



Canary Islands: Tenerife, Gran Canaria and Fuerteventura

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*In January 2022, I spent 12 days in the Canary Islands, 6 of those in Tenerife, one in Gran Canaria and 5 in Fuerteventura. I focused on mammals (9 species) and finding the endemic bird species. As it was a trip with my girlfriend, we spend some time with other outdoor activities like hiking and snorkeling. Mammals are in **bold**, birds in italics, a rudimentary species list is given in the end.*

Logistics and Preparations

Tenerife endemic birds are mostly easy, only the Laurel pigeon left us waiting a bit. We did not try the Gran Canaria Chaffinch. Based on other reports, the bustards can be tough on Fuerteventura, while the Chat was easy at Los Molinos. I did not try to build a complete species list or find all endemic subspecies, so check other trip reports/ebird/iNaturalist for other birding spots. For rare birds, there are some websites and social media: Facebook (Birds of the Canary Islands, Macaronesian Birds App), Twitter (Rare Birds in Spain) and reservoirbirds.com/Sightings.asp. While for birds ebird and the sites mentioned above were sufficient, for mammals and other groups I used <https://www.biodiversidadcanarias.es/biota/> to get a understanding of the distribution. Many things were booked out in advance, take care to book Whale Watching, Teide summit permit (but see below for alternative) and other touristy activities early on.

In January it can rain, and indeed we had some rain on Tenerife. On Fuerteventura, we also had a big "calima", basically a sand wind from the Sahara, that made observations tough, but can bring African vagrants.

We rented a car in Teneriffa and Fuerteventura, both times with Cicar, both times very easy without hassle, although they have a minimum rental time of a few days.

In Tenerife, we slept in hotels mostly booked on the same day. This was maybe good to stay spontaneous, but in hindsight it would be sufficient to change place only 1-2 times, as driving around the island is efficient, and many places can be reached quickly. Our program was very intense and it is worth to spend a bit more time on the island. In Fuerteventura we stayed in El Cotillo for most nights. A bit touristy but was a good base for snorkeling and the bustard.



Figure 1 Cloud forest, Anaga mountains

Tenerife

The three “easy” partial endemics came in quick, the first *Bertholet's pipit* close to a beach near the airport, *Canary Islands Chiffchaff* and *Atlantic Finch* on the first hike north of Santiago del Teide on a tour roughly around Cruz de Gala. This hike also delivered the first forest species like *Bolle's Pigeons*, *Goldcrests*, *Chaffinch* and a variety of Tenerife habitat. In the forest we flushed some *Bolle's Pigeons*, as well as some mystery pigeons...

After the hike, we tried *Laurel Pigeon* at three known places: Mirrador Fuente del Ray (28.376419, -16.626356), Mirrador el Lance (28.38498, -16.603469) and Mirrador La Grimona (28.392792, -16.608865), not much activity in the late afternoon, a few *Bolle's Pigeon*. In the night in the hills above our accommodation in Icod de los Vinos we easily found **Madaira pipistrelle** at several places with the bat detector (e.g. 28.343749, -16.701942). The next morning, we were successful at Mirrador Fuente del Ray for the *Laurel Pigeon*.

We then did a cloud forest hike in the northeast of the island in the Anaga mountains starting from Casa Forestal (28.541878, -16.229003). Beautiful forest! Further along the Peninsula in Benijo I spotted a *Peregrine Falcon* overhead.

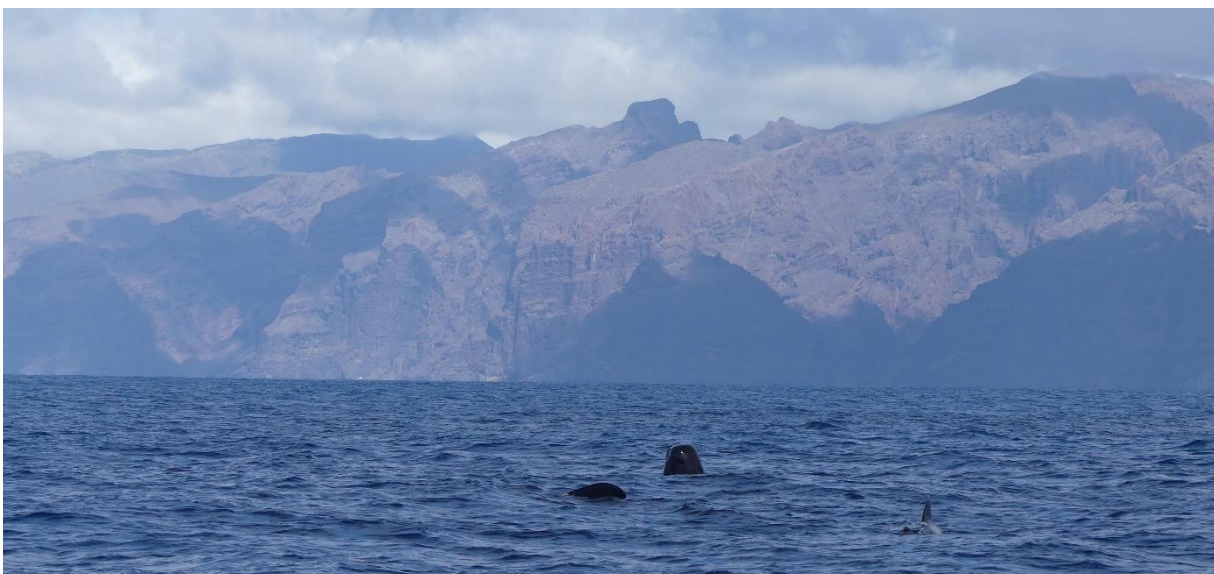


Figure 2 Short-finned Pilot Whales, Los Gigantos

As weatherwise our Whale Watching in Los Gigantes was moved a day earlier, we returned to the west the next morning, for a tour with Whale Wise Eco Tours. We were very lucky, with the resident **Short-finned Pilot Whales** which they usually see, as well as **Bottlenose Dolphins** and a mother/calf duo **Eden's Whales**, all in 2.5 hours.

I can recommend this company, although expensive, they try to maximize species and respect the animals. Already on the way back, I spotted some whales in the distance and only when it was clear that it was Pilot Whales again, we continued towards Los Gigantos. The 10:30 tour has the biggest chance to see the Pilot Whales and other stuff, as many boats are out. Exciting is also the possibility of beaked whales in the area – they occasionally see them when the water is very calm. We then went snorkeling in Alcalá – an Eastern Atlantic Trumpetfish saved the snorkeling.



Figure 3 Tenerife Blue Chaffinch and Brambling (selffound, but previously report, 5th record Canary Islands), Mirador de Chipeque

The final two days we spend in the mountains. The next morning, we worked our way up and started by a hike in the pine forest. Near the starting point there were two noteworthy caves: Cueva de los Pajaros (28.258334, -16.769588) is quite a challenge and should not be entered alone as it looks a bit sketchy at times (especially the parts in the back). There is bat activity, shown by some droppings. Approximately 100 metres further north, in a cave starting on the west side of the road going under the road, there was a **Western Barbastelle** ssp *guanchae* (approximately 28.259323, -16.770017). All other caves in the area I found/was aware of were not interesting/closed to public, same goes for other caves in the general area (Cueva de Samara further up the road, as well Cuevas Negras). The hike up to Cueva Negras was still nice! I admit after all these hikes and no Tenerife Blue Chaffinch I got unnecessarily nervous about the Finch and we went to see it in the Area Recreativa Las Lajas, where at a water place (approximately 28.189258, -16.66499) they come to drink. As a bonus, we had some Plain Swifts on the way up, but I think this was a chance encounter. Other places where we saw Tenerife Blue Chaffinch include Mirador de Chipeque, also with water place (28.374179, -16.463793) and Área Recreativa Ramón El Caminero (28.329650, -16.533112). We then had a short night and started at 3:00 climbing Pico del Teide. If one is on the summit before 9:00, no permit is needed. We had an intense day, also climbing down. On the way up, we were quicker as expected and found some wind shelter at the currently closed Refugio, which resulted in the possibly highest **House Mouse** of Spain!

The next morning, we boarded the ferry to Gran Canaria. Sea was high and conditions for wildlife watching difficult. I had some distant blows and splashed just before reaching Gran Canaria, as well as two Gannets.



Figure 4 Boettger's Wall Gecko *Tarentola boettgeri*, Barranco de Guinguada

Gran Canaria

First activity was snorkeling at the Playa de Las Canteras towards the rocks further out at low tide. Some currents make this place unsuitable for beginners, but even for us quite a lot of effort for few fish. Highlights were some nice Gold Sponges *Aplysina aerophoba*. We were compensated by a shorebird-hunting Peregrine falcon and a community garden with lots of Monarch butterflies (28.137282, -15.436284). We then went for a hike in Barranco de Guinguada. It is rather urban and dominated by agriculture like banana plantations, but I found all endemic reptile species and the Gran Canaria subspecies of *African Blue Tit*, as well as *Plain Swift*.

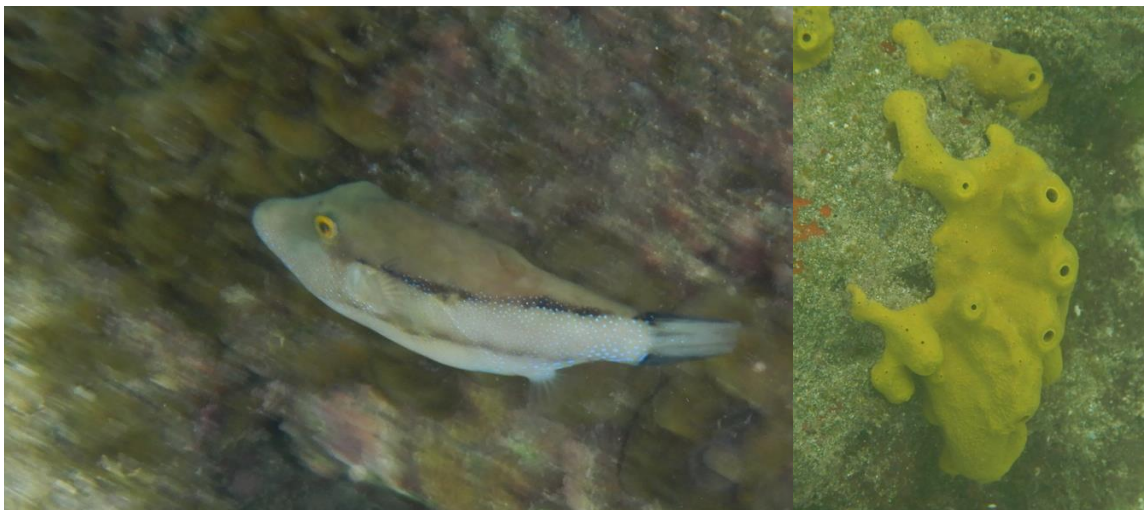


Figure 5 Macaronesian Toby and Gold Sponge, Playa de Las Canteras

The next morning, we took the ferry to Fuerteventura. The sea was more favorable, but seemingly my luck ran out, as I saw absolutely nothing except Mediterranean Gulls. To top things off, when I changed side of the ship when entering the port of Morro Jable, my girlfriend came running, as she detected **Bottlenose Dolphins** on "my side", where I had been staring into nothing for 2 hours!



Figure 6 *Dericorys lobata*, Costa Calma

Fuerteventura

After arriving mid-day, we picked up the car and drove to Costa Calma, where an artificial pine and palm forest is located. A magnet not only for birds, but for all sorts of wildlife, probably the most species-rich terrestrial place in Fuerteventura. Best for arthropods was the wilder part in the SW (28.156552, -14.233968), as well as an open area near our car parking, with plenty of *Hoopoe* and other wildlife enjoying some leaky pipes (28.153633, -14.232592). *Red-vented Bulbul* and *Laughing Dove* accompany the park-feeling, and the place was birdy even in mid-afternoon. I would recommend spending a morning birding there – not really for its beauty, but the rarity potential of this place. We walked on in direction NW, crossing El Jable to reach the coast on the other side of the island. On the way, there was a **Barbary Ground Squirrel** running across the track. Also, the first **Feral Goats** were seen. On the way back, I spotlighted in the park and had an **Algerian Hedgehog**! Driving towards Los Molinos, we spotted a **European rabbit**.



Figure 7 *Barbary Ground Squirrel*, Puertito de los Molinos

The next morning, we started in Los Molinos water reservoir (28.512713, -14.031442), which was rather dry and therefore not many water birds present. I was lucky though with two sightings of *Canary Islands Stonechat*, as well as quite a few *Black-bellied Sandgrouse* flying overhead (ca 9:00) and some probable **Feral Sheep**. Down at the Puertito de los Molinos we started hiking up the Barranco with quite a few species seen, including breeding *Canary Islands Stonechat* as well *Muscovy Ducks* and **Feral Goat**.



Figure 8 Houbara bustard, Tindaya plain

In the evening, we arrived at El Cotillo, our base for the remainder of the time. The first goal the next morning was the *Houbara Bustard* and indeed we were very lucky and before sunrise we had an individual along the road (28.609027, -14.005654). Fantastic views from the car with a totally relaxed bird! Going early seems the key, we did not see the bird again when passing the same place again on our way back 30 minutes later. The plan would have been to further go out other mornings, possibly also from El Cotillo, but a “calima”, basically a sand wind, moved in, and sand, dust and wind made birding difficult. Luckily aquatic activities kept me busy. Snorkling in El Cotillo was fantastic, although quite fluctuant in number of individuals, species number was always good. We visited Lobos Island, but were a bit disappointed: Bad snorkling (at least in the Puertito area, with less fish than anywhere else I went on this trip and currents) and -of course- many people. Maybe you can book one of the many boat trips in area, sometimes they have very cool marine life like sharks and dolphins as a bonus, and hopefully the snorkeling is better... Hiking around the islands was also not too interesting. I went diving from Corralejo with Punta Amanay with the goal of seeing a new shark order for me: Angelsharks. We did, so I was happy!



Figure 9 Bearded Fireworm, diving near Lobos Island



Figure 10 Algerian Hedgehog, Costa Calma

Species lists

More details in the text. T: Tenerife, GC: Gran Canaria, F: Fuerteventura

Mammals

Species	Where
Barbary ground squirrel	F: El Jable, Los Molino
House mouse	T: Refugio Teide
European rabbit	F: transit
North African hedgehog	F: Costa Calma
Barbastelle	T: Cave between Los Gigantes and Teide
Madeira pipistrelle	T: Icod de los Vinos
Eden's whale	T: Los Gigantes
Common bottlenose dolphin	T: Los Gigantes, F: Morro Jable harbor entrance
Short-finned pilot whale	T: Los Gigantes
(Feral Goat	F: El Jable, Los Molino)



Figure 11 Bottlenose Dolphin and Flying fish of the ferry, Morro Jable harbor entrance



Figure 12 Hoopoe and Laughing Dove, Costa Calma

Birds

Species	latin	Where
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	F: Los Molinos
Muscovy Duck	<i>Cairina moschata</i>	Cat C, F: Puertito de los Molinos
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	F: Puertito de los Molinos
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	ferry T to GC
Gray Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	F: Puertito de los Molinos
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	T: on route, F: Puertito de los Molinos
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	F: Costa Calma
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	
	<i>Accipiter nisus granti</i>	T: on route
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	
	<i>Buteo buteo insularum</i>	seen both in T and GC
Houbara Bustard	<i>Chlamydotis undulata</i>	Tindaya Plain
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	F: Puertito de los Molinos
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	F: Puertito de los Molinos
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	F: El Jable
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	F: Puertito de los Molinos
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	F: Puertito de los Molinos
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	T, GC, F: Coast
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	T, GC, F: Coast
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	T, GC, F: Coast
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	T, GC, F: Coast
Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	T, GC, F: Coast
Bolle's Pigeon	<i>Columba bollii</i>	T: all forest areas
Laurel Pigeon	<i>Columba junoniae</i>	T: Mirrador Fuente del Ray
Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	T, GC, F: Urban areas
Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	F: Costa Calma
Red-Vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	probably soon Cat C., F: Costa Calma

Plain Swift	<i>Apus unicolor</i>	T: Teide national Park, GC: Barranco de Guinguada
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	F: Costa Calma
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	
	<i>Dendrocopos major canariensis</i>	Tenerife, Teide National Park
Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	
	<i>Falco tinnunculus canariensis</i>	W Canary Islands, T: common
	<i>Falco tinnunculus dacotiae</i>	E Canary Islands, F: on route
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinoides</i>	
	<i>Falco peregrinus peregrinoides</i>	T: Benijo , GC: Playa de Las Canteras
Southern Gray Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	
	<i>Lanius meridionalis koenigi</i>	F: Costa Calma
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	
	<i>Corvus corax tingitanus</i>	T, F: common
Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>	
	<i>Calandrella rufescens polatzeki</i>	E Canary Islands, F: on route
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	T, F: on route
African Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae</i>	
	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae teneriffae</i>	Tenerife, common
	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae hedwigae</i>	Gran Canaria, Barranco de Guinguada
	<i>Cyanistes teneriffae degener</i>	E Canary Islands, on route
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	
	<i>Regulus regulus teneriffae</i>	T: all forest areas
Canary Islands Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus canariensis</i>	T: common
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	T, F: common
Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>	
	<i>Sylvia conspicillata orbitalis</i>	F: El Jable, Tindaya plain
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	
	<i>Erithacus rubecula superbus</i>	Teneriffe and Gran Canaria, T: Anaga mountains, GC: Barranco de Guinguada
Fuerteventura Stonechat	<i>Saxicola dacotiae</i>	F: Puertito de los Molinos
Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	
	<i>Turdus merula cabreræ</i>	W Canary Islands, T: common
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	F: Costa Calma
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	F: Puertito de los Molinos
Berthelot's Pipit	<i>Anthus berthelotii</i>	T, F: common in rocky areas
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	
	<i>Fringilla coelebs canariensis</i>	T: Anaga mountains, down in agricultural area
Tenerife Blue Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla teydea</i>	T: Teide national Park
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	T: Mirador de Chipeque
Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>	
	<i>Bucanetes githagineus amantum</i>	F: Tindaya Plain
Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	
	<i>Carduelis cannabina harterti</i>	E Canary Islands, F: Costa Calma
Island Canary	<i>Serinus canaria</i>	T: common in lowlands
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	
	<i>Passer hispaniolensis hispaniolensis</i>	T: on route