

Fuerteventura, Canary Islands
15 to 18 December 2010



Fuerteventura Chat, Embalse de los Molinos

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This was a short solo trip for which the main targets were Fuerteventura Chat, Houbara Bustard and Cream-coloured Courser. These were all seen well as were most of the other specialities (from a NW European's perspective) of the island.

Logistics

I stayed four nights self-catering at Costa Tropical Apartments. This is in the Costa de Antigua development a mile or so north of Caleta de Fuestes (just a few miles south of the airport). The place was cheap (£17/night for the apartment) and it was clean and well equipped. I hired a Fiat Panda from Goldcar for 4 days for £50. Driving was straightforward – easier than Tenerife and Gran Canaria due to quieter roads and the only twisty mountain roads encountered were in the Betancuria area.

Site Information

The main published birding site gen is in: Tony Clarke and David Collins (1996) *A Birdwatcher's Guide to the Canary Islands*. Prion. Although clearly a few years old now, this guide proved nonetheless useful. There are also a multitude of online trip reports available (e.g. through www.travellingbirder.com).

Notes on Sites Visited

Rather than giving full site details, these notes are primarily intended to supplement the information in Clarke & Collins.



La Oliva

For La Rosa de los Negrines, leave La Oliva NW on the FV 10 towards El Cotillo and take the track on the left after last house in village on a bend to the right. This track was in excellent condition and easily driveable (though presumably any driving off sealed roads contravenes hire car insurance). One bustard was seen quite closely on the left just after the cultivations. The displaying male was seen from further along the track, after it turns left alongside the bustard protection area fence, and climbs uphill. It was to the left, maybe 500 m or so after the left bend. The track continues uphill for a km or so and then, as it starts to descend, a small vegetated barranco held a pair of Fuerteventura Chats.

Embalse de los Molinos

From the FV 221 from Tefia to Puerto de los Molinos, pass through the village of Las Parcelas and just after leaving the village, the road turns to the right. Take the track off to the left here just before a goat farm. This track was also in good, driveable condition and reached the dam after c.3 km. The goat field on the right just after the turn-off held 2 sandgrouse. Contrary to expectation from recent reports, the reservoir did hold water, though few birds. The barranco running down from the dam looks worthwhile exploring. A ♂ Fuerteventura Chat was seen by the track c.1 km before the dam.

Rosa del Taro

This pool can be viewed from the FV 255 about 4 km north from Triquivijate, on the road towards Tesjuates. It is on the west side of the road and there is a large gravel area to pull off the road onto.

Boca del Risco dam

This is an area that I stopped at which looks like it held potential and might repay future visits if passing, although the water may just be seasonal. It is along the FV 413 from the Costa Antigua roundabout (just north of Caleta de Fuestes) that goes to Antigua. My map showed this as a minor road/track but it is actually a smooth, broad road (presumably fairly newly constructed). Just after km 8, park on the left hand side of the road and view the reservoir looking south. A telescope is useful.

Vega de Río Palmas

About 4 to 5 km south of Betancuria, on the FV 30, turn off where the village is signposted. The road crosses the barranco and then continues for c.1 km through the village. Park just before crossing the barranco again. Walk down the barranco towards the reservoir (c.1½ km). Reports from other birders had been that the reservoir was dry a few weeks earlier but I found it to be full. However the water was brown, presumably with silt from recent heavy rain and run-off, and was birdless.

Catalina García lagoon

This is north of the FV 20 running northwards from main FV 2 towards Tuineje. Coming from the FV 2, it is on the right after c. 6km. It is visible from the road – turn off north of the lagoon by a small white building and follow the track that runs back towards the lagoon to view. This track is rather rough and may be impassable without causing damage to the underside of some cars (just about managed to coax the Panda along it). May be safer to walk (c.500 m) if in doubt. There was another pool that held a Spotted Redshank and Yellow-legged Gulls. This was on the other side of the road c.100 N of the pull-off for the lagoon. Park at the pull-off and walk along the track adjacent to the main road to view.

La Pared

There are several accesses to this area. From the FV 617, running from Costa Calma north towards La Pared, I took the left turn onto a track near the highest point of this road. Almost straight away I branched left onto a track heading in the direction of the windfarm. The track is probably driveable but looks rough in places and I decided to park at the start and walk. The Houbara and coursers were seen after a couple of kms as the track descends towards a barranco that runs across the peninsular.

Costa Calma “woodland”

Trees line both sides of the road at Costa Calma. There is parking at the western end (branch off the road into a parking area for a hotel and shop shortly before reaching the second roundabout).

Hotel Meliá Gorriones

Reached by turning off at a roundabout c.2 km west of Costa Calma. The road bends round the left side of the hotel to a rough car park and access from where there is access to the beach. I walked west from here across the edge of the area of *Salicornia* (succulent inter-tidal plant).

La Lajita

Park at the Oasis Park (zoo/botanical gardens). Some folk report interesting birds within the park but I did not go in. Instead I crossed the main road (the FV 2) and followed a line of bushes down towards the sea. A pair of Fuerteventura Chats was by some apartments at the seaward end.

Pozo Negro

A few buildings and a café by the beach, accessed by taking the FV 420 for a few kms from the FV 2. A Red-billed Tropicbird was reported here the day after my return to UK.

Las Salinas

This is signed off the FV 2 south of Caleta de Fuestes. The best pools for waders were the large rectangular pools at the inland side of the complex. These can be viewed from the southern end without entering the site (although very easy to get in, I don't know if there is supposed to be an entrance fee). Also head along the beach by the site (easier from the southern end) to view the rocky shore and a tidal pool within the rocks.

Barranco de la Torre

I accessed from the seaward end. Turn off the FV 2 at Las Salinas, continue along the road past the village and then for a further km or so on a good track.

Caleta de Fuestes

The main sandy beach was devoid of birds but there were waders on the short rocky stretch immediately south of the beach before another sandy bay. A promising looking seawatching site was on a small headland just north of Caleta de Fuestes – there is a road along the coast from here to Costa Antigua, 1 km to the north.

Puerto del Rosario

The harbour held few birds with no obvious gull hang-outs etc. but there were some waders on the shore immediately to the north.

Itinerary

14 December

Ryanair flight from Edinburgh to Fuerteventura. This landed on time just around dusk (6ish). Car hire involved being taken to a depot a couple of miles away but this was trouble-free.

15 December

Hot, cloudy start, then sunny and dry. First stop was Las Salinas where the salt lagoons held a Black-winged Stilt and there were a handful of other waders, both there and on the adjacent shore. Then into Barranco de la Torre for the rest of the morning where a Black-bellied Sandgrouse was heard and several Spectacled and Sardinian Warblers were seen. A quick look a few miles further south at Pozo Negro produced the first Trumpeter Finches and also two Barbary Falcons flying along cliffs at the south end of the bay.



Houbara Bustard, La Oliva



Trumpeter Finch, Pozo Negro

After some lunch back at the apartment, I ventured out to La Oliva and spent from around 2pm until 6pm on the track that passes the cultivations at Rosa de los Negrines. A very distant Houbara was soon seen and then, after a few stops and scans, a much closer bird just past the cultivations. A short while later I encountered a displaying male that performed superbly. Further along the track, a pair of Fuerteventura Chats was found in a small area of vegetation.

16 December

Hot and sunny. A morning drive to La Pared where I parked up and walked across the plains heading SW towards the windfarm. A Houbara crossed the track a short way ahead, several Black-bellied Sandgrouse flew over and a pair of Stone Curlews was seen. Eventually after repeated scanning, three Cream-coloured Coursers were found and showed well, though a little distantly, for ten minutes or so. As I returned to the car, another (or the same) three Coursers flew over.

A walk through the trees alongside the main road at Costa Calma produced a few additions to the trip list. Then I ventured down onto the beach at Hotel Meliá Gorriones. The tidal lagoon appeared birdless, but the edge of the *Salicornia* en route held a good number of waders including c.40 Kentish Plovers.



**Fuerteventura Chat,
La Lajita**

Heading back north, I stopped at La Lajita where the highlight was another pair of Fuerteventura Chats. Catalina García lagoon produced the first Ruddy Shelducks of the trip, whilst a final stop at Las Salinas produced a further selection of waders.

17th December

Overnight rain cleared soon after dawn, but left a very windy day. Thus I deferred plans to head into the mountains around Betancuria and instead headed first to the beach at Caleta de Fuestes which held a selection of waders including c.10 Kentish Plovers. Heading inland, Rosa del Taro held just 3 Coots and, as I approached Embalse de los Molinos, another band of rain arrived. Hence I headed down to the sea at the end of the road (Puerto de Los Molinos) and sat out the rain a while. As it dried a little, I found a sheltered spot in the rocks and seawatched for a half hour but with nothing to show for the effort. I headed back up to Embalse de los Molinos, which held a few Ruddy Shelducks and got excellent close views of a male Fuerteventura Chat on the wall near the dam. Heading back towards the road, 2 Black-bellied Sandgrouse showed well among a field of goats.



**Black-bellied Sandgrouse,
Embalse de los Molinos**

As the wind was still strong, I decided to head into the island's capital Puerto del Rosario to look around the harbour for anything sheltering there. The harbour itself was almost birdless but a few waders frequented the shore to the north. Finally, I seawatched for the last hour and a half of daylight from Caleta de Fuestes, which produced 27 Gannets.



**Barbary Partridges,
Vega de Río Palmas**

18th December

Breezy again but less so than the previous day, so after checking out of the hotel, I headed again inland, stopping at an area that I have called Boca de Risco dam. Although it did not hold much, I reckon it might have potential. Up into the hills and a stop at well-signed car park at the south end of the village of Betancuria quickly produced the first African Blue Tit of the trip. In Vega de Río Palmas a pair of Barbary Partridges posed on a wall and I then parked up and

walked slowly down to the Embalse (reservoir) and back. Three more Barbary Partridges and c.6 African Blue Tits were the highlights here.

Heading back towards the east coast, another stop at Catalina García lagoon did not produce anything new though a Spotted Redshank was on a pool across the road. Brief looks at Las Salina and the very seaward end of Barranco de la Torre produced nothing of note and finally I seawatched off Las Salinas for 25 minutes up to 4pm. Then time to return the hire car before an evening flight home to a snowy Scotland.

Systematic List

Grey Heron – 1 on shore at Las Salinas on 15th and 1 at Costa Calma on 16th.

Little Egret – 2 on shore at Las Salinas on 15th with 1 there on 16th and 1 on pool along approach road to Pozo Negro on 15th.

Gannet – 27 flew north in one and a half hours at Caleta de Fuestes on 17th and 13 flew north in 25 minutes at Las Salinas on 18th.

Ruddy Shelduck – c.10 at Catalina García lagoon on 16th with 6 on 18th, 2 at Las Salinas on 16th and 18th, c.15 at Embalse de los Molinos on 17th and 3 at Boca del Risco dam on 18th.

[Muscovy Duck – 16 were on the pool by the beach at Puerto de los Molinos on 17th, along with a domestic-type Mallard]

Teal – 1 ♀ at Catalina García lagoon on 16th.

Buzzard – 1 by road near Tarajalejo on 16th and 3 at Vega de Río Palmas on 18th.

Barbary Falcon – 2 flying along cliffs at south end of bay at Pozo Negro on 15th.

Kestrel – 2 in Barranco de la Torre on 15th, 1 at La Oliva on 15th, 1 at Embalse de los Molinos on 17th, 1 at Vega de Río Palmas on 18th and several others seen while driving.

Barbary Partridge – 2 flew across road a couple of kms south of Betancuria, 2 in village at Vega de Río Palmas and 3 in barranco just west of the village, all on 18th.

Coot – 1 at Catalina García lagoon on 16th and 3 at Rosa del Toro pond on 17th.

Houbara Bustard – 3 at La Oliva on 15th (including a displaying ♂) and 1 at La Pared on 16th.

Stone Curlew – 2 at La Pared on 16th.

Cream-coloured Courser – at least 3 at La Pared on 16th.

Black-winged Stilt – 1 on pools at Las Salinas on 15th.

Grey Plover – 1 on shore at Las Salinas on 16th, 5 on Caleta de Fuestes beach on 17th and 1 at Puerto del Rosario on 17th.

Ringed Plover – 2 at Las Salinas on 15th with 6 there on 16th, c.100 on beach west of Hotel Meliá Gorriones on 16th, c.40 on Caleta de Fuestes beach on 17th and c.5 at Puerto del Rosario on 17th.

Little Ringed Plover – 1 at Catalina García lagoon on 16th and 1 at south end of Embalse de los Molinos on 17th.

Kentish Plover – c.40 on beach west of Hotel Meliá Gorriones on 16th and c.10 on Caleta de Fuestes beach on 17th.

Sanderling – c.20 on beach west of Hotel Meliá Gorriones on 16th, 8 on Caleta de Fuestes beach on 17th and c.5 at Puerto del Rosario on 17th.

Dunlin – 7 at Las Salinas on 15th, c.15 on beach west of Hotel Meliá Gorriones on 16th, 8 at Las Salinas on 16th and 4 on Caleta de Fuestes beach on 17th.

Common Sandpiper – 1 on pools at Las Salinas on 16th and 2 at Puerto del Rosario on 17th.

Redshank – 7 on the pools at Las Salinas on 15th and 3 there on 16th.

Spotted Redshank – 1 on pool across road from turn-off to Catalina García lagoon on 18th.

Greenshank – 1 flushed from pool in Barranco de la Torre on 15th and 1 just below dam at Embalse de los Molinos on 17th.

Whimbrel – 2 on the shore at Las Salinas on 15th, 1 there on 16th and 2 on Caleta de Fuestes beach on 17th.

Turnstone – 4 at Las Salinas on 15th, 4 on Caleta de Fuestes beach on 17th and c.5 at Puerto del Rosario on 17th.

Black-headed Gull – an adult flew south at Caleta de Fuestes on 17th.

Lesser Black-backed Gull – single figures among Yellow-legged Gulls in a field at Tejuales on 17th.

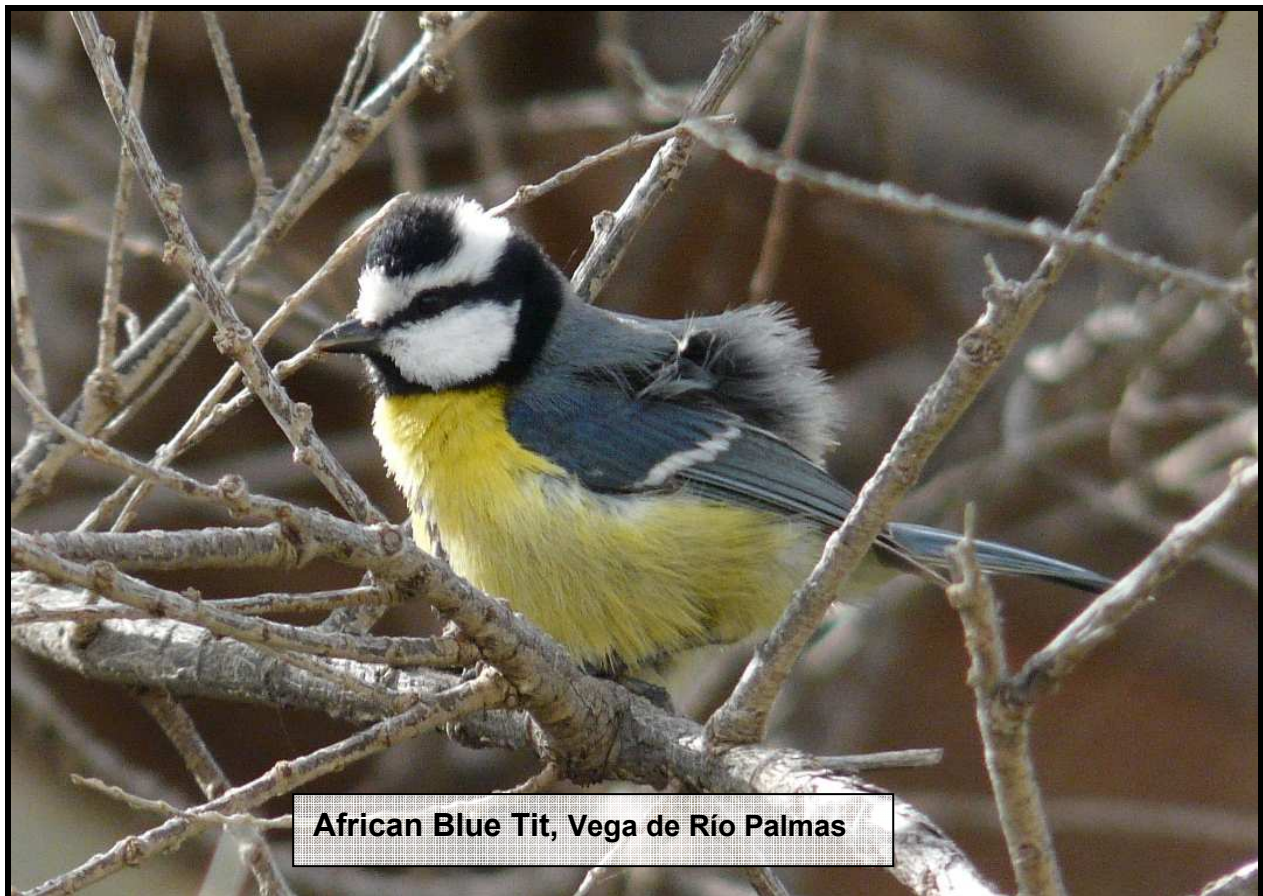
Yellow-legged Gull – Single figures at most coastal and some inland sites. A larger number (c.200) in a field by Tejuales on 17th with c.80 on pool opposite turn-off to Catalina García lagoon on 18th.

Sandwich Tern – 6 on rocky shore at Las Salinas on 15th, 2 there on 16th, c.8 at Puerto del Rosario on 17th and 4 flew south at Caleta de Fuestes on 17th.

Collared Dove – commonly seen, especially around villages and farms. One at Costa Calma on 16th had some resemblance to Barbary Dove and may have been a hybrid.

Feral Pigeon/Rock Dove – common.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse – heard at Barranco de la Torre on 15th, total of 9 flying over at La Pared on 16th and 2 seen well among goats by turn-off to Embalse de los Molinos on 17th.
Hoopoe – 1 at La Pared on 16th and 3 at Costa Calma on 16th.
Lesser Short-toed Lark – Flocks of c.20 and c.150 at La Oliva, common at La Pared on 16th and at Embalse de los Molinos on 17th with smaller numbers noted elsewhere.
Berthelot's Pipit – common and recorded at most sites visited.
Grey Wagtail – 2 at Vega de Río Palmas on 18th.
White Wagtail – 1 flew over La Oliva on 15th and 2 in among goats by turn-off to Embalse de los Molinos on 17th.
Robin – 2 at Costa Calma on 16th and 1 at La Lajita the same day.
Fuerteventura Chat – Pair at La Oliva on 15th, pair at La Lajita on 16th and a ♂ on a low wall by track to Embalse de los Molinos on 17th.
Blackcap – a ♂ at Vega de Río Palmas on 18th.
Spectacled Warbler – at least three at Barranco de la Torre on 15th with birds also seen at La Oliva the same day.
Sardinian Warbler – at least 2 in Barranco de la Torre on 15th and c.4 at Vega de Río Palmas on 18th.
Chiffchaff – 1 singing at Caleta de Fuestes on 15th, 2 singing at Costa Calma on 16th, 1 singing at La Lajita on 16th and 2 at Vega de Río Palmas on 18th.
Southern Grey Shrike – seen daily in small numbers, mostly perched on wires by the road.
African Blue Tit – 1 at Betancuria and c.6 at Vega de Río Palmas, both on 18th.
Raven – fairly common and widespread.
Spanish Sparrow – Common around villages and farms.
Linnet – recorded at Caleta de Fuestes and c.80 at Costa Calma on 16th.
Goldfinch – 2 at Costa Calma on 16th.
Trumpeter Finch – c.8 at Pozo Negro on 15th, c.10 at La Oliva on 15th and 2 at Boca del Risco dam on 18th.



African Blue Tit, Vega de Río Palmas