

Fuerteventura February 2018

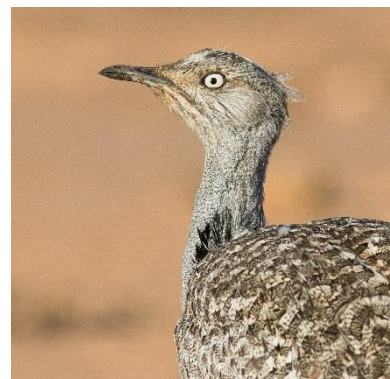
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We went to Fuerteventura from February 7th until 19th with the motivation of seeing and photographing desert birds such as Cream-coloured Courser and Stone Curlew while escaping the cold central European winter for a while. We chose Fuerteventura as it offers good chances of seeing desert birds and other nice southern European breeding species with possibilities of spotting migrants and vagrants. At the same time, the area of the island is not too large and easy to travel.

Finding the desert species was generally easier than expected but still required a lot of time and dedication. We were expecting to see most of the desert species but did neither really expect to get frequent great views of them nor good photography conditions. But investing a lot of time, especially in the early mornings and late afternoons, in the desert areas finally paid off and we were rewarded with surprisingly good views and excellent photography opportunities as well.

Birding the scrubby areas in the Barrancos turned out to be very productive with Canary Island Stonechat, Berthelot's Pipit, several warblers and other songbirds. February seemed to be perfect timing since most of the resident birds were singing all day long, what made them easy to find.



Our Birding Hotspots

Tindaya Plains

This area was for sure the one we spent most of our time since desert species were our main goal for the trip.

We found Houbara Bustards on each visit (two up to five individuals) as well as Cream-coloured Coursers (two up to eight individuals) on the road heading northwest from Tindaya. We got very close up views of both species, sometimes less than three meters from the car.

Along this road, we also spotted Barbary Partridge, Stone Curlew (both close to the village of Tindaya), Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Trumpeter Finch and Barbary Falcon. While Berthelot's Pipit and Lesser Short-toed Lark were abundant, Greater Short-toed Lark was only spotted and heard once on the road leading north towards El Cotillo.



Barranco des las Peñitas

The Barranco at Vega de Rio Palmas was one of our favourite "green spots" within the quiet and beautiful village of Vega de Rio Palmas, ending up in a dried-out lake which has dense Tamarisk bushes and some reeds by now. The barranco was the most reliable spot for Fuerteventura Blue Tit and it was packed with Sardinian and Spectacled Warblers as well as Chiffchaffs. Stone Curlews were flying through the valley and foraging in the yards. Surprisingly, we found a flock of about ten Ring Ouzels (ssp. *alpestris*), apparently wintering in this gorge. Eastern Canary Gecko and Atlantic Lizard were common as well and the atmosphere is just great.



Barranco de la Torre

Situated pretty close to the airport, we visited this Barranco twice with good views of Canary Islands Stonechat (at least four territories). Sardinian and Spectacled Warbler were abundant and some waders were present at a small pond along the creek (Stilt, Common Sandpiper, Snipe, and Little Ringed Plover). A Sparrowhawk was seen hunting over the Tamarisks. The highlight for sure was a vagrant Tristram's Warbler.

Barranco de Rio Cabras

This Barranco with a reservoir dam turned out to be a good spot for waders like Wood Sandpiper and Black-winged Stilt. Canary Island Stonechat, Warblers, Trumpeter Finch and Hoopoes were present as well. Egyptian Vultures were flying over regularly. During our visit, many birders came to twitch the African Dwarf Bittern (with considerably bad behavior).



Species List

1. **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*
Seen pretty much everywhere in proximity of water bodies
2. **Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca*
At the reservoir near Juan Gopar
3. **Barbary Partridge** *Alectoris barbara ssp. koenigi*
Most frequently seen just west of Tindaya, but we also flushed them in Barranco de la Torre and Barranco de las Penitas



4. **Common Quail** *Coturnix coturnix*
One bird near Tindaya, found at dawn by chance



5. **Cory's Shearwater** *Calonectris diomedea ssp. borealis*
Seen pretty much everywhere from the coast. Best numbers from La Lajita.
6. **Northern Gannet** *Morus bassanus*
Seen pretty much everywhere from the coast. Best numbers from La Lajita.

7. **African Dwarf Bittern** *Ixobrychus sturmi*
A long-staying individual at Barranco de Rio Cabras had been reported daily at the same site since its discovery in December 2017, so we gave it a try and got some distant views after half an hour. As a second for the WP, the Bittern attracted quite a lot of twitchers from all over Europe.
8. **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*
At least two individuals at Barranco de Rio Cabras
9. **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*
More or less everywhere in both fresh- and saltwater habitats
10. **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*
At Los Molinos, Barranco de Rio Cabras and one single individual in the middle of the tourist headquarter of Morro Jable
11. **African Sacred Ibis** *Threskiornis aethiopicus*
At the reservoir near Juan Gopar
12. **Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia*
One bird at the El Cotillo lighthouse
13. **Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus ssp. majorensis*
Seen regularly. Most individuals near the dump station close to Barranco de Rio Cabras
14. **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus*
One light morph west of Juan Gopar on February 16th



15. **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus ssp. granti (?)*
A single bird in Barranco de la Torre
16. **Eurasian Buzzard** *Buteo buteo ssp. insularum*
Common everywhere
17. **Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus ssp. dacotiae*
Common everywhere
18. **Barbary Falcon** *Falco peregrinus ssp. peregrinoides*
Two short observations while driving around between El Cotillo, La Oliva and Tindaya

19. **Houbara Bustard** *Chlamydotis undulata ssp. fuertaventurae*

Seen on every visit to Tindaya Plains. Foraging and displaying along and even on the road.



20. **Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

Barranco de Rio Cabras

21. **Common Coot** *Fulica atra*

Los Molinos

22. **Eurasian Stone Curlew** *Burhinus oedicephalus ssp. insularum*

Surprisingly hard to find (see). Heard almost everywhere during the night, even in or near villages.



23. **Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola*

Near El Cotillo and at Salinas del Carmen

24. **Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus*

One pair at the lighthouse of Isla de los Lobos

25. **Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula*

In several saltwater habitats (near El Cotillo and Salinas del Carmen)

26. **Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*

Pairs or single individuals at Barranco de la Torre and Barranco near La Pared

27. **Eurasian Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus*

One individual on Tindaya plains on February 9th

28. **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*

Most individuals in Barranco de Rio Cabras, one further pair in Barranco de la Torre and one at the reservoir in Juan Gopar.



29. **Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*

Barranco de la Torre and Barranco near La Pared

30. **Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*

One individual in Barranco de Rio Cabras and one near La Pared

31. **Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*

One in the Los Molinos reservoir

32. **Common Redshank** *Tringa tetanus*

One in the wetland near the Isla de Lobos lighthouse

33. **Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*

One at Barranco de Rio Cabras

34. **Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*

Common at the coast

35. **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*

One single bird in the wetland near the lighthouse on the Island of Lobos

36. **Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*

A small, tame group was fed by tourists close to the ferry on the Island of Lobos. Some further single individuals along the coastline

37. **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*

A small group in the wetland near the lighthouse on the Isla de Lobos

38. **Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*

At least three individuals in Barranco de la Torre

39. Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor ssp. bannermani*

For sure our target species, surprisingly found on every visit to Tindaya Plains (regularly up to eight individuals). Mostly along the dirt track heading northwest from Tindaya but single individuals also further north towards El Cotillo.



40. Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Few individuals at Jandia beaches

41. Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis ssp. atlantis*

Common, seen in all coastal waters and in the deserts

42. Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Common along the coast

43. Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis ssp. aragonica*

Seen on most visits to Tindaya plains. Flocks of dozens where seen about 10 a.m. at the Barranco of La Pared as mentioned by Gosney (2013).



44. Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Locally common near steep cliffs

45. Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Abundant everywhere

46. Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

Only seen in Barranco de las Peñitas

47. Common Swift *Apus apus*

Single individuals migrating

48. Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Uncommon but seen regularly in different kinds of habitats, also settlements. Two individuals at Barranco de Rio Cabras

49. Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor ssp. koenigi*

Quite common and far less shy than we knew that species from the European mainland, seen daily in all kind of habitats. One bird even in the centre of Betancuria between restaurants and souvenir shops.



50. **Raven** *Corvus corax ssp. jordanii*

Common in all kinds of habitats. Tame individuals are regularly fed at Mirador de las Penitas.



51. **Lesser Short-toed Lark** *Alaudala rufescens ssp. polatzeki*

Everywhere in the desert areas, sometimes in flocks of 50+ individuals

52. **Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla*

Seen once in the desert some km south of El Cutillo. Since it was our very first Lark of the whole trip we examined the ID quite close. We did not carefully check all the Lesser Short-toed Larks later and possibly overlooked some Greater.

53. **House Martin** *Delichon urbicum*

Several seen migrating from February 14th

54. **Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

Several seen migrating from February 13th

55. **Fuerteventura Blue Tit** *Cyanistes teneriffae ssp. degener*

We failed to find this species in Betancuria where it is frequently reported. Vega de Rio Palmas, just a few km south of Betancuria, proved to be more reliable spot with several singing males and some additional territories along the Barranco de las Peñitas. Also heard calling driving through Pajara.



56. Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Common in Barrancos, especially at Vega de Rio Palmas. To us, all Chiffchaffs looked and sounded like “normal” ones, no Canary Island Chiffchaffs.

57. Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

A single wintering bird in Betancuria. Thanks to kind tips by a british bird guide we found it within few minutes.

58. Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Few birds singing throughout the island

59. Tristram’s Warbler *Sylvia deserticola*

We did not spend much time twitching but could not resist to check for a Tristram’s Warbler reported from Barranco de la Torre, which would have been our first stop after arriving at the airport anyway. Luckily, we found it easily. A beautiful bird, definitely one of our highlights!



60. Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala ssp. leucogastra*

Common in Barrancos and bushy habitats, most abundant in Barranco de Las Penitas.



61. **Spectacled Warbler** *Sylvia conspicillata ssp. orbitalis*
Abundant in shrubby habitats



62. **European Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*
At least two in Barranco de las Penitas, near Vega de Rio Palmas

63. **Canary Islands Stonechat** *Saxicola dacotiae*
Scarce but regularly seen in every Barranco and irregularly from the road and near villages. Occurs in more or less all habitats.



64. **Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos*
Regularly in bushy habitats where the birds used to rest during spring migration
65. **Redwing** *Turdus iliacus*
Single individuals in Barranco de las Penitas

66. **Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus ssp. alpestris*

An apparently wintering flock of 10 individuals in Barranco de las Penitas near Vega de Rio Palmas



67. **Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea ssp. canariensis*

One in the Los Molinos Reservoir, one in Barranco de Rio Cabras

68. **White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*

Only at Los Molinos

69. **Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus*

At least one bird in the Barranco of La Pared

70. **Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis*

At least one bird in the Barranco of La Pared

71. **Berthelot's Pipit** *Anthus berthelotii*

Common everywhere, also in settlements



72. **Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra ssp.thanneri*
At least three individuals in the Antigua plains

73. **Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanethes githagineus ssp. amantum*
Pretty common in and around settlements, but very mobile. Actually it took us several days to see this bird. Maybe it is easier to find in dry seasons when there are only few water holes which attract the birds.



74. **Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis ssp. parva*
At least one pair in Barranco de Las Penitas, near the dried-out reservoir

75. **Common Linnet** *Linaria cannabina ssp. harteri*
Locally common in desert plains

76. **Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis*
Locally abundant in and near settlements



Conclusion

Our trip was more than successful for both birding and photography and outreached our expectations by far with many magic encounters. Fuerteventura is a very nice island that offers great nature tourism opportunities, but there is a dark side: the development of big numbers of hotels and resorts driven by mass tourism has destroyed a lot of its scenic beauty and natural as well as cultural heritage. It has left a bad footprint on the island that is about to develop even further. We avoided these areas of the island and only spent our money in small, rural villages with the hope of contributing to a more sustainable, culturally rich way of travelling on the island. Flying to Fuerteventura is worse enough and more or less everything you consume on the island needs to be imported, which leaves a very bad environmental impact. We encourage travelers, birders, photographers and nature enthusiasts in particular to travel as sustainable as possible and spend the money in local communities. Seeing the crazy mass tourism development (20 percent increase within the last two years) leaves a bad feeling behind after we had these magnificent time on Fuerteventura in splendid Barrancos and endless desert plains.

Recommended Literature

We used two books that proved to be very helpful: Dave Gosney's guide *Finding Birds in the Canaries* (2013) and the Crossbill Guide *Canary Islands: Fuerteventura and Lanzarote* by Dirk Hilbers and Kees Woutersen (2014).

More pictures

For more pictures from this trip you are invited to have a look on our web pages:

www.christianhoefs.de/2018/03/11/fuerteventura/

www.jansohler.de/fuerteventura

www.lukasthiess.wordpress.com/2018/03/03/fuerteventura-im-februar/