

Gran Canaria – March 2019

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This is a very brief report on a visit to Gran Canaria that we made in March 2019. It wasn't a birding trip, but inevitably I did note my sightings on BirdTrack, and also made a special effort to see Gran Canarian Blue Chaffinch, which had been split from the Tenerife version since I visited that island a number of years ago.

We flew with Jet2 from Manchester on 12 March, returning on 23rd, and stayed at a self-catering cottage at Arbejales, a few kilometres north of Teror, in the hills at the north end of the island (<https://www.airbnb.co.uk/rooms/7553995?location=Arbejales%2C%20Spain>). This area is much less developed than the southern end of the island, with small villages and an agricultural economy, and in March, was full of colour as the wild flowers were at their best, despite a dry winter. The weather was mostly sunny and temperatures were typically in the low to mid 20s, although early mornings and late afternoons were cool and cloudy, the mist descending quickly from 5pm onwards.

Below is a list of the bird species seen, with an idea of frequency, and site details for the scarcer species.

Red-legged Partridge – seen in scrubby and agricultural habitats in the north of the island

Cory's Shearwater – common off all western coasts, with small numbers inshore but hundreds feeding close to a dolphin-watching boat trip that went several miles southwest of Puerto Rico.

Spoonbill – several in the Laguna La Charca adjacent to Maspalomas

Grey Heron - several in the Laguna La Charca adjacent to Maspalomas

Little Egret - several in the Laguna La Charca adjacent to Maspalomas

Gannet – one seen from the dolphin-watching boat off Puerto Rico.

Sparrowhawk (*ssp. granti*) – one south of Arbejales.

Buzzard (endemic *ssp. insularum*) – common in hills

Moorhen – one in the Laguna La Charca adjacent to Maspalomas

Stone-curlew (presumed *ssp. insularum* but a candidate to be split, with the West Canary islands form *distinctus*) – heard at night from cottage in Arbejales.

Ringed Plover – three in the Laguna La Charca adjacent to Maspalomas

Whimbrel - six in the Laguna La Charca adjacent to Maspalomas and one on the beach at the nearby lighthouse.

Greenshank – four in the Laguna La Charca adjacent to Maspalomas

Yellow-legged Gull (*ssp. atlantis*) – small numbers at all coastal areas

Rock Dove – abundant and widespread in the mountains and coastal cliffs.

Turtle Dove – one in Arbejales on our final morning, 23rd, and also at least two in the Botanic Garden that morning, presumably having only just arrived.

Eurasian Collared Dove – abundant in all residential areas. No African Collared/Barbary Doves were seen.

Plain Swift – abundant in mountains, and occasionally in foothills near reservoirs. Pallid Swift almost certainly seen in mountains, and possibly Common Swift.

Hoopoe – only seen at a couple of sites: La Aldea St Nicolas in the west and the Caldera de Baldama in the northeast.

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*ssp. thanneri*) – common in wooded areas across the island.

Kestrel (*ssp. canariensis*) – abundant and widespread, especially in mountains.

Ring-necked Parakeet – common in Maspalomas, and a pair presumably of this species heard in the Botanic Garden near Tafira Alta.

Raven (*ssp. canariensis*) – seen during most walks in the mountains

African Blue Tit (*ssp. hedwigae*) – common in wooded, shrubby and garden habitats across the island.

Barn Swallow – several flying north from the island at Sardina lighthouse in the northwest on the 20th.

Canary Islands Chiffchaff (endemic sp.)- abundant and widespread wherever there is verdant vegetation, and far commoner on Gran Canaria than I remember on either Tenerife or Fuerteventura.

Blackcap – heard in scrub and garden habitats throughout the island.

Sardinian Warbler (*ssp. leucogastra*) – present in low densities across the north and central part of the island.

Blackbird (*ssp. cabreriae*) – common in scrub, woodland and gardens across the island.

Robin (potentially *ssp. marionae*) – present in low densities in the central and northern part of the island, especially abundant in the Botanic Garden.

Spanish Sparrow – heard (from moving car) around palm trees in several places, though only viewed in Agaete.

Grey Wagtail – seen in a couple of places, usually in a barranco in the north of the island.

Berthelot's Pipit (endemic sp.) – common in all rocky areas, from the coastal plain to the highest mountains

Chaffinch (*ssp. canariensis*) – seen in only a few places, most frequently in the garden of our accommodation.

Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch (endemic sp.) – a male seen well, and a couple of calls heard, in the forest south west of El Juncal (accessed on the GC661). It was difficult to locate (a birder we met had been trying for six hours when we left). Park in the village and walk south, across the barranco, then along the wide forest track that follows the valley West, climbing slowly. A couple of Dutch birders heard them along this first stretch, but our sighting was beyond the Casa Forestal, where the track turns southwest and starts to decline. Around 550m beyond the Casa Forestal, the path turns into a barranco that was more lush than any other, holding a small pool and greater birdlife than

elsewhere. Here (<https://w3w.co/flexibility.tiny.tilts>) we watched a male for several minutes. We continued for another couple of kilometres to the west and saw no others, nor similar habitat.

Goldfinch (ssp. *parva*)– seen in a handful of places, including the Botanic Garden.

Atlantic Canary (endemic sp.) – abundant and widespread wherever there is verdant vegetation, particularly in the north and central parts of the island

Corn Bunting – several seen, and more heard, in grassland below San Jose del Alamo in the northeast of the island

We also saw a couple of dragonflies, many ladybirds (including the endemic *Coccinella miranda*) and lots of butterflies, though of a limited range of species (Canarian Speckled Wood, Canarian Red Admiral, Clouded Yellow, several White sp. and a probable Monarch).

