

Finding all the endemics of the Canary Islands

March 18-27 2024



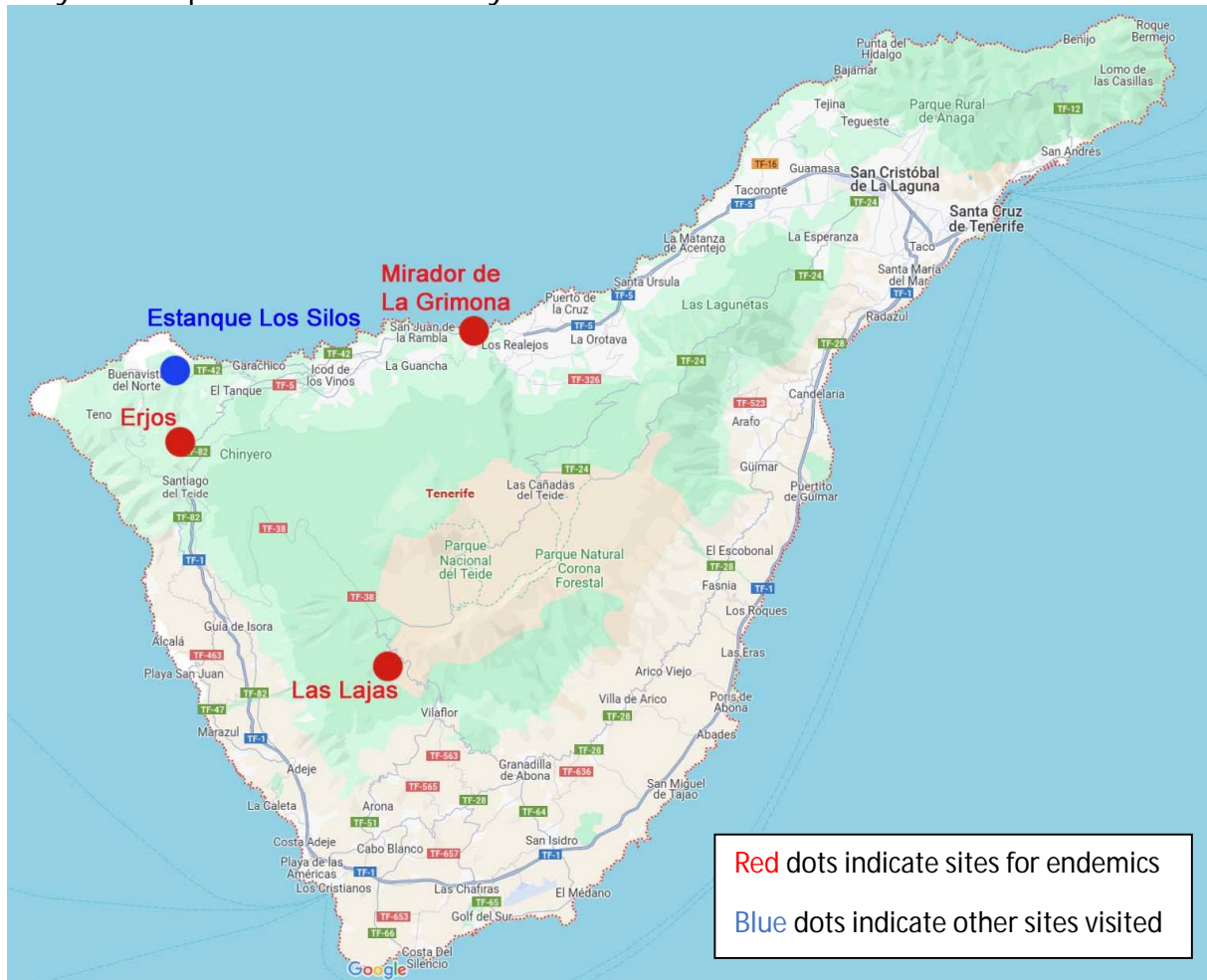
After the recent splits there now is 7 true endemic species (*Laurel Pigeon*, *Bolle's Pigeon*, *Fuerteventura Stonechat*, *Canary Islands Chiffchaff*, *Canary Islands Chaffinch*, *Tenerife Blue Chaffinch*, *Gran-Canaria Blue Chaffinch*) plus another three near-endemic species that are shared with Madeira (*Berthelot's Pipit*, *Canary Plain Swift*). Recent research suggests that both subspecies of *Robin* on the Canary Islands should be granted species level, so there might be more endemic species to come. Seeing all of them requires a visit of the three islands of Tenerife, Gran Canaria and Fuerteventura as each of these islands holds a species occurring nowhere else. With the exception of



Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch all of the endemics are relatively easy to find. Additionally winter and migration period provides good possibilities to find either American or African Vagrants. During our trip, we focused on the endemics reducing efforts on finding wetland or coastal species. We planned three days for each island which is more than enough.

Tenerife

is the only place for *Tenerife Blue Chaffinch* which is confined to the Pine stands of the higher elevations and also the only island (visited) for *Bolle's Pigeon*. The island is dominated by the Volcano Teide, the highest mountain in Spain. The southern half is rather dry and sunny and is sparsely vegetated while the northern half can be cloudy and foggy and thus is the green part of the island with laurel forests that are home to the two pigeon species. Finding the endemics here is fairly easy and requires the visit of only few sites:



Both *Laurel Pigeon* and *Bolle's Pigeon* can reliably be found at **Mirador de La Grimona** (28.392845, -16.608837). These species can be a little tricky as they are usually seen flying and thus require a vantage point to scan the laurel forest. Unfortunately, this can be problematic because fog / clouds occur fairly often preventing visibility. Mirador de La Grimona is located very low along the TF5, a busy road along the north coast of Tenerife (making it a rather unromantic stay). During our visits, visibility was still good whereas fog had already prevented observations further up the mountains. It took us barely five minutes to find both species and it was even possible to see them perched. A scope is very helpful here as the distances are quite high.

The Mirador can only be visited travelling westwards as the traffic will probably prevent a turn onto the small parking area.

The small village of **Erjos** in the northwest of the island is a good starting point to explore the Laurel Forest and a site regularly visited to find the endemic Pigeon species. Park your car at 28.328207, -16.805892 and follow the signs to Monte del Agua. The first part of the track takes you through rather open country with loads



Canary Islands Chaffinch prefer the laurel forests of the island

of *Canary Islands Chiffchaffs* and *Island Canary*, some *Robins* were present as were two warbler species (*Blackcap* and *Sardinian Warbler*). *Plain Swifts* were seen from here too. Two *Bolle's Pigeon* flew by. Before entering the Laurel forest there is a track leading onto a small ridge giving you a vantage point to look over the forest. From here we observed one *Laurel Pigeon* flying. You can continue the track towards Mont del Agua, but you will need to find vantage points to find the Pigeons. In the forest visibility naturally is limited and it is harder to find the birds but several *Canary Island Chaffinches* plus a few *Robins* were quite cooperative here.



Possible split: Tenerife Robin at Erjos

Zone Recreativo de Las Lajas for *Blue Chaffinch*. This site is located along TF 21 that crosses the island including the scenic drive around Mount Teide. The coordinates (28.189214, -16.665425) mark a drinking spot where up to six *Tenerife Blue Chaffinches* came drinking simultaneously. Other species here include *Great*

Spotted Woodpecker, African Blue Tit, Canary Islands Chiffchaff, Goldcrest and Island Canary.

Las Lajas is a dead sure spot for Tenerife Blue Chaffinch



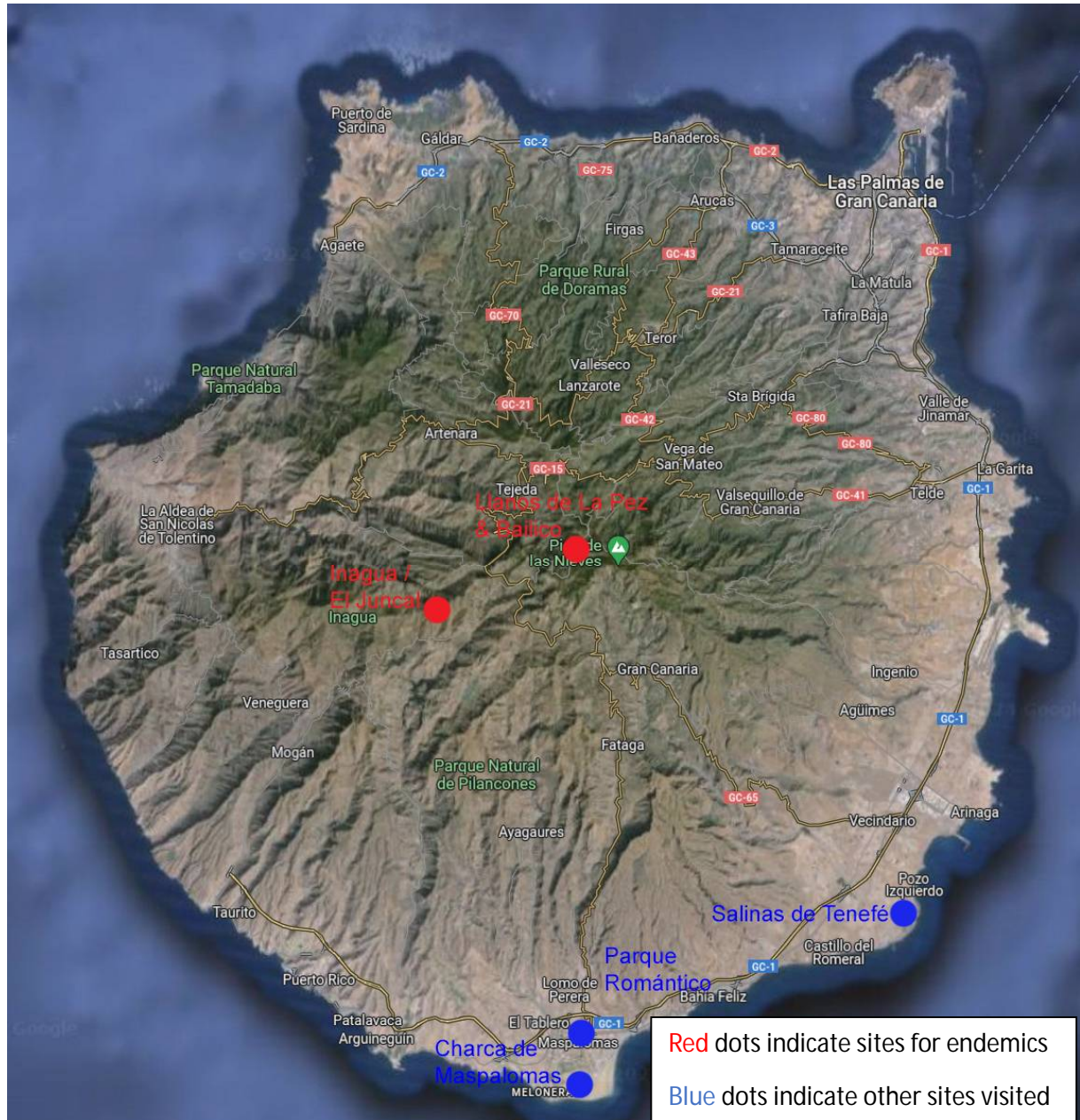
Other sites visited:

Estanque los Silos and surroundings: after finishing off the endemics, we were looking for close by wetland sites which is not easy on the Canary Islands. We found a few water basins here 28.368071, -16.820845 and a bit further down the road that provided a few birds not seen elsewhere on Tenerife like *Dunlin*, *Coot* and *Gray Wagtail*. A bit further west we had nice *Barbary Partridges* in a plantation (28.368136, -16.841850).

Gran Canaria

is the only place to find *Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch*. There are only two separate locations where to see them: La Cumbre and Inagua. The information on which site is the best for the species is somewhat contradictory. Other endemics on the island are *Canary*, *Berthelot's Pipit*, *Canary Islands Chaffinch*, *Canary Islands Chiffchaff*, *Plain Swift*. A reintroduction program for *Laurel Pigeon* exists, so there are a few birds on the island.

Finding Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinches is pretty difficult as the birds tend to be

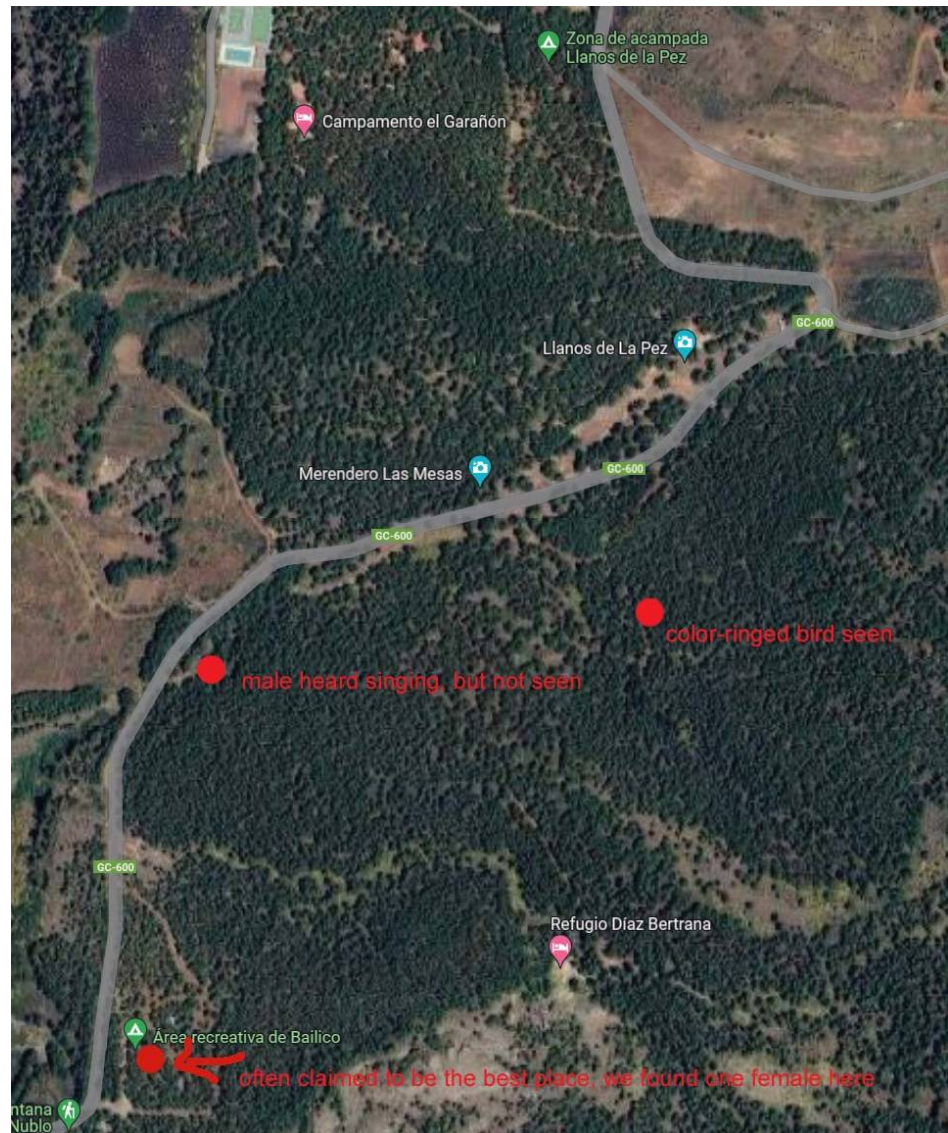


somewhat quiet and hidden. They like to stay up high in the trees and hardly ever come down to lower branches or even the forest floor. Other reports recommended to plan three days for the finch. We found them earlier, but our observations were brief and unsatisfactory.

Though 90% of the Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinches are found in the Inagua Nature Reserve and some reports state that the search was more successful there than in La Cumbre, most people head for the latter. Finding the species in both areas is not a matter of course. We decided to search for it at La Cumbre, as more people had recommended it.

Bailico, a campsite in the forest (parking 27.960458, -15.589481), is recommended above all, but many also head for **Llanos de la Pez**, which is only a few hundred meters away (parking 27.966420, -15.583538). I didn't find a clear strategy for finding the birds in the reports, I myself assumed that one or two birds would already be singing at the time of year. In general, the species seems to be heard much more often than seen, but during our visit there were hardly any sounds in the forest.

The results of 15 hours of work over two days with numerous kilometers on several tracks were a female on Bailico, a singing male between Bailico and Llanos de La Pez and a color-ringed bird near the picnic area at Llanos de La Pez. The map shows the core area for the finch including my findings.



During the visit, we easily found *Island Canary*, *Plain Swift*, *African Blue Tit*, *Berthelot's Pipit* and *Great Spotted Woodpecker*. A few *Robins* were around as well, especially near the place on the map for the singing male. A pair of *Gray Wagtails* were around at La Pez and several *Ravens* tried to get some food on the Recreation Area. The open area in the northeast of this map was good for *Red-legged Partridge*.

Llanos de La Pez can get really crowded and noisy on weekends, making it nearly impossible to hear calling birds. Better avoid these!

Other sites visited:

Charca de Maspalomas is located at the busy southernmost point of the island and is one of the most species-rich sites of the Canary Islands. This is because it is a permanent wetland that attracts many migrants, especially waterfowl and waders. 150 species have been seen here according to ebird with a good number of rarities having turned up here. Several introduced (established) species such as *Muscovy Duck*, *African Collared Dove*, *Common Waxbill*, *Monk Parakeet* and *Rose-ringed Parakeet* are fairly easy to see. Some endemics can be found here as well but mostly the common ones such as *African Blue Tit*, *Canary Islands Chiffchaff*, *Plain Swift* and *Island Canary*.

Observing here is done almost exclusively from the Maspalomas Pond Promenade that gets extremely crowded later in the day so I recommend going very early if you want to avoid the masses of people.

Parque Romántico is far from being either a park or romantic. It is located between C. Dinamarca and C. Finlandia in Playa des Ingles. What looks like a green patch on Google Maps turns out to be tennis courts bordering a small green spot that is



used as a mixture of a rubbish dump and a dog's toilet. We visited this spot as there was a longstaying *Sudan Golden Sparrow* visiting the only flowering tree along C. Finlandia.

Salinas de Tenefé was another site visited to find a vagrant. A *Semipalmated Plover* was turning up here together with a few other waders such as *Common Ringed Plover*, *Black-bellied Plover* or *Ruddy Turnstones*. Seawatching can be rewarding here, but we didn't try.

Fuerteventura

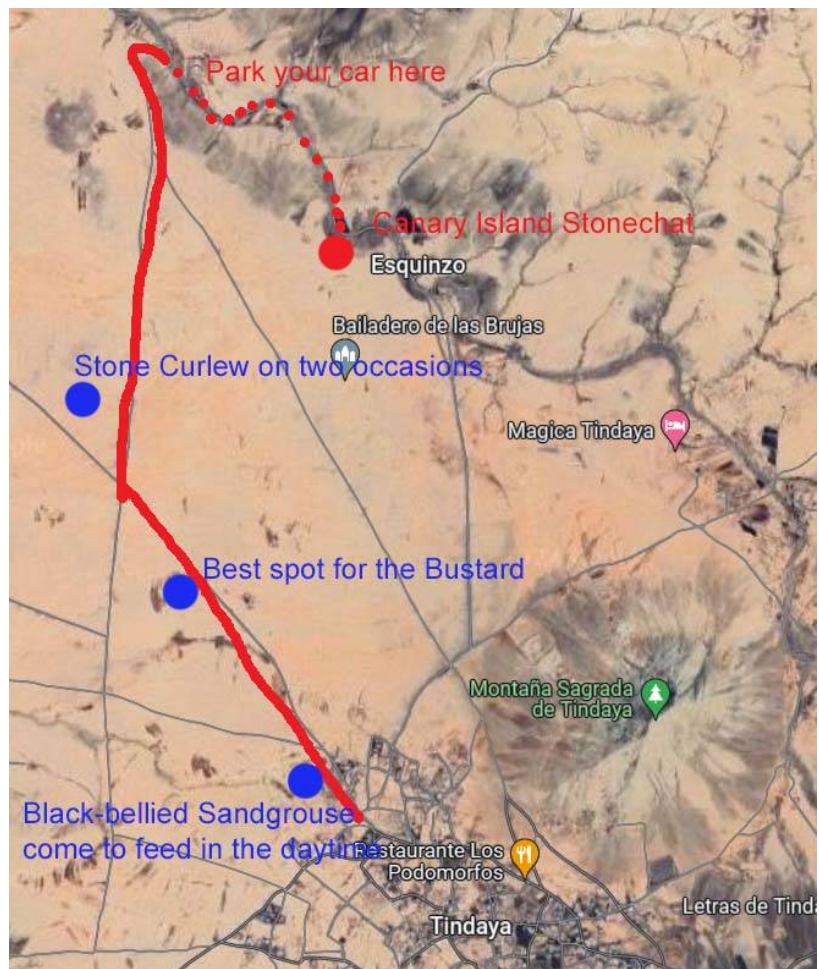
is the only place to see *Fuerteventura Stonechat*. The birds prefer vegetated Barrancos with rocky slopes. They are not uncommon but somewhat scattered across the island. Apart from this species only two other endemics occur on Fuerteventura: *Berthelot's Pipit* & *Plain Swift*. On the other hand, Fuerteventura offers a good selection of semi-desert species. Finding all of these plus the endemic Stonechat can easily be managed by visiting two sites that are very close to each other and are located in the north-west of the island:





Llanos de Tindaya is the most famous site on Fuerteventura as there are good chances finding several semi-desert species such as *Cream-colored Courser*, the endemic subspecies of *Stone-Curlew*, *Lesser Short-toed Lark*, *Black-bellied Sandgrouse* and of course *Houbara Bustard*.

The best way to explore this plain is by car along the Calle Virgen de la Caridad, an old tarmac road with loads of pot-holes. *Houbara Bustards* can be seen relatively easy along the track. My favorite spot was an area of deserted fields (28.602160, -13.998626) where up to 6 birds were feeding in the late afternoon very close to the



road. On one occasion two *Stone-Curlews* were quite cooperative and offered funny sights chasing bumblebees on foot. Another spot where they were several birds on two occasions was a bit further down the road (28.607095, -14.002650). *Lesser Short-toed Larks*, *Berthelot 's Pipit* and *Great Gray Shrikes* can be encountered relatively easily.

Though they can be seen along Calle Virgen de la Caridad, the best place for finding *Black-bellied Sandgrouse* is the goat kennel right before exiting Tindaya (28.593798, -13.991957). Up to 8 birds were seen here simultaneously feeding among the goats, chicken and feral Pigeons allowing short distance views with a little patience. During my visits, the Sandgrouse were not present in the mornings and evenings, obviously they tend to come feeding in the midday hours.



The goat kennel in Tindaya offers fantastic views of Black-bellied Sandgrouse

Barranco de Esquinzo can be reached from Llanos de Tindaya by taking a right turn from Calle Virgen de la Caridad at the first (only?) possibility, following the gravel road until it descends and makes a sharp right bend. Park your car down in the Barranco and walk it uphill for roundabout 1.3 km until you reach a rocky bend (dotted line on the map; 28.617097, -13.992156). This is a place for *Fuerteventura Stonechat*. *Trumpeter Finch* was present in good numbers and this was the only occasion we found the endemic ssp. of *Linnet*.

Other sites visited:

Embalse de los Molinos: Located near Puerto de los Molinos near the western coast, this was one of the few sites that had not dried out. Nevertheless, there were hardly any birds except from a few *Ruddy Shelducks*, *Black-winged Stilts* and one *Little Ringed Plover*. A soaring *Egyptian Vulture* was a pleasant view, so was one flying *Black-bellied Sandgrouse*. A little search of the rocky slopes finally led to the observation of a *Fuerteventura Stonechat* about here 28.519163, -14.034197.

Barranco de la Muley is close to the airport and another spot to find *Fuerteventura Stonechat*. From the airport, take the FV2 south and turn right onto FV413 towards Antigua. Take the first gravel road to the right until approaching the Bar-



ranco, park the car and make your way down. The birds like to be in the steeper curves of the riverbed, we had a pair with a young. *Peregrine Falcon* was around (supposed to breed in the area), our only *Northern Wheatear* of the trip was seen here as well. There was still some water left, but the two small *waders* flying up refused to get identified. A pair of *Ruddy Shelduck* and a *Gray Heron* were around as well.

Embalse de La Oliva: Located south east of La Oliva this is a fenced Embalse that offers views from only a few points. Water levels were good during our visit, there were breeding *Ruddy Shelducks*, *Black-winged Stilts* and *Moorhen*. The green bushes around the waterbody are probably attractive for migrants, two *Willow Warblers* were the only ones we saw during our trip. *Spectacled Warblers* were common in the drier bushes surrounding the site and a *Great Gray Shrike* was around as well.

Balsa Barranco de La Florida is located in the southeast where FV2 crosses FV4. It was the place with the most water and quite a lot of birds were around. The reason we came was a longstaying *Lesser Yellowlegs* that was easy to discover. Some migrants like *Yellow Wagtail*, *Woodchat Shrike*, *House Martin* and *Red-rumped Swallow* were around. Among the numerous *Yellow-legged Gulls* was our only *Lesser Black-backed Gull* of the trip.



Lesser Yellowlegs at Balsa Barranco de la Florida

Golf Club Salinas de Antigua was another site we visited to find a vagrant, but the *Blue-winged Teal* that spent quite a while at the pond of the Golf Course had left already and was replaced by a *Eurasian Teal* accompanied by a *Garganey*. Some waders were around: *Greenshank*, *Whimbrel*, *Little Ringed Plover* and *Common Sandpiper* were present. Two *Spoonbills* were seen flying overhead. This place can only be viewed from outside the fence in the north of the Golf Course.

The Species:

Ruddy Shelduck	quite common on Fuerteventura
Garganey	only one observation on the pond of the Golf Club Salinas de Antigua.
Teal	together with the latter species.
Barbary Partridge	this species is a bit unpredictable. They are not uncommon on Tenerife and Fuerteventura, but it is hard to give reliable suggestions. Either you stumble into them or you don't. We've seen or heard them at Charcas De Erjos and Buenavista del Norte (Tenerife) and Llanos de Tindaya (Fuerteventura).
Red-legged Partridge	introduced in Gran Canaria where we frequently encountered it in the open areas bordering Llanos de La Pez.
Bolle's Pigeon	easily found at Mirador de la Grimona, two more birds were seen near Erjos.
Laurel Pigeon	together with the latter species but fewer birds: 3 at Mirador de la Grimona and 1 near Erjos.
Collared Dove	very common.
Laughing Dove	though there are sightings on all the island, we only found them on Fuerteventura., The goat kennel in Tindaya is a good spot, two sightings also in Villaverde.
Rock Pigeon	hard to separate the wild types from the feral Pigeons but wild types are said to occur.
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	Occurs Fuerteventura (and Lanzarote) only. Several were seen flying Llanos de Tindaya, Fuerteventura. The best spot on this island was a goat kennel in the village just before you enter the plains. At least 8 birds came feeding between the goats and chicken and were quite tame with a pair landing just around 10 meters in front of me. The only other sighting was from Embalse delos Molinos.
Houbara Bustard	Several birds at Llanos de Tindaya, Fuerteventura, six seen simultaneously in a small patch with blooming flowers right beside the track.
Pallid Swift	Three birds over Llanos de Tindaya, Fuerteventura was the only observation.
Plain Swift	regularly encountered on all three islands especially near settlements though observations on Fuerteventura were noticeably fewer than on the other islands.
Moorhen	Few sightings probably because we didn't visit many ponds or wetlands. One bird at los Silos on Tenerife, several at Charca de Maspalomas on Gran Canaria and at Embalse La Oliva on Fuerteventura.
Coot	Only seen at Estanque los Silos on Tenerife.
Stone-Curlew	subspecies <i>insularum</i> can be seen at Llanos de Tindaya in Fuerteventura. We found them relatively easy.

	Especially in the early morning they are still actively calling making it easier to spot them of course. They are also on the other two islands, but we didn't go for them there.
Black-winged Stilt	common in the few wetlands we visited: Charca de Maspalomas on Gran Canaria, Balsa Barranco de La Florida and Embalse La Oliva on Fuerteventura
Black-bellied Plover	one observation only along the coast of Fuerteventura. Not uncommon but we didn't observe in many coastal habitats.
Common Ringed Plover	seen on Tenerife (Salinas de Tenefé) and Gran Canaria (Charca de Maspalomas)
Semipalmated Plover	one longstaying bird at Salinas de Tenefé (Gran Canaria, 23.3.)
Little Ringed Plover	several at Charca de Maspalomas (Gran Canaria). On Fuerteventura few individuals at Balsa Barranco de La Florida on Fuerteventura and a single bird at Embalse de los Molinos.
Whimbrel	can turn up at any coastal site, seen on all islands.
Common Sandpiper	Single birds at Charca de Maspalomas (Gran Canaria, 23.3.) and Balsa Barranco de La Florida on Fuerteventura, most common at Golf Club Salinas de Antigua.
Lesser Yellowlegs	longstaying bird at Balsa Barranco de La Florida on Fuerteventura (24.3.).
Greenshank	seen on all islands one single bird at los Silos (Teneriffe, 19.3.) and several at Charca de Maspalomas (Gran Canaria, 23.3.), also Golf Club Salinas de Antigua (Fuerteventura).
Turnstone	probably common, as we hardly visited suitable habitats, our observations were limited to a single bird on the coast of Puerto Lajas.
Dunlin	one single bird at Estanque los Silos (Tenerife, 19.3.)
Black-headed Gull	seen only on the pond of the Golf Club Salinas de Antigua (Fuerteventura).
Yellow-legged Gull	quite common at all coastal sites.
Lesser Black-backed Gull	one adult at Balsa Barranco de La Florida on Fuerteventura (24.3.).
Common Tern	only one sighting at the harbor of Santa Cruz de Tenerife waiting for our ferry.
Cory's Shearwater	we didn't do seawatching but saw several birds on both ferry trips.
Barolo Shearwater	we were fortunate to have seen one from the ferry from Gran Canaria to Fuerteventura (24.4.).
Black-crowned Night-Heron	two birds at Charca de Maspalomas (Gran Canaria, 23.3.).
Little Egret	several sightings on the coast on Tenerife and Gran Canaria. I don't remember having seen it on Fuerteventura.

Western Cattle Egret	seen only on Fuerteventura. 10 birds overflying our hotel in Villaverde on two evenings.
Gray Heron	several at Charca de Maspalomas (Gran Canaria), also on Fuerteventura (Barranco de la Muley, Llanos de Tindaya).
Glossy Ibis	one bird at Charca de Maspalomas (Gran Canaria).
Eurasian Spoonbill	at least three birds at Charca de Maspalomas (Gran Canaria) and two birds overflying Golf Club Salinas de Antigua (Fuerteventura).
Egyptian Vulture	regular only on Fuerteventura, one bird near Balsa Barranco de La Florida, also Embalse de los Molinos and Barranco de la Muley.
Black Kite	one bird (migrating?) at La Cumbre, Gran Canaria
Common Buzzard	observations on all islands.
Eurasian Hoopoe	surprisingly only one sighting in Vilaflor (Teneriffe).
Great Spotted Woodpecker	quite common in the pine forests on Tenerife and Gran Canaria, does not occur on Fuerteventura.
Eurasian Kestrel	quite common on all islands.
Peregrine Falcon	seen on Tenerife (Puerto de la Cruz) and Fuerteventura (Villaverde, Barranco de la Muley).
Rose-ringed Parakeet	single birds in Puerto de la Cruz (Tenerife)., a few more at Charca de Las Palomas (Gran Canaria).
Monk Parakeet	established in Gran Canaria and easy to find at Charca de Las Palomas.
Great Gray Shrike	single birds on Tenerife (Teide) and Gran Canaria (Salinas de Tenefé), more common on Fuerteventura, especially Llanos de Tindaya.
Woodchat Shrike	one single bird at Barranco de la Florida (Fuerteventura).
Common Raven	seen on all islands.
African Blue Tit	pretty common on Tenerife and Gran Canaria, much fewer on Fuerteventura due to the lack of vegetation. Our only observation there was in Morro Jable.
Lesser Short-toed Lark	rather frequent on Fuerteventura though we mainly saw them in Llanos de Tindaya. Occurs scarcely on the other islands but we didn't go for it there.
House Martin	up to seven at several locations on Fuerteventura.
Red-rumped Swallow	one single bird at Barranco de la Florida (Fuerteventura).
Willow Warbler	migrant that we found only on Fuerteventura (Embalse La Oliva).
Canary Islands Chiffchaff	common on Tenerife and Gran Canaria, does not occur on Fuerteventura.
Blackcap	several in different locations on Tenerife.
Sardinian Warbler	on Tenerife we saw a few birds near Erjos, they were pretty obvious in the south of Gran Canaria.
Spectacled Warbler	several on Fuerteventura: few at Llanos de Tindaya, quite common around Embalse de La Oliva but also seen elsewhere.

Goldcrest	endemic subspecies <i>teneriffae</i> is found on Tenerife where they are not uncommon mainly in the pine forests. Two birds in Las Lajas 3 (18.3.), single birds at Mirador Matanzos and near La Caldera, a recreation area along TF21. Does not occur on Gran Canaria or Fuerteventura.
Blackbird	common on Tenerife and Gran Canaria. I'm not sure, if we saw it on Fuerteventura.
European Robin	interesting species as both <i>superbus</i> of Tenerife and <i>marioanae</i> of Gran Canaria are possible future splits. On Tenerife, they were fairly common in the northern green part of the island. On Gran Canaria, we saw only two birds, probably because we were predominantly searching Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch in the Pine Forests. One male showed well near Bailico in La Cumbre.
Fuerteventura Stonechat	restricted to the island of Fuerteventura, where it is not uncommon but a bit localized. Prefers Barrancos with a certain amount of vegetation. Good suggestions are Barranco de Esquinzo and Barranco de la Muley. Also seen at Embalse de los Molinos.
Northern Wheatear	one bird at Barranco de la Muley.
Common Waxbill	seen in the south of Gran Canaria, where it is established. Easy to find at Charca de Las Palomas. Observations exist from the other islands but I can't tell if there is established populations.
Spanish Sparrow	Seen on all islands. There was an impressive colony at Hotel Maho in Villaverde (Fuerteventura).
Sudan Golden Sparrow	longstaying bird on Gran Canaria at Parque Romántico in Playa des Inglés. There was a single red flowering tree (27.749401, -15.574656) where all the birds came to feed among them this African species.
Gray Wagtail	seen on Tenerife (Los Silos) and Gran Canaria (Llanos de La Pez) but not on Fuerteventura.
Western Yellow Wagtail	a single bird (ssp flava) at Barranco de la Florida (Fuerteventura).
Berthelot's Pipit	one of the common species and encountered on all islands though we've seen few on Tenerife mainly because we stayed in the green and rather forested north of the island.
Canary Islands Chaffinch	regular in the Laurel forests on Tenerife, also Llanos de La Pez (Gran Canaria). Does not occur on Fuerteventura.
Tenerife Blue Chaffinch	occurs only on Tenerife. Common at Las Lajas but we've seen them also near La Caldera Recreation area and even in a bush in front of the Restaurante Bambi on the sparsely vegetated area around Mount Teide.
Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch	scarce bird of Gran Canaria and difficult to observe. Suggestions are La Cumbre (where we saw it) and Inagua National Forest (where we did not go).

Trumpeter Finch

not uncommon on Fuerteventura. We saw them at Llanos de Tindaya and Barranco de Esquinzo. Occurs on the other island but it is much rarer there.

Linnet

ssp. *meadewaldoi* on Tenerife and Gran Canaria and *harteri* on Fuerteventura. We've only seen the latter (at Barranco de Esquinzo) but didn't really seek this species.

**European Goldfinch
Island Canary**

seen Gran Canaria only.
common sight on Tenerife and Gran Canaria. Does not occur on Fuerteventura.