

Fuerteventura

23 January – 2st February 2011 Neil and Priscille Preston



1 - Fuerteventura Chat - Barranco de Rio Cabras

Neil and I decided to get away from the British winter with a last minute short haul break with no jetlag – rest, sun, warmth and a few lifers thrown in. We based ourselves in the middle of the island in Caleta de Fuste – Self-catering deal, cheap and cheerful place built for tourists, practical base but very little else to offer. We got a hire car for the whole duration. The weather turned bad as we arrived, lots of rain and wind, worn our fleece and used the car as a mobile hide and shelter. When we departed, the island was green with plenty of wildflowers and butterflies – happy goats feeding on fresh green shoots. We also spent two night a Costa Calma in the south which allowed us early and late birding around the southern sandy plains.



2 - Houbara Bustard - La Pared

Site Information

The main published birding site is in: Tony Clarke and David Collins (1996) A Birdwatcher's Guide to the Canary Islands. Prion., and Gosney Guide of the Canary Islands. Although clearly a few years old now these guides proved nonetheless useful. One key difficulty was that the roads have been re-done with less opportunity stop by to scan the suggested sites and by-passed have been build making difficult to pick up tracks.

Notes on Sites Visited

Rather than giving full site details, these notes are primarily intended to supplement the information in Clarke & Collins.



Caleta de Fustes

The palm opposite to our balcony held a colony of **Spanish Sparrows** and **Collared Doves** were common. **Berthelot's pipits** and **White Wagtail** were showing well in the land behind the hotel.

The main sandy beach was devoid of birds but there were **Turnstones** and **Kentish Plovers** on the short rocky stretch by the promenade. **Yellow-legged gulls**, **Gannets** and **Sandwich Terns** were gliding in the strong wind. A promising looking sea watching site was on a small headland just north of Caleta de Fustes. By the end of the trip this sea watch site didn't produce any other birds.



3 - Hoopoo - El Cotillo

Las Salinas

We stopped at the salt pans every time we drove past. Workers were tending the salt pans and didn't produce any waders but the rockery pools to the right produced **Turnstones**, **Grey Heron**, **Little Egret** and **Kentish Plovers**.

Barranco de la Torre

We accessed from the seaward end. Turn of the FV 2 at Las Salinas, continue along

the road past the village and then for a further km or so on a good track but muddy at time. Due to the rain, pools had formed. We visited this site three times and we noticed that when the wind was

blowing from NNE it was very quiet for birds. The mouth of the Barranco produce **Spanish Sparrows**, **Berthelot's Pipits**, **Yellow-legged Gulls** and **Sandwich Tern**. Further along the tamarisks a **Sardinian Warbler** showed well and **Spectacled Warblers** were displaying. **Kestrels** and Common Buzzards were perched along the ridge. A pair of **Egyptian Vultures** (right leg yellow ring 28A) glided over. We suddenly came aware of buzzing noise and our first flock of **Trumpeter Finches** were feeding on the rocky face. We continued further down the Barranco and flushed two **Barbary Partridges** that landed



4 - Barbary Partridge - Barranco del Torre

100m away. A **Southern Grey Shrike** (race *koenigi*) was butchering a dragonfly and on the ridge two **Hoopoes** made themselves noticed by calling. Loud honking distracted us - pair of Ravens. On our way back an incredible **Barbary Falcon** showed beautifully and flew over the ridge denying me a photo. Above us **Plain swifts**, **Egyptian Vultures** and **Buzzard** were all working the thermals and a

flock of **Ruddy Shelducks** flew over – they look stunning in flight.



5 - Trumpeter Finch - Barranco del Torre

Costa Calma Resort

Hotel Gardens and roundabouts produced **Goldfinches** and heading north, **Swallow** and **House Martins** were noticed flying over.

La Oliva

We looked for the **Houbara Bustard** at La Rosa de Los Negrines. Leave La Oliva on the FV10 toward El Cotilo and take the track on the left on

the bend to the right after the last house in the village. We drove along the bustard protection fence. **Lesser Short-toed Lark** was singing and **Berthelot's Pipits** flittering around. We continued until the track starts to descend, a small barranco held a pair of **Barbary Falcon** and **Ravens**. We turned around and on the right end side of the track at about 300m Neil spotted a male **Houbara** displaying.

Embalse de los Molinos

Many trip reported the dam empty of water...during our visit it was full. From the FV221 from Tefia to Puerto de los Molinos, pass through the village Las Parcelas, just after the village as the road turn to the right, take the track off to the left just before the goat farm. Very few birds along the track, **Ravens**, **Hoopoe** and near the goat farm, **Trumpeter Finches** and **Lesser Short-toed Larks** were drinking from a small pool of water and the dam itself held **Ruddy Shelducks**, **Greenshank** and **Green Sandpiper**.

Vega de Rio Palmas

South of Betancuria on the FV30. Lush barranco and unusually green with tall palm trees along the barranco and road. We walk about 2 miles towards the dam, **Spectacled Warblers** busy feeding chicks, five **common buzzards** calling above along with several pairs of noisy **Ravens**. The Dam was overflowing but didn't hold any duck or waders. We continued past the dam and looking down the narrow valley some movements in the apparently barren steep rocky slopes caught my eye, a male Stonechat, shortly followed by a female, once in the scope the white throat, supercilium and dark upper tail confirmed it was a pair of **Fuerteventura stonechats** busy feeding chicks. On our way back two **Barbary Partridges** flew over to the other side of the valley, a pair of **Egyptian Vulture** and **Kestrels** glided effortlessly and near the bridge three Blue tits were calling in the tamarisks. After closer inspection they had very dark blue heads, another new bird, **African Blue Tits**

La Pared

We visited La Pared three times early and late in the day and had found the best access was from the FV617, driving from Costa Calma north towards La Pared. As we drove along the track keeping, to the left towards the Wind Farms, **Lesser Shorted toed Larks** in full display appeared along with a usual pair of noisy **Ravens**. Further along the track we flushed five **Black Bellied Sandgrouses**, Suddenly Neil saw a male bustard in full display running towards us on the track. The car was the



6 - Houbara Bustard - La Pared



perfect hide and we watched the bird displaying for the next hour only a few meters away. The following day we tried the track that branch to the right and got the car stuck, luckily a passerby help us out – would be ok with a 4x4. Once the car safely parked up we went on

foot in the search of **Cream Coloured Coursers** which gave us a great show a mile further down the track. In keeping with their name we found hard to keep up with them on the difficult terrain. Time for rest and refreshment so we returned to the hotel where a **Ringed Necked Parakeet** kept circling over the garden calling from palm to palm and **Swallows** were flying over heading north.

La Lajita

We stopped at La Lajita to visit the Botanical Garden which was closed but we noticed a very large raptor flying over the car park, a Griffon Vulture but after close inspection we noticed the leather dangling from the legs.. We presume an escapee from the local zoo.

Pozo Negro



7 - Marabou Stork - Lava Flow near Pozo Negro

Although the sea and the area was deserted of birds after the storm, a few days later as we drove on the main road going north, before the lava flow in the flooded field a large bird caught my eyes. Luckily Neil was able to turn the car around and park. A **Marabou Stork** was feeding on frogs and snails, took off, displaying its large wings and circled over us to land again to continue with its feeding.

El Cotillo

Another wet and windy day so we decided to see if the other side of the island was any dryer. Good move, no rain as we stopped at Jandia. We parked and walked up a dry river bed. It was rather disheartening as little was showing apart from **LST Larks**, **Berthlot's Pipits** and **Southern Grey Shrikes**. I was getting tired of spending hours searching with no rewards

Moody and grumpy I suggested we should try our luck on a track south of El Cottillo, thinking of killing time before



8 - Cream Coloured Courser - La Pared



9 - Lesser Short Toed Lark

spending a few hours in a local fish restaurant. We passed the bay with all the surfers and within 200m three **Hoopoes** gave us great show...a bird at last! I got out of the car and a **Bustard** just passed by totally ignoring us followed by **Trumpeter Finches**. We drove an extra 200m and we both heard a call neither of us recognised. Parked and we to check the walled field...eight **Black Bellied Sandgrouse** were happily

feeding but soon became aware of us and moved in the distance.

Happy and ready for some nice local fish we settled sheltered from the wind on the harbour and tasted the local fish. A few meters away from our comfortable seat we could look scrutinise the details of yellow leg gulls of all ages whilst **Turnstones** and **Common Sandpipers** were feeding on the receding tide.

Willis' Barranco /Barranco de Rio Cabras

Many trip reports states that it is difficult to reach the barranco due to the dual carriage way preventing stopping. With a little bit of exploring, you can access relatively well the barranco. As you are travelling towards the airport exit at the petrol station, go through the petrol station and turn right then left and park at the end. With good footwear you can walk across the plain and down the barranco. As the barranco is narrow we were totally sheltered from the strong wind.



10 - Fuerteventura Chat & Painted Lady



11 - Egyptian Vulture

We walk up to towards the dam and along the way we had **Kestrel, Spectacled Warbler, Buzzard, 3 Egyptian Vultures, 4 pair of Fuerteventura Chats, Ruddy Schelducks, Grey Heron, White Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail, Kentish Plover, two Hoopoes, Trumpeter Finches, Ravens, Yellow-legged Gulls, Southern Grey Shrikes, Black Redstart, Berthelot's Pipits, Chiffchaff, Redshanks and Rock Doves.**