Gran Canaria 22nd -28th November 2017

We decided to have a short winter break on Gran Canaria, flying direct from Edinburgh by Ryanair. Accommodation was arranged via Booking.com in a self catering apartment in Maspalomas in the south of the island. Finally we booked a car getting a good deal from Autoreisen.

22nd November. Our first full day on the island started with us watching Canary Island Chiffchaffs and Sardinian Warblers in the bushes outside our apartment. Collared Doves, Hoopoe, Blackbirds, Spanish Sparrows and a pair of Tree Sparrow were feeding in the well-watered grassy area in front of the apartment complex. After visiting a market on the edge of down we walked down the banks of a (dry) canal towards the coast. The scrub held Canaries, Goldfinch, a Greenfinch, a few of Common Waxbills, whilst overhead we had a flock of 20+ Plain Swift.

The canal ended up by a small lagoon known as Charco. The lagoon held a few birds: 6 Little Egret, 3 Grey Heron, 5 Greenshank, 2 Sanderling, a Common Sandpiper and a Whimbrel. At the bottom end by the beach were a small group of loafing Yellow-legged Gulls. We walked along the beach to the lighthouse. Only bird of note offshore was a Sandwich Tern. Returned back to our apartment. The palm plantation by the lagoon held several Ring-necked Parakeets and Monk Parakeets.

23rd November. An early start as we headed inland. Although the roads were at times quite steep with severe hairpin bends they had been recently improved. Our destination was the village of El Juncal on the edge of the Inagua forest. From the village we drove south into the forest and up to 27.943838N, 15.663908W. From here we walked along the tracks in search of our target bird. The forest was very quiet and birds fairly scarce. We had a few Canary Island Chiffchaff, African Blue Tit and a couple of Berthelot’s Pipits. Eventually a call alerted me to a nice male Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch. A bit further along the track we had a second bird. After lunch we slowly made our way back to Maspalomas. Enroute had a few Common Buzzard and Common Kestrel.

24th November. Headed down to Maspalomas golf course. Entered through the main gate without any problems. Walked around the edge of the course then out through a gate and across the road into the southern part of the course. Just through the gate was a large flock of feeding Canaries, with a few Hoopoe and a Meadow Pipit. Walked along the edge of the course and eventually arrived at two pools. These held 3 Mallard, 3 Ruddy Shelduck, a Coot, a few Moorhen and along the edge a Little Stint, a Dunlin, 4 Common Sandpipers and some White Wagtails. Continued round the course, not seeing a lot else and back out the main gate.

I then headed for the golf course at Meloneras. A small road took me to the west end near a lake. A gate was open so I walked in. A Shoveler was present on the lake with some Coot and Moorhen. The only waders were three Common Sandpipers, but a first winter Mediterranean Gull was a surprise. I walked further north to some smaller pools, but these just held a Grey Wagtail. I was then stopped by a golf course employee, told that the course was private and was escorted out. It is infact possible to view the lake from the slope by the gate where I entered.

I then skirted round the east end of the golf course and ended up in the corner adjacent to Costa Meloneras. Here I could view a vegetated gully. It held quite a few birds including a Spectacled Warbler, a pair of Sardinian Warbler, a Southern Grey Shrike and more surprisingly a Common Redstart. There were also flocks of Spanish Sparrow, Canary and a few Common Waxbills.

25th November. In morning drove east along the motorway and came off at the junction for El Doctoral. At the first roundabout took the last (3rd) exit towards a raised fenced area. This area contained three reservoirs. Found a gap in the fence and wandered through to have a look. Most birds were on the one furthest from road. 35+ Grey Heron and 7 Spoonbill were roosting on the banks. A Eurasian Wigeon took off and was immediately pursued by a Barbary Falcon. It dropped back down into the reservoir by some Moorhen. On the bare sides of the reservoir there was a nice flock of 50+ Lesser Short-toed Larks. The scrub held a Spectacled Warbler and a pair of Southern Grey Shrikes. The larger, lower reservoir only held loafing Lesser Black-backed and Yellow-legged Gulls. I returned to the car and back to the roundabout where I took the 2nd exit, drove along a bit, then turned right down a track that went underneath the motorway. Continued down till I was level with a fenced area on the opposite side of the branco. I then walked across, found another gap in the fence and checked out the two reservoirs. These held a pair of Ruddy Shelduck, 7 Eurasian Teal and a few Coot. On the banks there was a roost of 17 Little Egrets and waders comprised 16 Greenshank, 3 Black-winged Stilts and 5 Common Sandpipers. Returned to the car and continued down the track, eventually arriving on the coast south of Pozo Izquierdo. Further south was an area of fairly dried out pools. Surprisingly bird less bar a few Southern Grey Shrikes and a pair of Spectacled Warblers.
Returned to Maspalomas and in afternoon we walked along the promenade from Costa Meloneras to Maspalomas. A scattering of waders comprised Ringed Plover, Sanderling and Whimbrel, with a distant Cory’s Shearwater offshore.

**26th November.** A sightseeing day as we headed back inland. Had a few touristy stops at Arteara, Tejeda and then Artensa. Just west of Artensa had a lunch stop in an area of conifer forest. Took a wander down one of the tracks finding a pair of Great-spotted Woodpecker and flushed a Red-legged Partridge. Then headed east from Artensa. A view point at Montena Negro revealed three very confiding Great-spotted Woodpeckers. As we dropped down through cultivated valleys we saw quite a few Common Kestrel and Common Buzzard. On our arrival back in Maspalomas had a nice flock of 50+ Plain Swift close to the apartment.

**27th November.** Another touristy morning visiting Puerto Mogan and then driving up the valley through Mogan to Veneguera. On the ridge before Veneguera had a pair of Raven. Apparently they are getting very scarce nowadays on Gran Canaria.

Returned to Maspalomas and in the afternoon I revisited the Maspalomas golf course. On the lakes a male Pochard was a good find (apparently only the 7th record for the island), there were also 12 Little Ringed Plovers with the Dunlin and Little Stint. I continued south along the edge of the course towards the dunes, seeing another Spectacled Warbler. A calling Kestrel caught my attention it was mobbing something – a Short-eared Owl! They flew over into the dune area and the owl landed between some scrubby bushes, whilst the kestrel landed on top of a bush still calling. The owl was disturbed by a walker and flew low over the scrub before dropping down once again. As I walked back through the golf course I had a couple of flocks of Monk Parakeets and a Song Thrush.

**28th November.** After breakfast headed down to Charco. As I was walking down I had a Cattle Egret fly north over the bushes. On the lagoon new birds comprised a juvenile Purple Heron and a first winter Audouin’s Gull. Then rechecked Meloneras Golf Course (from the outside). Nothing new but the Common Redstart was still in the gully.

We packed and then headed north up the motorway, taking the junction for Castillo del Romeral and continuing on to El Matoral des Salines. There are two small reservoirs here but they only held 6 Little Egret. Then checked the coast – a scattering of waders including Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Sanderling, Whimbrel and Turnstone, with a Sandwich Tern offshore. Returned to the motorway following the signs for El Doctoral to recheck the reservoirs. New birds at the top group included another (or the same?) drake Pochard, a Little Ringed Plover and a Black-headed Gull. Then drove down to the eastern two. Here the Eurasian Teal flock had increased to 11 birds and with them was a Blue-winged Teal. The Little Egret flock had increased to 31 and with them were 4 adult and 2 juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron. It was a grand end to the trip and we then headed to the airport.

We thoroughly enjoyed our trip, which was fairly relaxing. Saw 65 different species, including the key target bird. Most days it was very warm, though for much of the week it was quite cloudy.

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