

Tenerife, Canary Islands 10 to 13 December 2009

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Blue Chaffinch, Las Lajas

This was a short birding trip targeting a few local specialities. In particular I was keen to see Laurel Pigeon, Bolle's Pigeon, Canary Islands Chiffchaff, Blue Chaffinch, Tenerife Blue Tit, Barbary Falcon and Little Shearwater. December is not usually the most popular time to visit but I succeeded in seeing all these species except Little Shearwater. Lots of information exists for birding on Tenerife and this short trip report is intended just to give a feel for what birding is like in December.

Birding Sites

Almost all the sites visited are covered in "Where to Watch Birds in Tenerife" (Eduardo García del Rey, 2000, Publicaciones Turquesa S.L.) so I won't give further directions here. Many are also covered in "A Birdwatchers' Guide to The Canary Islands" (Tony Clarke & David Collins, 1996, Prion). The main site not included in these was Mirador Las Grimonas, a well known reliable site for Laurel Pigeon. This is a lay-by located on the main TF-42 road running along the north coast of Tenerife a few kms west from Puerto de la Cruz immediately after the second of two tunnels.

Practicalities

I flew Ryanair from Glasgow Prestwick to Reina Sofia airport (south of the island near Los Cristianos) arriving after dark on 9 December. I picked up a pre-arranged hire car

through Goldcar and stayed four nights at a campsite just a few kms from the airport (Camping Nauta: www.campingnauta.com). If staying here be sure to bring a good ground mat as the camping area is basically on gravel. I returned the car at 5pm on 13 December and arrived home in Aberdeen in the early hours.

Itinerary

10 December

Due to ferry schedules, this day was planned around taking the afternoon ferry to La Gomera and back. The first target bird was encountered immediately on exiting the tent: Canary Islands Chiffchaff. These proved to present pretty well everywhere. Next stop was Las Galletas, nearby on the south coast. The tide was in so I moved on to Ten-Bel. The rather abandoned-looking plaza here was teeming with Ring-necked Parakeets and also held two Monk Parakeets. I moved on to El Fraile, parking a short way out of the village and walking to the reservoir, which held three Spoonbills but little else of note. In the afternoon I took a 2pm boat to La Gomera and a 5pm return trip. These proved to be virtually birdless with just a few Yellow-legged Gulls seen and no sign of any Little Shearwaters. Note that the Naviera Armas ferry currently offers the best birding, being slower than the Fred Olsen ferries and having better viewing areas.

11 December

This was the big clean-up day. First stop was the picnic site in the pine forest at Las Lajas. The site was deserted and it actually took a while to track down the Blue Chaffinches but they then gave excellent close views. The best area was a small drinking pool next to a hut at the bottom left hand side of the site. Tenerife Blue Tit was also seen fairly briefly, as was Tenerife Kinglet (split by some authorities). I moved on to the far north west and to the dramatic setting of Punta del Fraile in the Teno Natural Park. I spent most time at the western of the two parking areas and after an hour and a half waiting, two Barbary Falcons sailed into view overhead and showed well for a few minutes. The third stop was Mirador Las Grimonas, just west of Puerto de la Cruz. Nothing happened for half an hour but then a Laurel Pigeon flew across the slope and a few minutes later I noticed a perched bird that gave excellent telescope views for a few minutes. Time was running short now so I finished the day with a brief visit to La Caldera, near Aguamansa, which held a selection of expected woodland birds.

12 December

The weather was not looking promising, with overnight rain, so I made a slow start and arrived late morning at Erjos Ponds in the NW of the island. Venturing out between bands of rain I found a drake Wood Duck. Although it was fully-winged, a drake Mandarin on the same pond did not help its credentials. Subsequently I found that it had been present since mid July and was indeed generally considered to be an escaped or released bird. Whilst trying to get closer to the Wood Duck for photos, I flushed several Snipe and then almost stepped on a Jack Snipe, apparently a scarce bird in the Canaries. Despite the low cloud and occasional deluge, I ventured out to walk along the road to Monte del Agua (cars are no longer allowed on this road). Fortunately the cloud lifted and, watching for an hour from the viewpoint a few yards down the track to La Calabecera, some 4.5 km from Erjos, I had two flight views of Bolle's Pigeon. Also here were better views of Tenerife Blue Tit and Tenerife Kinglet. On the walk back another five pigeons were disturbed from the canopy but seen very briefly at best. Finally, seawatching for the final hour and a half of daylight from Garachico (overlooking Roque de Garachico) again produced a blank on Little Shearwater.

13 December

The final day was spent birding several sites in the very southern tip of the island. Again the tide was in at Las Galletas so I moved on swiftly to Guargacho. The reservoirs here

were dry though time spent wandering around the desert-like plains produced one or two Spectacled Warblers. Then on to the reservoirs named as “Southern Airport Area” in del Rey. A no entry sign barred the approach to the third reservoir while the others held just a Little Egret. Next El Médano which was quiet but the dunes to the SW of town yielded 6 Kentish Plovers. I returned to El Fraile Reservoir which held quite a few more birds than on 10 December as well as a smart male Spectacled Warbler in scrub immediately adjacent to the reservoir. Las Galletas then produced a handful of shorebirds and a final visit to Ten-Bel produced up to 4 Monk Parakeets. I returned to the airport around 5pm for the flight home.



Canary Islands Chiffchaff, Garachico



Wood Duck, Erjos Ponds

Systematic List

Little Egret: One at El Fraile reservoir on 10th and 4 there on 13th. One on reservoir at Southern Airport Area on 13th.

Grey Heron: One at El Fraile reservoir on 13th.

Spoonbill: Three at El Fraile reservoir on 10th and 8 on 13th.

Mandarin Duck: A drake at Erjos Ponds on 12th.

Wood Duck: A drake at Erjos Ponds on 12th (apparently present since July 2009 and of suspect origin).

Teal: Two at El Fraile reservoir on 13th.

Pochard: One ♀ at El Fraile reservoir on 13th.

Tufted Duck: Five at El Fraile reservoir on 13th.

Buzzard: One at Mirador Las Grimonas on 11th.

Kestrel: Commonly seen all over island.

Barbary Falcon: Two at Punta del Fraile, Teno Natural Park on 11th.

Moorhen: Present at Erjos Ponds on 12th.

Coot: Seen at El Fraile reservoir on 10th and c.40 there on 13th. Also seen at Erjos Ponds on 12th.

Little Ringed Plover: Two at El Fraile reservoir on 13th.

Ringed Plover: One at El Fraile reservoir on 13th and 6 at Las Galletas on 13th.

Kentish Plover: Six birds close to car park at La Mareta, near El Médano on 13th.

Grey Plover: One flying around Los Cristianos port on 10th. Two at Las Galletas on 13th.

Dunlin: Two at El Fraile reservoir on 13th.

Jack Snipe: One at Erjos Ponds on 12th.

Snipe: c.10 at Erjos Ponds on 12th.

Whimbrel: One at El Médano and 3 at Las Galletas on 13th.

Greenshank: One at El Fraile reservoir on 13th.

Turnstone: 11 at Las Galletas on 13th.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Two at El Fraile reservoir on both visits.

Yellow-legged Gull: Seen at El Fraile Reservoir (c.30 birds on both visits), Los Cristianos, San Sebastián de la Gomera, Garachico, Las Galletas and El Médano.

Feral Pigeon/Rock Dove: Regular feral birds in urban areas. At Las Lajas on 11th, a small group of c.5 birds hanging out in pines were better-looking Rock Dove types.

Bolle's Pigeon: At least two seen at Monte del Agua from viewpoint 5 km from Erjos on 12th. Also a total of 5 birds seen between here and the transmitter mast at start of track were this species or Laurel Pigeon.

Laurel Pigeon: One or two at Mirador Las Grimonas on 11th.

Collared Dove: Noted at Camping Nauta, Ten-Bel and Los Cristianos,

Ring-necked Parakeet: Several small flocks (maybe 20-30 birds) screeching around the plaza at Ten-Bel on 10th and 13th.

Monk Parakeet: Two at plaza at Ten-Bel on 10th and up to 4 birds there on 13th.

Hoopoe: One at Camping Nauta on 12th.

Great Spotted Woodpecker: c.5 at Las Lajas on 11th.

Berthelot's Pipit: Noted at El Fraile, San Sebastián de la Gomera, Las Lajas, Guargacho and Southern Airport Area.

Grey Wagtail: One at San Sebastián de la Gomera on 10th.

Robin: Seen at La Caldera on 11th.

Blackbird: Noted at Camping Nauta, La Caldera, Monte del Agua and Ten-Bel.

Spectacled Warbler: One or two at Guargacho and a male at El Fraile reservoir on 13th.

Blackcap: One ♀ at Ten-Bel plaza on 10th.

Canary Islands Chiffchaff: Seen at most sites including Camping Nauta, Ten-Bel, Monte del Agua, Garachico and Guargacho.

Goldcrest (Tenerife Kinglet): One at Las Lajas and noted at La Caldera on 11th. One or two seen well at Monte del Agua on 12th.

African (Tenerife) Blue Tit: One at Las Lajas and one or two at La Caldera on 11th. At least two seen well at Monte del Agua on 12th.

Southern Grey Shrike: c.5 between El Fraile and reservoir on 10th and two in same area on 13th.

Raven: Two at Punta del Fraile, Teno Natural Park on 11th.

Spanish Sparrow: Seen at Southern Airport Area at the village at El Fraile on 13th.

Chaffinch: Several at La Caldera on 11th.

Blue Chaffinch: c.10 birds seen well at Las Lajas and at least one also at La Caldera on 11th.

Canary: Best views at Las Lajas where c.20 birds present on 11th.



Laurel Pigeon, Mirador Las Grimonas



Berthelot's Pipit, San Sebastián de la Gomera