

Spain – The Canary Islands



Winter Sunshine Break

Friday 03 February – Friday 10 February 2017

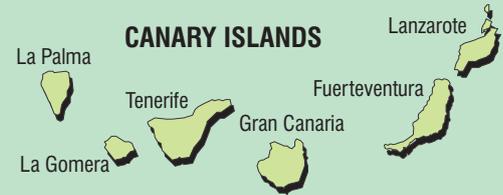
Leader: David Walsh

2017 Cost: **£1,999** single room supplement **£100**

Friday 02 February – Friday 09 February 2018

Leader: David Walsh

2018 Cost: **£2,099** single room supplement **£100**



The Canary Islands provide us with the chance of seeing some special birds in welcome late winter sunshine! Remarkable for the wealth of unique plant and animal life, this isolated archipelago has an endemic avifauna not found in any other part of the world. The Canaries are made up of seven islands and five islets, which fall conveniently into two main groups – the Western Islands (Tenerife, La Gomera, La Palma, El Hierro, Gran Canaria) and the Eastern Islands (Lanzarote, Fuerteventura and five islets). This natural division is based on the physical characteristics which the islands exhibit and we plan to visit three of them during our tour. Tenerife is the largest of the Canary Islands and its varied landscapes reflect its volcanic origins. Here, and on the adjacent island of La Gomera, the prevailing winds produce a climate conducive to ancient laurel forests and open pines. The eastern island of Fuerteventura is completely different and more like North Africa, being much drier with scrubby vegetation, rocky gorges and desert-like scenery. The Canary Islands hold a number of endemic (and near-endemic) species, including Fuerteventura Stonechat, Atlantic Canary, Blue Chaffinch and Bolle's and Laurel Pigeons. In addition, there is a healthy population of Houbara Bustard and we hope to see this species in its spectacular display alongside Cream-coloured Courser and Black-bellied Sandgrouse. Additionally, there is the chance to spot some interesting seabirds and cetaceans. The tour leader will be David Walsh who has made more than 15 winter visits to the Canary Islands.

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Days 1 to 4

We depart from London, or Manchester, to Tenerife. Depending on when we arrive, there may be time for some late afternoon birding. We check-in to our hotel where we stay for the next four nights. The wonderfully varied island of Tenerife is dominated by the volcanic Pico de Teide (3718m), the highest mountain in Spain. The north of the island is often cloudy and the hills have moist laurel forests. The central area consists of open pines and a high plateau, whilst the south is in the rain shadow and is drier and sunnier. On our first full day we will concentrate on the south and central areas. In the open pines, which occur above 800m, we will visit a well-known picnic site in search of the endemic Blue Chaffinch and we hope to have excellent views of this species as well as the local races of Goldcrest, Great Spotted Woodpecker and African Blue Tit. We also have our first opportunity of seeing the Atlantic Canary, the symbol of the islands, renowned for its distinctive song. Weather permitting, we will venture higher and marvel at the spectacular volcanic, moon-like, rock formations in the centre of the island where the excellent display boards will prove informative. On the barren plains of southern Tenerife, with their prickly pears and euphorbias, we will have our first chance of seeing Berthelot's Pipit and Plain Swift; these two species are restricted to the Canary Islands and Madeira. On some previous trips local information has also helped us locate a number of rarities, with American ducks and waders amongst the possibilities!

The next day we will take the inter-island ferry to La Gomera. The boat trips will give us the opportunity of looking for Cory's Shearwaters and other seabirds, whilst we also hope to spot groups of Shortfin Pilot Whales or Bottle-nosed Dolphins. On arrival on La Gomera we will head for the beautiful laurel forests and find good vantage points from where patient scanning should produce views of our main target species, the endemic Bolle's and Laurel Pigeons. We will enjoy lunch at a restaurant in a



Houbara Bustard

Blue Chaffinch



picturesque valley in the centre of the island, from where we may be able to study another endemic, the Canary Islands Chiffchaff, with its distinctive song, and search for the local race of Chaffinch which looks very different from the one we see at home. We will enjoy more of the wonderful scenery on the island before descending to San Sebastian for our return boat trip. There should be time to briefly explore the town park, with Monarch, Canary Speckled Wood, Indian Red Admiral, Cleopatra and African Grass Blue amongst the butterfly possibilities. We have a number of options for our last full day on Tenerife. We may visit the north-west of the island in search of Common Rock Sparrows and Barbary Falcon; alternatively, we may drive into the hills, where we have a second chance of looking for the species we had targeted on La Gomera, or explore the lowland areas in the north-east hoping to find Sardinian Warbler and the distinctive Tenerife race of European Robin, a possible future 'split'.

Days 5 to 7

We will take a flight to Fuerteventura and transfer to the south of the island for a three night stay in a hotel by the sea which has proved very popular with previous groups. The scenery will provide a complete contrast to north and central Tenerife as we will immediately notice the desert-like plains and rocky gorges, known locally as 'barrancos'. Fuerteventura is the only place in the world where the Fuerteventura Stonechat occurs; although it is not uncommon, it may take some time to locate, but we will enjoy discussing whether it reminds us more of a Stonechat or a Whinchat! The other main target on this island is Houbara Bustard; this

species has been hunted to extinction in much of North Africa but remains relatively numerous on Fuerteventura. We will look for it on the plains close to our hotel and have a fair chance of witnessing a male in full display, something which will live long in the memory! By making more than one visit to the same habitat we should encounter the beautiful Cream-coloured Courser as well as Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Stone Curlew, Spectacled Warbler, Lesser Short-toed Lark, Common Raven and the endemic race of Great Grey Shrike. From our hotel we will scan the beaches and tidal pools for gulls and waders, with Kentish Plover, atlantis Yellow-legged Gull and Little Egret likely and a number of other species possible; on several previous trips we have found Eurasian Spoonbill. In the centre of Fuerteventura the hills should produce Barbary Ground Squirrel, Egyptian Vulture, Barbary Partridge, Trumpeter Finch and the eastern islands race of African Blue Tit, different from the one on Tenerife and La Gomera, whilst at Molinos Reservoir we will find large numbers of Ruddy Shelduck and perhaps Little Ringed Plover or Black-winged Stilt. Nearby we will visit a taverna in a rocky cove on the west coast. Spanish Sparrows will be numerous in our hotel grounds, Eurasian Hoopoe could be found anywhere whilst a short drive from our hotel we will look for the introduced Sacred Ibis and both Rose-ringed and Monk Parakeets in one of the town parks. On several previous trips we have found some interesting dragonflies including Vagrant Emperor, a wanderer from the African mainland.

Day 8

Depending on the flight time we may have time for some local birdwatching prior to flying back to London or Manchester.

Canary Island Stonechat



Outline Itinerary

- Day 1** Fly to Tenerife
- Days 2-4** Tenerife
- Days 5-7** Fuerteventura
- Day 8** Depart Fuerteventura

Party Size

Maximum of seven clients.

Accommodation

Comfortable accommodation in twin/double and single rooms with private facilities.

Transport

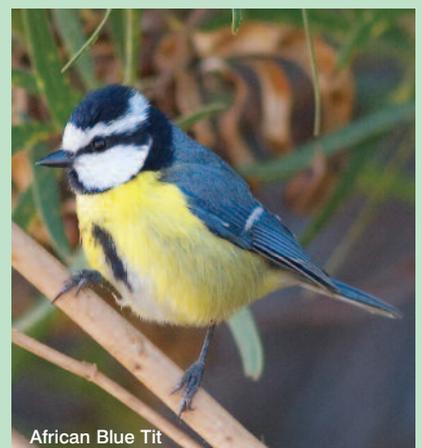
By minibus driven by the leader.

Includes

All flights, meals, accommodation, transport, entry fees, services of the leader, airport taxes and tips.

Gradings

-  Good
-  80
-  Mild/Warm
-  Low/Medium
-  Normal
-  Relaxed
-  Good
-  Easy
-  Scheduled



African Blue Tit