and with the somewhat inclement weather in mind we agreed to call it a day and head back to the hotel.

Tuesday 20th March: Los Molinos and La Pared

We had been so completely engrossed in our birdwatching that it seemed incredible to find that we only had one day left. We decided to start by revisiting the reservoir at Los Molinos, where the holiday had got off to such a good start on the first day. It did not disappoint. The flocks of ruddy shelduck and coot were still there, as were the various waders and the swarm of house martins by the dam. This time, though, we were treated to regular fly-pasts by chortling groups of black-bellied sandgrouse. During the course of the morning we saw at least 25. The swift flock was much reduced, but all those that remained were little black swifts. But it was three new species that stole the show.

Walking back towards the minibus a squacco heron flew across the lake towards us, and settled somewhere out of sight on the lake margin. We thought that if we walked out along the dam we would be able to see where it had landed. About half-way across the dam we noticed a red-rumped swallow flying up and down the trickle of water below it, and then all 140 ruddy shelducks suddenly took off and flew up the reservoir towards us. An impressive sight in its own right, but it could surely only mean that there was a bird of prey somewhere over the far side of the reservoir. First we spotted a distant Egyptian vulture, but then we noticed another large bird low over the water. It was an osprey. It was mobbed briefly by a tiny looking buzzard, before settling on the muddy bank to allow us views through the telescope.

Having watched the osprey we turned our telescopes to the reservoir margin, where we thought the squacco heron might be hiding. We realised that the heron would be almost exactly the same colour as the bank, so it would be difficult to spot if it kept still. As we scanned we noticed a small bird hopping about along the lake edge. It was our second bluethroat of the holiday, though much more distant than the one we had seen the day before. In trying to get everybody to see the bluethroat, we suddenly realised that the squacco heron was standing next to it! We had been right, it was exactly the same colour as its surroundings.

Driving back down the track towards the main road, we finally chanced upon a group of four coursers. We stopped the bus to watch them at close range, and to take photos. Now we could see the lovely pastel blue crown and black and white face pattern. They really are lovely birds.



Barbary ground squirrel.

We drove south through the mountains, stopping briefly at a viewpoint high above the Río Palmas valley, from where we could look down on the tamarisks and palm trees at the dry reservoir we had walked to earlier in the week. As usual, tourists were busy photographing the tame Barbary ground squirrels, and there were equally tame Berthelot's pipits.

We stopped for lunch in the leafy village of Pájara with its chirping sparrows and bougainvillea. A monarch butterfly drifted past us, but there were few birds to see other than the odd goldfinch. After lunch we visited the church with its unusual carved façade of beasts and

flowers before heading south through barren mountain scenery to our final destination of the week.

Just inland from the small resort of La Pared we struck west on a track into the sandy waste that joins Jandía to the main part of the island. Next to where we parked the minibus there was a rare plant, the endemic Medusa's-head Bindweed *Convolvulus caput-medusae*. Due to the drought there were no flowers on it, so it was an act of faith on the part of the group to accept that the thorny 'hedge-hog plant' in front of them was a bindweed. It is a very rare plant indeed, and only about two thousand individuals are known, mainly from this small area near La Pared.

We walked along a sandy track to a concrete bunker where we could get out of the gusty wind. Below us was the sandy Matas Blancas plain, with wind turbines on the hill beyond. Scattered across the sand was a herd of about sixty camels, complete with a herdsman who was wrapped up against the wind and sun like an extra in Lawrence of Arabia. We sat and waited for birds to appear, always a better idea than wandering around in the open, but only had distant view of two more coursers and a small group of Barbary partridges. Battling against the wind on the way back to the bus there were three more coursers (right by the bus in fact!) and a migrant wheatear.

For our last evening we forsook the hotel restaurant and drove to Corralejo for a paella near the main square. Back at the hotel we had a whisky to celebrate the end of a really wonderful trip.

Wednesday 21st March: travel back to England

David and Lesley joined me for a last pre-breakfast excursion to the fields by La Oliva. A tawny pipit among the ever-present Berthelot's was our last addition to the list of birds for the holiday, and there was a wood sandpiper on the pond. We had just enough time for one last look at the 'courser field', where there were five cream-coloured coursers to round off the holiday.

Highlights of the week as nominated by group members

- David L** Hoopoes fighting on the road in front of the minibus and the African blue tits.
- Lesley** Little egret fishing in the tidal pool and photographing the houbara.
- Valerie** Hoopoes fighting, the trumpeter finches and the colour on the back of the cream-coloured courser's head when seen at close range.
- Dixon** The egret fishing and the bluethroat.
- Richard** The egret fishing, the African blue tit and the Fuerteventura chat.
- David C** Hoopoes fighting and the amazing views of the bluethroat.

SYSTEMATIC LISTS

BIRDS

Cory's Shearwater	Lots seen off northern coastal areas.
Gannet	Small numbers off Morro Jable and Corralejo.
Cattle Egret	Four at Morro Jable saltmarsh on 17 th .
Little Egret	Four at Los Molinos Reservoir and ones and twos on the north coast.
Squacco Heron	One at Los Molinos Reservoir on 20 th .
Purple Heron	One flew in at Morro Jable and one in Barranco de la Torre.
Grey Heron	Maximum of 11 at Los Molinos Reservoir.
Ruddy Shelduck	140 at Los Molinos Reservoir, a pair all week at La Oliva fields, and several other sightings.
Mallard	Three at Caleta de Fustes golf course.
Ring-necked Duck	Two females at Los Molinos reservoir.
Egyptian Vulture	Several pairs/individuals were all adult.
Buzzard ¹	Seen on half the days, with a maximum of ten on 16 th .
Osprey	One at Los Molinos Reservoir on 20 th .
Kestrel ²	Seen every day.
Barbary Partridge	Two flushed in the pine forest near Betancuria, and five on the sandy plain near La Pared
Moorhen	Four at Los Molinos Reservoir, two at Catalina García and one at Rosa del Taro.
Coot	160 at Los Molinos Reservoir
Houbara Bustard	Three near Tindaya on 16 th .
Black-winged Stilt	20 at Los Alares and two at Los Molinos Reservoir
Stone-curlew	A pair near Antigua windmill on 16 th .
Cream-coloured Courser	Up to six at the 'courser field' at La Oliva, and a total of nine seen in various places on 20 th .
Little Ringed Plover	15 at Catalina García and small numbers in several other places.
Ringed Plover	Single birds on three dates.
Kentish Plover	Small numbers on the north coast and one at Catalina García.
Grey Plover	One on the north coast near Majanicho on 18 th .
Sanderling	Four on the north coast near Majanicho on 18 th .
Dunlin	One on the north coast near Majanicho on 18 th .
Snipe	Three at Catalina García on 17 th .
Bar-tailed Godwit	Three on the north coast near Majanicho on 18 th .
Whimbrel	Three on the north coast near Majanicho on 18 th .
Redshank	Two at Los Molinos Reservoir and two at Catalina García.
Greenshank	Up to four at Los Molinos Reservoir and single birds at Catalina García and Los Alares.
Green Sandpiper	Two at Los Alares and one at Los Molinos Reservoir.
Wood Sandpiper	Seen at Los Molinos Reservoir, Los Alares and La Oliva.
Common Sandpiper	Seen most days.
Turnstone	Three at Corralejo on 18 th .
Lesser Black-back	12 on the plain near Tindaya on 16 th .
Yellow-legged Gull	Seen in good numbers every day.
Sandwich Tern	One at Morro Jable on 17 th .
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	Eight near Betancuria windmill and two at Tindaya on 16 th , six at La Oliva on 18 th , and a total of about 30 at Los Molinos on 20 th .
Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	Seen every day.
Collared Dove	Seen every day.
African Collared Dove ³	One near the hotel on 14 th .
Turtle Dove	Small numbers at Río Palmas valley and in a few other locations.
Laughing Dove	Two seen near the hotel on 14 th .
Monk Parakeet ⁴	Six at Morro Jable on 17 th .
Ring-necked Parakeet ⁵	Two at Morro Jable on 17 th .
Plain Swift (Little Black Swift)	Up to 50 at Los Molinos reservoir on 15 th , but only five or so there on 20 th .
Pallid Swift	Seen most days.
Bee-eater	One over Costa Calma on 17 th .

Hoopoe	Seen every day, with a maximum of ten on 19 th .
Lesser Short-toed Lark	Flocks seen every day.
Skylark	Two at La Oliva fields on 15 th .
Sand Martin	One or two seen most days.
House Martin	Dozens seen every day, and up to about a hundred at Los Molinos Reservoir on both visits.
Swallow	Seen every day, but less numerous than House Martin.
Red-rumped Swallow	One at Los Molinos Reservoir on 20 th .
Tawny Pipit	One at La Oliva fields on 21 st .
Berthelot's Pipit	Seen every day.
Tree Pipit	Two in the hotel garden on 15 th , at least 15 at Costa Calma on 17 th , and four at Los Alares on 19 th .
Meadow Pipit	Up to three present at La Oliva fields throughout.
Yellow Wagtail	Up to three of the Spanish race seen every day, and one male blue-headed at Río Palmas valley on 16 th .
White Wagtail	Singles seen at three locations.
Robin	Three in Río Palmas valley on 16 th .
Bluethroat	Male of the white-spotted race at Los Alares on 19 th , and another male of unknown race at Los Molinos on 20 th .
Black Redstart	A male at Los Gorriones on 17 th .
Redstart	A male at Los Alares on 19 th .
Fuerteventura Chat	Three at Los Molinos on 15 th , a pair in Río Palmas valley on 16 th , and two at Los Molinos on 20 th .
Northern Wheatear	A few seen most days.
Song Thrush	Two at Río Palmas on 16 th .
Sedge Warbler	One at Antigua windmill on 16 th , one at Los Gorriones on 17 th , at least two calling at Rosa del Taro on 19 th , one at Los Molinos reservoir on 20 th .
Spectacled Warbler	A few seen most days.
Subalpine Warbler	A female at Los Molinos reservoir on 15 th , two at Catalina García, one at La Lajita golf course and one at Los Gorriones (all on 17 th), a male at Parque Holandés on 18 th , and two in Barranco de la Torre on 19 th .
Sardinian Warbler	Most common at Río Palmas valley.
Whitethroat	One at La Lajita golf course on 17 th .
Blackcap	Seen or heard at Antigua windmill, Antigua municipal park, and in Pajara.
Bonelli's Warbler	Two at Los Gorriones on 17 th .
Chiffchaff	Seen every day.
Willow Warbler	Seen every day.
African Blue Tit ⁶	On 16 th we saw one in the Río Palmas valley and a pair in the pine forest near Betancuria, and there was one at Los Gorriones on 17 th .
Woodchat Shrike	A male at Los Alares on 19 th .
Southern Grey Shrike ⁷	A few seen every day.
Red-vented Bulbul ⁸	Four at La Lajita on 17 th .
Raven	Seen every day.
Spanish Sparrow	Seen every day.
Canary	A pair in the pine forest near Betancuria on 16 th .
Goldfinch	Two at Río Palmas on 16 th and one at Pájara on 20 th .
Linnet	Seen every day.
Trumpeter Finch	Seen every day.
Corn Bunting	Up to ten in the fields at La Oliva on each visit.

Total = 90 species

¹ The Canary Islands sub-species is *Buteo buteo insularum*.

² The Eastern Canary Islands sub-species is *Falco tinunculus dacotiae*.

^{3&4} These introduced species are now considered to be established as wild birds in the Canary Islands.

⁵ This introduced species is now considered to be established as a wild bird in the Canary Islands as a whole, although it is not clear whether it is fully established in Fuerteventura.

⁶ The sub-species found in Fuerteventura is *Cyanistes ultramarinus degener*.

⁷ The sub-species found in Fuerteventura is *Lanius meridionalis koenigi*

⁸ Although this introduced species is not yet officially considered to be established in the wild, it is now regularly seen in various places on the island.

MAMMALS

Algerian hedgehog *Atelerix algirus* – several road corpses but none were seen alive.

Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus* – a few seen most days.

Barbary ground squirrel *Atlantoxerus getulus* – common.

Kuhl's pipistrelle *Pipistrellus kuhli* – one in La Oliva.

Feral goat *Capra hircus* – it is quite difficult to work out which of the goats are wild, but some of those we saw in the mountains would certainly have been part of the self-sustaining feral population.

REPTILES

Eastern Canary Islands lizard *Gallotia atlantica*

BUTTERFLIES

Green-striped white *Euchloe belemia*

Clouded yellow *Colias crocea*

Monarch *Danaus plexippus*

Plain tiger *Danaus chrysippus*

OTHER INVERTEBRATES

Emperor dragonfly *Anax imperator*

PLANTS

Pinaceae

Pinus canariensis

Canary Islands pine

Planted in the Castillo de Lara forest

Pinus halepensis

Aleppo pine

As above

Apiaceae

Astydamia latifolia

On shore near Cotillo lighthouse

Asclepiadaceae

Caralluma burchardii

Stone-like succulent near hotel

Asteraceae

Asteriscus sericeus

Small shrub with silvery leaves and yellow flowers at Antigua windmill. Endemic to Fuerteventura.

Chrysanthemum coronarium

Crown daisy

Kleinia neriifolia

The common succulent shrub

Launaea arborescens

Shrub with soft spines

Silybum marianum

Milk thistle

Taraxacum officinale

Dandelion

Road verge in Fustes

Boraginaceae

Heliotropium erosum

Heliotrope

Low plant with white flowers

Brassicaceae

Erucastrum canariense

Yellow flowered sp. in Río Palmas

Cactaceae

Opuntia dillenii

Small, yellowish, widely naturalised

Opuntia ficus-indica

Large plantations, some naturalised

Caesalpinaceae

Ceratonia siliqua

Carob

In gardens

Caryophyllaceae

Spergularia media

Greater sea-spurrey

Convolvulaceae

Convolvulus caput-medusae

Medusa's-head

La Pared

Bindweed

Convolvulus althaeoides

Mallow-leaved bindweed

Roadsides

Cucurbitaceae

Citrulus colocynthus

Bitter apple

Euphorbiaceae

Euphorbia handiensis

Jandia spurge

Gran Valle

Euphorbia trigona

Cactus garden at Antigua windmill

Ricinus communis

Castor oil plant

Fabaceae		
<i>Lotus lancerottensis</i>		
<i>Trifolium repens</i>	White clover	Hotel lawn
Frankeniaceae		
<i>Frankenia capitata</i>	Sea heath	Cotillo
Mimosaceae		
<i>Acacia cyclops</i>		Roadsides etc. in mountains
Moraceae		
<i>Ficus carica</i>	Fig tree	
Plumbaginaceae		
<i>Limonium papillatum</i>	A sea lavender	Endemic pink flowered species on coastal rocks at Cotillo
Solanaceae		
<i>Datura stramonium</i>	Thorn-apple	
<i>Lycium intricatum</i>		Low, thorny shrub
<i>Nicotiana glauca</i>	False tobacco	
Tamaricaceae		
<i>Tamarix canariensis</i>	Canary Islands tamarisk	
Zygophyllaceae		
<i>Zygophyllum fontanesii</i>	Sea grape	
Agavaceae		
<i>Agave americana</i>	Century plant	
<i>Agave fourcroydes</i>		
Arecaceae		
<i>Phoenix canariensis</i>	Canary Islands palm	Río Palmas etc.
<i>Phoenix dactylifera</i>	Date palm	Widely cultivated
Juncaceae		
<i>Juncus acutus</i>	Sharp rush	Río Palmas
Liliaceae		
<i>Aloe vera</i>		Commonly planted and cultivated
<i>Asparagus pastorianus</i>		
Poaceae		
<i>Arundo donax</i>	Giant reed	
<i>Pennisetum setaceum</i>	Fountain grass	
<i>Phalaris canariensis</i>	Canary grass	



The very rare, cactus-like, *Jandia* spurge.



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