

Spain – The Canary Islands

Winter Sunshine Break

Sunday 20 February – Sunday 27 February 2011

Principal Leader: David Walsh

2011 Cost: **£1,699** 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 Archipelago has been isolated from the continents for a long period, thus giving rise to 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, 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, Island Canary, Blue Chaffinch, White-tailed and Dark-tailed (Bolle's) 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 main tour leader will be David Walsh and this will be his sixth winter visit to the Canary Islands.

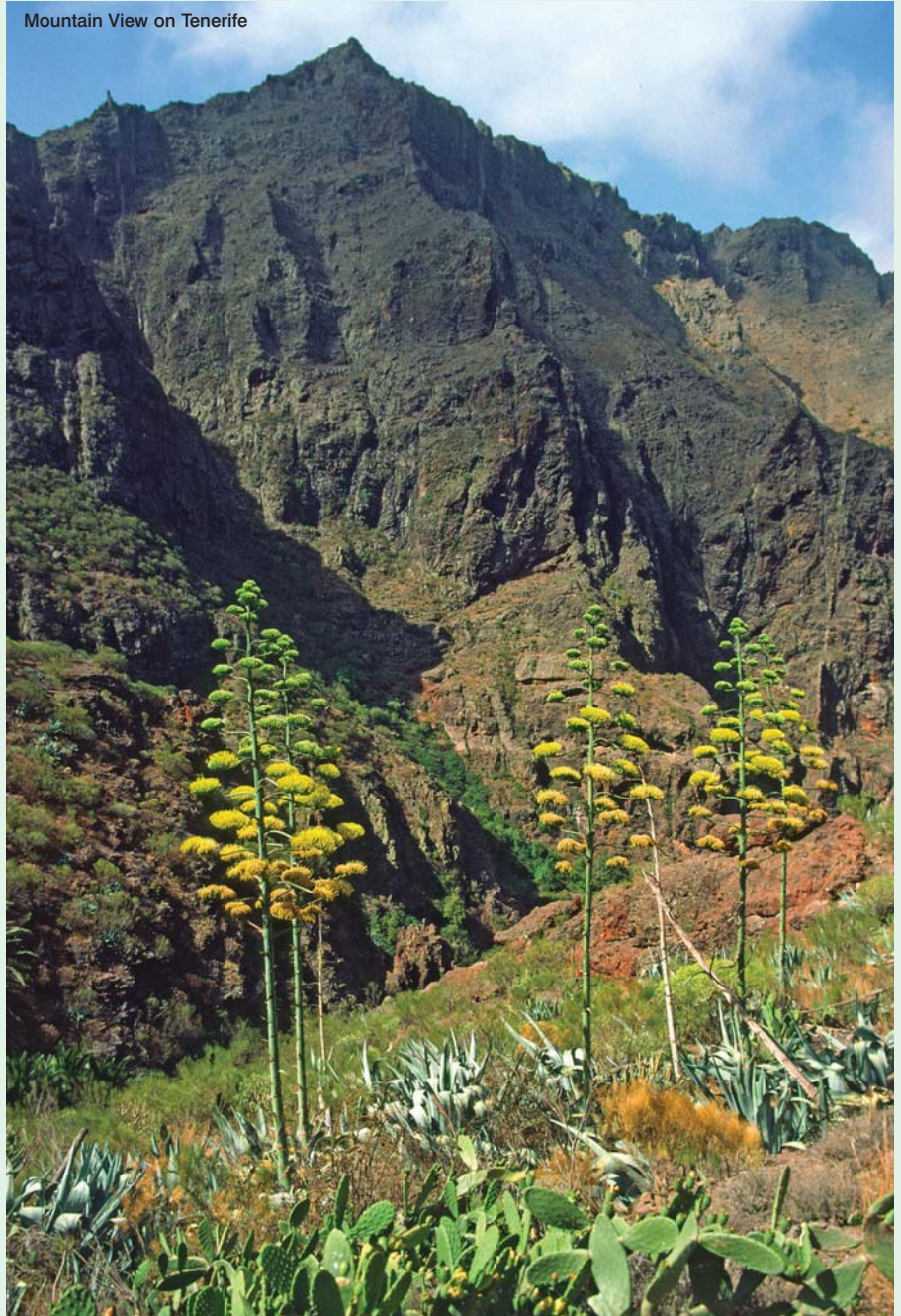
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Days 1 to 4

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 on Tenerife 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 will hope to have excellent views of this species as well as Tenerife Goldcrest and the local races of Great Spotted Woodpecker and Canary Blue Tit. We also have our first opportunity of seeing the Island 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!

On the third day we will take the inter-island ferry to Gomera. The boat trips will give us the opportunity of looking for Macaronesian and Cory's Shearwaters, whilst we will also hope to spot groups of Shortfin Pilot Whales or Bottlenosed Dolphins. On arrival on 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 White-tailed and Dark-tailed (Bolle's) Laurel Pigeons. We will enjoy lunch at a restaurant in a picturesque valley in the centre of the island, from where we will be able to study another endemic, the

Mountain View on Tenerife





Cory's Shearwater

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, African Grass Blue and African Migrant amongst the butterfly possibilities. On our last full day on Tenerife, we visit the north-west of the island. Along the spectacular north coast we will look for Yellow-legged Gulls of the race atlantis, whilst on the Punto del Teno peninsula we will search for a flock of Rock Sparrows and, if we are lucky, a Barbary Falcon might be found perching on its favourite ledge! In the hills we have second chances to look for the species we had targeted on Gomera and will also hope to find Sardinian Warbler and the distinctive Tenerife race of European Robin, a possible future 'split'. On the return journey we may have time to take in the famous 'dragon tree' whilst marvelling again at the variety of habitat on Tenerife.

Days 5 to 7

We will take an early morning flight to Fuerteventura and transfer to our hotel in the south of the island for a three night stay. 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 (or Canary Islands) 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 good 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 Southern Grey Shrike. From our hotel we will scan the beaches and tidal pools for gulls and waders, with Kentish Plover and Little Egret likely and a number of other species possible; on previous trips we have found Slender-billed Gull and Eurasian Spoonbill. In the centre of Fuerteventura the hills should produce Barbary Ground Squirrel, Egyptian Vulture, Barbary Partridge, Trumpeter Finch and the local race of Canary Blue Tit, different from the one on Tenerife and Gomera, whilst on Molinos reservoir we will hope to encounter Ruddy Shelduck and perhaps Little Ringed Plover or Black-winged Stilt. Nearby we will enjoy lunch in a taverna in a rocky cove on the west coast. Spanish Sparrows will be numerous in the hotel grounds, Eurasian Hoopoe could be found anywhere whilst, if time permits, we will look for the introduced Monk Parakeet in one of the town parks.

Day 8

We fly back to Tenerife before catching an evening flight back to London.



Canary Island Stonechat

Outline Itinerary

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

Party Size

Maximum of 14 clients (two leaders with more than seven clients).

Accommodation

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










Transport

By minibus.

Includes

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

Gradings

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



Houbara Bustard