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FUERTEVENTURA IN AUTUMN



Houbara Bustard – one of the highlights of our trip to Fuerteventura © Fernando Navarrete

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FUERTEVENTURA IN AUTUMN

31 October – 6 November 2022

Leaders: Fernando Navarrete and Derek Barber

Trip Report: Derek Barber

Introduction

We had a fantastic week, with a fabulous group, the weather was kind and we enjoyed excellent views of almost all of the specialities.

Highlights were many but included Canary Islands Stonechat, Cream-coloured Courser, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Berthelot's Pipit, Trumpeter Finch, Atlantic Canary, African Blue Tit, Lesser Scaup and who can forget the incredible display of the male Houbara Bustard !!

We would like to thank you all for your great company and enthusiasm. We had many laughs on the way and we hope you enjoyed yourselves as much as we did. We both look forward to travelling with you again in the future.

Derek Barber and Fernando Navarrete

Trip Diary

Day 1 – Monday 31 October

Having all arrived safe and sound at Fuerteventura Airport, we met Fernando (who had arrived from Madrid on an earlier flight), picked up the vehicles and headed north to our accommodation for the week, the lovely Hotel Rural Mahoh located just north of La Oliva in Villaverde.

After checking in and a quick freshen up, we enjoyed the first of what would turn out to be a series of most excellent dinners at the hotel with a great selection of wines and local beers also available!!

Day 2 – Tuesday 1 November

We woke to the sounds and sights of the large colony of Spanish Sparrows and many Eurasian Collared Doves which call our hotel their home. After breakfast, we loaded up the vans and headed out to begin our exploration of the island.

Our first location was the famous Tindaya Plain which is just a short distance from where we were staying. We stopped to look at a Laughing Dove perched on wires by the side of the

road which promptly dropped to the ground and disappeared out of view. Thankfully our first Berthelot's Pipit was much more obliging as it sung from a perch high on a flowering cactus.

A small flock of Trumpeter Finches was seen briefing and we had excellent prolonged views of Mediterranean Short-toed Lark (previously known as Lesser Short-toed Lark) as they skuttled around on the ground. Further into the plains, Fernando spotted our first Houbara which, although distant, was on show for a long period affording good scope views.

We also found the first of what would turn out to be many Great Grey Shrikes, the subspecies *koenigi* being present on the island. These had at one point been split but are now lumped back into Great Grey Shrike.

Large numbers of Northern Raven were also seen and would be a common sight throughout the tour.

We hadn't gone much further when another Houbara was spotted heading towards the track we were driving along. We continued slowly but it skuttled away at the sight of our vehicles.

This was followed by a very nice Cream-coloured Courser quite close to the vehicles and a pair of Black-bellied Sandgrouse on the ground feeding. Common Kestrel of the local *dacotiae* subspecies was also recorded but, one of the most noteworthy things today, and a feature throughout the holiday, were the sheer numbers of Painted Lady butterflies. These were present in their thousands and quite a spectacle !! On the butterfly front, we also saw the first of many Greenish Black-tips and Clouded Yellows.

After an excellent morning, we had lunch at a local restaurant in Lajaras which gave us our first introduction to the local cuisine. Eventually we pulled ourselves away and headed out birding again, this time to Los Molinos reservoir.

A quick stop at a valley on the way failed to produce any Canary Island Stonechats but as we turned off the main road at Los Molinos, we had excellent views of a pair of chats on the track leading to the reservoir.

As this is such a special species (since it is currently considered the only true endemic to Fuerteventura), we spent some time enjoying these birds.

Moving on, we parked at the end of the track and walked the eastern edge of the reservoir finding good numbers of Ruddy Shelducks and Black-winged Stilts plus Common Greenshank and a Western Marsh Harrier.

A diving duck caught our attention and at first, we thought it was just a strange-looking Tufted Duck in moult, but it just did not look right. After some lengthy scrutinising, discussion and reference to field guides, we concluded that it was a male Lesser Scaup. This was only the 5th record for the islands, so a nice find indeed !!



Lesser Scaup © Fernando Navarrete

It was time to leave but not before a Northern Wheatear was seen briefly from the vehicles and added to the list.

Back at our hotel, we enjoyed a fantastic paella which had been specially prepared for us. A fine end to what had been an excellent first full day.

Day 3 – Wednesday 2 November

Breakfast was again enjoyed to a backdrop of the chirping of the local Spanish Sparrow colony before we loaded up and headed out, this time to the well-known area of Barranco de Rio Cabras.

Close to the barranco, an adult Egyptian Vulture was spotted perched on a telegraph tower which allowed us some great scope views. In the distance, we could see a large refuse tip which, on closer inspection, held thousands of Yellow-legged Gulls feeding on the detritus. Let's face it, a birding trip is not complete without a visit to a refuse tip, although not everyone was disappointed at the suggestion that sewage works seemed to be a scarcity on the island!!!

A White Stork was seen flying in and an immature Egyptian Vulture was then found with the adult we had seen earlier. We ended the day having seen at least ten different Egyptian Vultures; an impressive total indeed.

A few Common Buzzards were kicking about as were a couple of Common Kestrels. We had better views of Great Grey Shrike and we could just about make out snippets of its song.

As we peered over the edge of the barranco, we located a couple of Spoonbills happily feeding away in the river and the muddy margins produced Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Common Sandpiper and a couple of Green Sandpipers. Walking along a bit further, we had great views of a male and two female Canary Islands Stonechats and as we headed back

towards the vehicles, a couple of female-type Trumpeter Finches were perched up on a wire fence.

After another fabulous lunch, this time near Antigua, we headed off to our next destination Castillo de Lara (El Pinar). On arrival, we were shocked to find the area badly affected by a fire which had devastated the pine forest. Thankfully, there were still a few trees in the bottom of the valley which remained undamaged and here we found African Blue Tit, which showed superbly well, as did a male Sardinian Warbler. A Spectacled Warbler, however, played hard to get, although everyone got some sort of view.



African Blue Tit © Fernando Navarrete

Unfortunately, a couple of flyover Atlantic Canaries were just not tickable. A Barbary Partridge had been heard calling on a couple of occasions and two were then flushed along the path with one seen to land and then scabble up a slope to our left.

This was soon followed by a Barbary Falcon which, although distant, gave fairly good views over the nearby hills. Barbary Ground Squirrels seemed to be everywhere here.

We then gave Barranco de Rio Palmas a go. Although this site is generally better in the morning, it would have been rude not to take a look as we were in the area. A Laughing Dove was seen briefly, and an Atlantic Canary was heard singing and we also had some further good looks at a pair of African Blue Tits, a Common Chiffchaff, Eurasian Blackcap and a European Robin. We would have to return, although we did get to see a Plain Tiger butterfly as we headed back to the vans which was much appreciated.

After another excellent supper, we heard the Stone Curlews again during the bird log. They were out there somewhere.....

Day 4 – Thursday 3 November

Today was to involve quite a lot of driving as we planned to head south to the 'rarity' hotspot of Costa Calma. Our first stop was just outside Antigua where Martin spotted a Houbara flying in. It continued to fly parallel with us, then away and was seen to land but we could not relocate it despite a long search. We did, however, find a flock of Common Linnets which turned out to be the only ones seen on the trip.

Further south, a White Wagtail was located on a roadside pool before we arrived at our intended destination. We soon added European Goldfinch and the introduced Red-vented Bulbuls before a single Yellow-browed Warbler was heard calling and then seen well. African Grass Blues were numerous along the woodland pathway.

Lunch was taken at a lovely restaurant in La Lajita on the seafront where a Cory's Shearwater was feeding just offshore providing excellent views through the scopes.

We then headed to Barranco de la Pared, which was especially good for dragonflies, including Broad Scarlet, which were present in good numbers. Also seen were Lesser Emperor, Sahara Bluetail and Blue Emperor.

We also had an exceptionally close encounter with a Great Grey Shrike and a couple of pairs of Spectacled Warblers, although the Atlantic Lizards which were also present were somewhat harder to view.

Our final stop was in the Jandia National Park where a Houbara Bustard was spotted by Roger. Initially this gave us the run around but finally gave itself up, giving reasonable views in the valley below. With a pair of Black-bellied Sandgrouse flushed from the path, it was an excellent end to the day before we headed back to our hotel for another tasty evening meal.

Day 5 – Friday 4 November

Following breakfast, we headed for Barranco de Rio Palmas which turned out to be a wise choice since as soon as we arrived a pair of Spectacled Warblers and then a pair of Sardinian Warblers showed exceptionally well only a short distance from where we had parked the vans.

A Monarch butterfly was then found and as we headed down the road, a Barbary Falcon was glimpsed dashing through the valley behind us. We backtracked up the slope and had fabulous views of the bird perched and then hunting over our heads.

Laughing Doves were finally seen really well, and three Atlantic Canaries were also found with a male looking particularly nice. The European Robin was still in residence as was a least one of the Blackcaps and the Chiffchaff we had seen earlier in the week, although a Spotted Flycatcher was an unexpected find.

We then headed up to Castillo de Lara (El Pinor) where we found the only Eurasian Hoopoe of the holiday which was spotted feeding on the grass near a water channel.

Whilst we watched this, we could hear a male Atlantic Canary singing and after a bit of searching, this was located. As we approached, we found a small feeding flock of five canaries which included two males and three female-types. They continued to feed and were very approachable.

After another amazing lunch in Lajaras, we headed to the coastal town of Majanicho with its surrounding rugged coast and mudflats, which is a magnet for waders. Good numbers of Common Ringed Plovers were present, along with Eurasian Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Common Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, a Dunlin and a single first winter Curlew Sandpiper. Looking out to sea, there were hundreds of Cory's Shearwaters feeding offshore which was quite a spectacle.

We then drove back towards the Tindaya Plains scanning as we went. There was the small challenge of getting over a broken-up piece of track but, after carrying out some temporary repairs, we safely negotiated this difficulty.

Tindaya Plains seemed quiet but, just as the sun started to disappear below the horizon, we were rewarded with a feeding flock of seven Cream-coloured Coursers which, although very mobile, gave good views through the scopes ending another rewarding day.

Day 6 – Saturday 5 November

The plan was to try to get better views of sandgrouse so we headed back to Los Molinos. There were 300+ Ruddy Shelducks which represent the bulk of the Spanish population, whilst four Eurasian Wigeon were new in and the male Lesser Scaup was still present.

We then found upwards of fifty Black-bellied Sandgrouse mostly in flight but with some distantly on the ground; there was much cheering every time someone got on to them through the scopes !!

Western Marsh Harrier was seen again, probably the same individual as earlier this week and a single Common Snipe on the opposite bank was a nice find. A flock of eight Trumpeter Finches, with a male perched up, was also much appreciated by the group.

A short stop at Puertito de los Molinos didn't add anything to the list (unless you want to count 'mucky' ducks) so we headed off for lunch at one of our favoured restaurants in Antigua.

Plain Swifts had been reported recently at Caletilla del Espino so that was our next stop after lunch. Although we had no luck with the swifts, we added Eurasian Curlew and Great Cormorant to the trip list and a flock of eight Eurasian Spoonbills flying over was much appreciated with one seen to land on the nearby coastal strip.



Black-bellied Sandgrouse © Fernando Navarrete

We walked down to the shoreline hoping to get better views of it and found a very nice pair of Kentish Plovers, the female of which had a number of rings. A couple of Sandwich Terns were also noted, and six Cory's Shearwaters were seen feeding close inshore.

Towards sunset, we ended the day back on the Tindaya Plains in the hope of getting better views of Houbara Bustard. One individual male was seen really well and gave prolonged views and then further down the track, we were privileged to witness two displaying males. We had really struck lucky, as males do not normally displaying at this time of year, but the small amount of rain which had fallen the previous night had seemingly encouraged them to do their stuff. It was a fitting finale to what had been a most excellent and enjoyable trip.

Day 7 – Sunday 6 November

Fernando was determined to find some local Stone Curlews after breakfast and once this goal was achieved, we loaded up and headed to the airport. We tried again for Plain Swift from the open viewing deck at the airport, but alas were not successful, although we did see a number of distant Egyptian Vultures before heading to the gate for our flight home.

Systematic List

Birds

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

Very common and seen each day. Over 300 birds at Los Molinos (on 5 November) represents the bulk of the Spanish population.

Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca Penelope*

Four female types at Los Molinos on 5 November.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*

A single moulting male at Los Molinos (1 and 5 November) will be the 5th record for the islands if accepted.

Barbary Partridge *Alectoris barbara koenigi*

Five seen at Castillo de Lara (El Pinar) on 5 November.

Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata fuerteventurae*

Our first morning on the Tindaya Plains (1 November), produced two distant sightings. One was seen in flight and briefly on the ground near Antigua (3 November), with another single being seen relatively well at Jandia National Park on the same day.

Tindaya Plains produced the best views on 5 November when we had great prolonged views of a male, followed by a further two displaying males as the sun set.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*

Seen on four dates, the best being 50+ at Los Molinos on 5 November.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Seen daily, with apparently non-feral birds on several occasions around some of the cliffs...

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Common and noted each day.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

Seen on four dates with the best views at Barranco de Rio Palmas on 4 November.

Eurasian Coot *Fulicra atra*

Seen on both occasions that we visited Los Molinos reservoir (1 and 5 November).

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus insularum*

Heard most evenings around our hotel but it wasn't until the morning of 6 November when Fernando found some for us.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Seen on four dates with good numbers at Los Molinos.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Seen at Majanicho on 4 November and at Caletilla del Espino on 5 November with a high count of six birds at the former site.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Singles at Barranco de Rio Cabras (2 November) and Los Molinos (on 5 November).

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

A very nice pair of these lovely waders was seen well at Caletilla del Espino on 5 November. The female had a number of rings but, as yet, we have not been able to trace her origins.

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Seen at Majanicho on 4 November and Caletilla del Espino on 5 November with a high count of six at the former site.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius Arquata*

One on the golf course at Caletilla del Espino was a surprise find.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Up to thirteen were present at Majanicho on 4 November.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Just the one seen at Majanicho on 4 November.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

One first year bird was seen well at Majanicho on 4 November.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

One seen at Los Molinos on 5 November.

Common Sandpiper *Acticus hypoleucos*

Seen on four dates either singularly or in pairs.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Two present at Barranco de Rio Cabras on 2 November.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Seen on three dates with at least five at Los Molinos on 1 November being the highest count.

Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*

One of the most sought-after species on the island but not always easy to find. We had fairly good views of one on the Tindaya Plains on 1 November and then a group of seven at the same location on 4 November which gave us the run around and never came close.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michaellis*

Common and seen every day.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Two seen out to sea from Caletilla del Espino on 5 November.

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

One seen well feeding just offshore from our lunch stop at La Lajita on 3 November. We estimated over 500 from Majanicho on 4 November and six were again seen well from Caletilla del Espino on 5 November.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

One at Barranco de Rio Cabras on 2 November.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Two seen around the lakes on the golf course at Caletilla del Espino on 5 November.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Two immatures were at Barranco de Rio Cabras on 2 November, eight were seen flying out to sea from Caletilla del Espino on 5 November, with a single adult seen at the same location feeding on the shoreline on the same day.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Small numbers seen on all dates.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Small numbers seen on all dates.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus majorensis*

Good to see this species in quite high numbers, including quite a few immature birds, with our best daily count of 10+ on 2 November.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Fairly common and noted on all dates.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Just one seen on 4 November at Castillo de Lara (El Pinar).

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus dacotiae*

Fairly common and noted on all five dates – the richly coloured form *dacotiae* exists on Fuerteventura.



Peregrine (Barbary) Falcon © Fernando Navarrete

Peregrine (Barbary) Falcon *Falco peregrinus pelegrioides*

Now 'demoted' to just a subspecies of Peregrine Falcon, we first encountered one at Castillo de Lara (El Pinar) on 2 November, followed by fantastic views of a hunting bird at Barranco de Rio Palmas on 4 November.

Great Grey Shrike (Sahara) *Lanius excubitor koenigi*

Seen on every date but the best and most obliging bird was at Barranco de la Pared on 3 November.

Northern Raven *Corvus corax canariensis*

Common and seen every day, sometimes in large groups of over 20 individuals.

African Blue Tit *Parus teneriffae degener*

Another sought after species and seen very well at Castillo de Lara (El Pinar) and Barranco de Rio Palmas on 2 and 4 November with a high count of six.

Mediterranean Short-toed Lark *Alaudala rufescens*

Noted on every date and seen particularly well on the Tindaya Plain on 1 November with at least twenty individuals recorded.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Not common but seen on three dates.

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

One was heard and seen well at Costa Calma on 3 November.

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Seen at Costa Calma (3 November) and Barranco de Rio Palmas (4 November).



Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata orbitalis*

Numbers on the island are definitely down from previous years. We had distant but good views at Castillo de Lara (El Pinar) on 2 November.

At Barranco de la Pared on 3 November a couple of pairs gave us the run around before finally giving themselves up.

The best views were at Barranco de Rio Palmas on 4 November where a pair performed superbly.

It is worth noting that the island race is greyer on the mantle than other subspecies.

Spectacled Warbler © Fernando Navarrete

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*

A showy male at Castillo de Lara (El Pinar) on 2 November was much appreciated but the pair at

Barranco de Rio Palmas on 4 November was even better!!

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Probably the same bird was seen at Barranco de Rio Palmas on both 2 and 4 November.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

A single bird was seen at Barranco de Rio Palmas on 4 November.

Canary Islands Stonechat *Saxicola dacotiae*

Numbers of this species seem to be down this year but we had fantastic views of the ones we did find. The first pair was found at Los Molinos on the track up to the reservoir on 1 November. A male and two females also performed really well at Barranco de Rio Cabras on 2 November.



Canary Islands Stonechat © Fernando Navarrete

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Two seen briefly whilst travelling. One on 1 November and another on 3 November. Both were female types.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*

Common and seen daily.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

One seen on the drive south to Costa Calma.

Berthelot's Pipit *Anthus berthelotii*

Seen commonly and well on all dates.

Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus amantum*

Noted on four dates, but difficult to get a good look at. The best being a couple of female-types perched on wire fencing at Barranco de Rio Cabras on 2 November and a very nice male seen perched at Los Molinos on 5 November.



Berthelot's Pipit © Fernando Navarrete

Linnet *Linaria cannabina harterti*

One small flock seen near Antigua (3 November).

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

A few heard and seen in the woods at Costa Calma.

Atlantic Canary *Serinus canaria*

Seen in flight a couple of times on 2 November both at Castillo de Lara (El Pinar) and Barranco de Rio Palmas. Three seen in pines at Barranco de Rio Palmas on 4 November and then a small flock showed exceptionally well at Castillo de Lara (El Pinar) on the same day.

(Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnontus cafer*)

An introduced species from South Asia. Around ten individuals were seen in the woods at Costa Calma (3 November).

Dragonflies

Sahara Bluetail *Ischnura saharensis*

Lesser Emperor *Anax parthenope*

Blue Emperor *Anax imperator*

Broad Scarlet *Crocothemis erythraea*

Red-veined Darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii*

Butterflies

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

Small White *Artogeia rapae*

Greenish Black-tip *Elphinstinia charltonia*

Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea*

Monarch *Danaus plexippus*

Plain Tiger *Danaus chrysippus*

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

Red Admiral sp

African Grass Blue *Zizeeria knysna*



Plain Tiger © Fernando Navarrete

Mammals

Barbary Ground Squirrel *Atlantoxerus getulus*

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Amphibians & Reptiles

Atlantic Lizard *Gallotia atlantica*

East Canary Gecko *Tarentola angustimentalis*