

# LANZAROTE (CANARY ISLANDS)

18<sup>th</sup> August – 1<sup>st</sup> September 2011

## Introduction

After spending our summer holiday two years in a row in Scandinavian countries my family decided it was time to fly again to a sunny destination. Lanzarote was one of the Canary Islands we had never been before and looked very attractive in the brochure. We were very not disappointed because the island has indeed much nice scenery and some very interesting attractions. Last but not least there was also a new bird for me on offer.

We stayed a fortnight in the 'Apartamentos Santa Rosa' in Costa Teguise, which turned out to be a good choice. Costa Teguise has all you need: not too big, clean, plenty of supermarkets and shops, nice beach (Playa Bastian), plenty of space to park a car and quiet at night.

We hired a car for 12 days (recommended) and visited most of the tourist places on the island like the Mirador del Guinate, Los Jameos del Agua, Cueva de los Verdes, Jardin de Cactus, Timanfaya Volcanic Park, El Golfo, Haria, Montagorda-beach (Puerta del Carmen) and the beach east of Orzola. I also used the car to visit the Teguise-plain early in the morning, from Costa Teguise this is a drive of about 25 minutes. The roads are in excellent condition and both car-hire and petrol is rather cheap.

The weather was remarkable: quite cold and cloudy in the morning but usually sunny after 11 am. There was also much wind which kept the temperature down to a maximum of around 29°C during the day, so very pleasant weather.

## Systematic list of birds recorded

The following birds were recorded during this holiday. The taxonomy is according to the Dutch committee for avian systematics (CSNA).

**Cory's Shearwater**                      *Calonectris diomedea*

Macaronesian endemic. Seen from the coast, but no big numbers. No other shearwaters or petrels were seen despite the fact that the Archipelago Chinijo (close to the northern part of Lanzarote) is one of the best sites for breeding seabirds in the whole of the Canaries.

**Cattle Egret**                              *Bubulcus ibis ibis*

Quite common around Arrecife.

**Little Egret**                              *Egretta garzetta garzetta*

**Grey Heron**                              *Ardea cinerea cinerea*

**Spoonbill**                                *Platalea leucorodia leucorodia*

One bird with several Little Egrets near Orzola on 24-08.

**Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus dacotiae*

One of the Canary islands endemic subspecies. Common all over the island.

**Barbary Falcon** *Falco pelegrinoides pelegrinoides*

One bird hunting pigeons near Orzola.

**Houbara Bustard** *Chlamydotis undulata fuertaventurae*

Canary islands endemic subspecies. All my efforts to see this bird in August 1990 on Fuerteventura failed and I felt a little anxious this would happen again on Lanzarote. There was no need to worry however because it turned out that these birds are easy to find on Lanzarote, even in summer.

On 21<sup>st</sup> August I went to the Teguisse-plain early and took the LZ402 west from Teguisse to La Caleta de Famara. After about 500 meter I took an obvious track on the left side of this road, going to Tao. Although unmetalled this track is safe to drive with a normal car.

I started scanning along this track and it didn't take long before I had seen my first Houbara Bustard and I saw another 3 near the cultivations halfway between the LZ402 and Tao. Birds are feeding here in (the edge of) some green fields. In total I saw about 7 birds in 45 minutes of birdwatching so the statement by Tony Clarke that 'the highest density of this species is probably on the plain southwest of Teguisse' still holds true.

On another visit on 29-08 with my son (10) we had about 4 Houbara Bustards in 30 minutes of birdwatching with one feeding in the same fields not far from the car. On the way back we also had a bird flying along the LZ408 close to Nazaret, so they are probably common in suitable habitat.

According to the 'Field Guide to the Birds of Macaronesia' by Garcia-del-Rey this subspecies is poorly differentiated from the nominate.

**Stone Curlew** *Burhinus oediconemus insularum*

One of the Canary islands endemic subspecies. A common bird on the Teguisse- and Famara-plain. I heard dozens of birds in the early morning while searching for Houbara Bustard and saw about 20. Also a single bird seen next to the road near Nazaret.

**Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres interpres*

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina alpina*

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*

**Redshank** *Tringa tetanus ssp.*

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*



**Lesser Short-toed Lark**      *Calandrella rufescens rufescens*

Canary islands endemic subspecies. Common at the Teguisse-plain where dozens of birds seen, often in large groups.

Based on genetic research it is now clear that the former subspecies *polatzeki* is a synonym of the nominate subspecies *rufescens* ('Field Guide to the Birds of Macaronesia' by Garcia-del-Rey). As a result all birds in the Canary Islands should be assigned to the nominate.

**Barn Swallow**                      *Hirundo rustica rustica*

**Berthelot's Pipit**                      *Anthus berthelotii*

Macaronesian endemic. One of the most common birds in all kinds of habitat, all over the island.

Birds from the Canary Islands and Selvages are usually separated as *berthelotii* (and those from Madeira as *madeirensis*) but is considered monotypic here following 'Pipits & Wagtails' by Alström and Zetterström.

**Tawny Pipit**                              *Anthus campestris*

One migrant bird on a beach near Orzola on 24-08.

**Spectacled Warbler**                      *Sylvia conspicillata orbitalis*

Macaronesian endemic subspecies. Birds were seen or heard on various places on the island.

According to 'Pipits & Wagtails' by Alström and Zetterström this is a valid subspecies that occurs in the Canary Islands, Madeira and the Cape Verde Islands but the 'Field Guide to the Birds of Macaronesia' by Garcia-del-Rey states there is no genetic evidence to support this.

**Sardinian Warbler**                      *Sylvia melanocephala melanocephala*

Only a few birds heard or seen.

Birds from the Canary Islands are sometimes separated as *leucogastra* but are included here in the nominate *melanocephala* following 'Sylvia Warblers' by Shirihai, Gargallo & Helbig. The same conclusion was drawn in the 'Field Guide to the Birds of Macaronesia' by Garcia-del-Rey.

**Ultramarine Tit**                              *Cyanistes ultramarinus ultramarinus*

Several birds seen at the end of the valley (near a small bridge) west of Tabayesco.

Ones the Blue Tits on Fuerteventura and Lanzarote were assigned to a separate subspecies '*degener*' or even a separate species 'Fuerteventura Blue Tit – *Cyanistes degener*'. Further research however has shown that '*degener*' is a synonym of the taxon *ultramarinus*, often regarded as a separate species: Ultramarine Tit.

**Desert Grey Shrike**                      *Lanius elegans koenigi*

Canary islands endemic subspecies. Rather common in different types of habitat and recorded both in towns, villages, deserts and along roads and seafronts.

The taxonomic position of this subspecies has switched back and forth, but now believed to be part of the 'elegans-group', consisting of the subspecies *elegans*, *algeriensis*, *theresae* and *koenigi*. Sometimes regarded as a separate species 'Canary Islands Desert Grey Shrike'.

**Raven**                                      *Corvus corax ssp.*

Only recorded in the northern part of the island near Mirador de Haria, Tabayesco and the windmills near Los Valles.

Birds from the Canary Islands are sometimes separated as *canariensis*, but the validity of this subspecies has been questioned and it is perhaps better to include them in the subspecies *tingitanus* that also occurs in North Africa. The subspecies *tingitanus* is sometimes considered a separate species (African Common Raven).

**Spanish Sparrow**                      *Passer hispaniolensis hispaniolensis*

Common in towns and villages.

**Canary**                                      *Serinus canaria*

Macaronesian endemic. Several singing birds heard and seen near Haria and Tabayesco.

**Linnet**                                      *Carduelis cannabina ssp.*

Quite a common bird at most places visited.

Birds from Fuerteventura and Lanzarote are usually separated as *harterti* but based on genetic research this subspecies (and the subspecies *meadewaldoi* of the western Canaries is no longer considered valid following the 'Field Guide to the Birds of Macaronesia' by Garcia-del-Rey. It is now unclear which subspecies occurs in the Canary Islands but possibly *mediterranea* or the (undetermined) subspecies from neighbouring north-west Africa. (BWP).

**Trumpeter Finch**                      *Bucanetes githagineus amantum*

Canary islands endemic subspecies. Quite common on the Teguisse-plain where birds were heard far more often than seen. Trumpeter Finches also come to drink at the pools in the 'Jardin de Cactus' in Guatiza and we saw several birds at close range here.

## **Birds not seen**

I did not see the following endemic (sub)species, that breed on Lanzarote. I saw all these sub(species) however during earlier trips to the Canary Islands:

- **Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus majorensis*

This new subspecies was described by Donázar et al (<http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/jrr/v036n01/p00017-p00023.pdf>) in 2001 and only occurs on Lanzarote and Fuerteventura. I had no problems seeing this bird on Fuerteventura in August 1990 (up to 25 birds seen together) but we failed to find a single bird on Lanzarote. Probably Fuerteventura has a bigger population compared to Lanzarote or the population of Egyptian Vulture has decreased since.

- **Buzzard** *Buteo buteo insularum*

A rather common bird on the western Canary islands, but apparently very scarce on the eastern islands. I did see two single 'Canary Islands Buzzards' on Fuerteventura however back in August 1990.

- **Long-eared Owl** *Asio otus canariensis*

In 2011 several pairs of Long-eared Owl were discovered on Lanzarote for the first time and successful breeding took place. An article about this novelty is in preparation. The 'Field Guide to the Birds of Macaronesia' by Garcia-del-Rey states that there is no genetic evidence to support this subspecies.

Lanzarote also has a remarkable number of birds that became extinct in the last century. These are: **Canary Islands Oystercatcher** *Haematopus meadewaldoi*, **Canary Islands Stonechat** *Saxicola dacotiae muriela* (Archipelago Chinijo, just north of Lanzarote) and **Canary Islands Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus canariensis exsul* (sometimes regarded as a separate species - Lanzarote Chiffchaff).

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