

# EL HIERRO & TENERIFE

14 – 21 March 2007

## Introduction

During a 8-day visit to El Hierro and Tenerife (Canary Islands) with my non-birding father I tried to find as many endemic birds as possible. I decided to visit El Hierro after the recent upgrade of the former *ombriosus* subspecies of Blue Tit to a full species: Hierro Blue Tit *Cyanistes ombriosus*.

El Hierro is one of the most remote islands in the Canary Islands and difficult to reach. Because of the small airport there are no direct (charter)flights from the mainland of Europe to El Hierro. All travel by air has to take place from Tenerife North (Los Rodeos Airport), which is a different airport from where most charters arrive at Tenerife South (Reina Sofia). Most, if not all, domestic flights to El Hierro are operated by Binter Canarias ([www.binternet.com](http://www.binternet.com)), although it was impossible to get any reliable information on flightschedules beforehand. It is also possible to travel to El Hierro by ferry from Los Christianos (Tenerife) with Fred Olsen ([www.fredolsen.es](http://www.fredolsen.es)) or Naviera Armas ([www.naviera-armas.com](http://www.naviera-armas.com)) but as far as we know this ferry runs only ones a day (or even once a week) and is not much cheaper than a domestic flight. The only advantage could be the possibility to watch some seabirds on the way, at least if the ferry is not going too fast and if the light is still adequate on the usually late departure from Los Christianos.

I also investigated if it was possible to combine El Hierro and La Palma in a 8-day visit. Because of the apparent very limited direct flights between both islands this proved to be very difficult, mainly because it was not possible to get any information on flights and available seats. It is however possible to travel between both islands via Tenerife by ferry or domestic flight, but this is expensive and could be time-consuming.

So we opted for the easiest way and booked a package deal with Neckermann, including flight, hotels and car-hire. As far as I know Neckermann is currently the only tour-operator in the Netherlands who is offering accomodation on El Hierro.

## Information

There is very limited information available on the internet on birdwatching on El Hierro. I only found one trip report ([www.travellingbirder.com](http://www.travellingbirder.com)) by Remco Hofland and Teus Luijendijk, two familiar Dutch birders who had visited El Hierro in April 1998. There are also (only) two pages dedicated to El Hierro in ‘A birdwatchers’ guide to the Canary Islands’ by Tony Clarke & David Collins. Due to the fact that the Hierro Blue Tit is now a full species, and there are also two potential splits, more bird-watchers will undoubtedly visit this island in the near future, and much is still to be discovered about the birds on El Hierro.

On the contrary to El Hierro, there are so may trip reports about birdwatching on Tenerife to be found on the internet, that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the more relevant information. There is also a book dedicated to birdwatching on Tenerife by Eduardo García del Rey ‘Where to watch birds in Tenerife’. I also visited Tenerife before, in August 1990, so was already familiar with most sites and birds, but it was good to see them again after almost 17 years !

## Itinerary

14-03

The flight from Amsterdam to Tenerife with Transavia arrived at 18.30h Uneventful transfer (1½ hour) to a hotel in Puerto de la Cruz. During the evening and night lots of rain and lighting.

15-03

We were picked up at 05.45h for our transfer to Los Rodeos-airport. After a short flight (40 minutes) with Binter Canarias we finally arrived at the small airport of El Hierro at 08.10h. Picked up the car and first drove to our apartment near Las Puntas through the new tunnel that connects Valverde with El Golfo and Frontera (now only a 20 minutes drive). Picked up some groceries and petrol (only €0,71 per litre !) in Frontera and went straight out birding. Above 800 metres we encountered a thick fog that limited our visibility a lot. Our first place to visit was the Hoya de El Pino which was initially shrouded in a thick fog. Here we however saw our first Hierro Blue Tits and ombriosus-Chaffinches and also the inevitable Canary Islands Chiffchaff. We continued along the TF-211 and stopped at the Raya the la Llania. From this point several trail start and we made a circular walk that took about 3 hours in an easy pace. During this walk we saw more Hierro Blue Tits, ombriosus-Chaffinches, Canary Islands Goldcrest and our first (very close) flock of Plain Swifts. This walk went through mixed and deciduous forest and it was a beautiful sight to see the fog sometimes appear and disappear is a blinck of the eye. We drove back via San Andres – Valverde and relaxed in our apartment. On our first day we had already seen all our targetbirds ! Over dinner (the only choice was between ‘meat’ or ‘fish’) we were making plans and decided to visit the east and south-side of the island the next day.

16-03

Before breakfast in the nearby Hotel Las Puntas I did an hour of seawatching, which produced only a number of distant Cory’s Shearwaters. We then drove to Echedo and took the small but good road to Charco Manso. Along this road we were surprised to see our first Barbary Partridges, a bird we thought did not occur on this island. Later we found out that it was introduced here in the 1980s and is apparently now well established. There were also good numbers of Sardinian Warblers, Berthelot’s Pipits and Canaries along this road. Charca Mansa itself was disappointing and had only a very small pool that not seemed very attractive to waders (none were present). We continued along the TF-211 and drove via San Andres-El Pinar to Restinga and saw a lot of roadside-birds like Kestrel, Buzzard, our only Linnets (well seen in the telescope) and Corn Bunting. Just south of El Pinar we made a stop to look at a large group of Rock Sparrows on a wire and some Ravens (of the small local race). At Restinga there were few birds present in the harbour and we bought some souvenirs in this very quiet village. We drove back to El Pinar and went to a large picknick-area called Hoya del Morcillo, where we saw more Hierro Blue Tits and Canary Islands Goldcrests. There were still many trees that showed signs of the large forest-fire that had ragged the islands two years ago. Because of a recent land-slide the road to Raya the la Llania was blocked, so we drove via San Andres to the TF-211 and stopped at k23, where the forest is more open. Here we saw lots of Hierro Blue Tits, Robins, many singing Canary Islands Goldcrests and the only Turtle Dove on this trip. We returned to Frontera via the Hoya de El Pino (no Chaffinches this time) and from a viewpoint we saw a large reservoir north-west of Frontera. This looked good for birds and after some searching we reached the reservoir. On the banks of this reservoir we discovered 5 Common Sandpipers. To exclude Spotted Sandpiper we scrutinized these birds but found them all to be ‘just’ Common Sandpipers. In the evening, when it was already dark, I drove a 15 km stretch of road between Las Puntas and Los Llanillos in the hope of seeing owls, but no owls were seen.

17-03

Today we decided to drive around the western tip of the islands, the part that we had not visited so far. We first drove to the reservoir near Frontera again to check if any new waders were present. Now there were 6 Common Sandpipers present and lots of Yellow-legged Gulls. We visited Charco Azul, according to Clark another potential spot for waders, but this looked totally unsuitable for waders. The road from Sabinosa via Santuario de Nuestra Senora de los Reyes to El Pinar is now metalled and in good shape (although at some points narrow and steep) and ends at Hoya del Morcillo. It was already

raining when we visited the Santuario, and the rain lasted the whole afternoon. Because of the rain we saw very few birds along this road, and we drove back via Hoya del Morcillo (where we could shelter and have lunch), San Andres, Hoya del El Pino (again no Chaffinches ) to Las Puntas. In the late afternoon the skies brightened and I had a short walk in the surrounding of Las Puntas. In the bushes around the apartments Canary Islands Chiffchaff, Sardinian Warbler, Hierro Blue Tit, Collared Doves and Canaries were seen. We had a pizza in a nearby restaurant and packed our stuff.

#### 18-03

We left early from Las Puntas and headed to the airport to catch our 08.40h flight back to Tenerife. One of the last birds we saw on El Hierro were another two Barbary Partridges on our way to the airport. We arrived on Tenerife on time, ready to see some other birds. However we could not find anyone to help us to pick up our hired car and it took over two hours before we could finally leave. First we searched the fields on the south-side of the Los Rodeos-airport for Lesser Short-toed Larks of the rufescens-subspecies. We did not see or hear this bird, perhaps because it was windy and quite cold, and this bird has become very scarce too. We heard a Quail, the only one on this trip. We then drove via the highway TF-1 towards Puerto de la Cruz and ended up in a traffic-jam because of a road-accident, which took some more time. Leaving the TF-1 at La Orotova we headed straight to La Caldera. Although it was quite foggy, and later even raining, there were a lot of birds around and within 10 minutes we had seen Tenerife Blue Tit, Tenerife Robin, canariensis-Chaffinch, Blue Chaffinch and Canary Islands Goldcrest very well. We stayed here for a while and had some soup before we continued on the TF-21 towards the El Teide. The higher we drove, the colder it got and there was even snow near Portillo. We had another stop near the Las Lajas picknick-area but, on a Sunday, it was crowded with people and no birds of notice. It was already quite late and we pushed on to Costa Adejé. The hotel for our 3-night stay was near the centre of the horrible Playa de las Américas (near Puerto Colom) and it took some time to find our hotel and a place to park the car. A sharp contrast to the quiet life on El Hierro. The food and room in this hotel were o.k. and if you like parakeets and feral doves, this is the place to be. We didn't bother for the entertainment in the hotel and went to bed early.

#### 19-03

We had a early start and after the buffet-breakfast we tried to leave Cost Adejé in a northern direction. After much searching we found a slip road to the TF-1 and drove to Erjos. Because it was still very cloudy and raining a little in Erjos we decided to visit Garachico first and then return later (in the hope the weather would improve). Garachico is a nice scenic town and we had a leisurly walk and a coffee there. We saw the 'Roque de Garachico', which holds a breeding colony of Little Shearwaters, and scanning this rock and the surrounding waters when it becomes dark could be a nice way of seeing this bird. Of course we did not see this bird in broad daylight. We returned to Erjos around 11.00h, parked the car near the 'Casa Forestal' and walked the track into the Laurel forest. As soon as we entered the forest a thick fog appeared and the visibility went down to almost zero. We flushed two Bolle's Pigeons (only glimpsed) and went to the first viewpoint (1.4 km from the road). We stayed here an hour but saw only fog and no pigeons at all, so this was a rather frustrating experience. We went back along the track and had some prolonged and close looks at several Tenerife Robins, before we visited the now famous 'Erjos Ponds'. Because the weather seemed to deteriorate I brought my father back to the hotel (where the sun was shining !) and went birding myself at several sites in the south. First I visited the shrub-area north-east of Golf del Sur and saw several Barbary Partridges and had nice views of Spectacled Warblers. On the northern edge of this golf-course was a migrant 'Common' Chiffchaff, a Snipe and a nesting pair of Grey Wagtails. I next went to the nearby Amarilla Golf and searched for over an hour on the western site of the road to this golf-court for Stone Curlew. When I had almost given up hope I flushed a Stone Curlew close to the road and had a good look at it before it flew out of sight.

#### 20-03

Before breakfast I did an hour of seawatching and saw many Cory's Shearwaters, some close to the shore. On floating fishing-rafts at sea lots of Little Egrets were present, and around these rafts some dolphins and small whales (Short-finned Pilot Whales ?) were present. After breakfast we went to Golf del Sur and Amarilla Golf again but added only Little Ringed Plover and Hoopoe to the trip-list. The

weather was still unstable, mostly clouded and a fierce wind but with a temperature about 20°C. We fancied for another look at Blue Chaffinch, so headed towards the Las Lajas picknick-area via San Miguel, the excellent TF-635 and Vilaflor. At Las Lajas we were actually above the clouds and the sun was shining and we stayed here for quite a while. The place was very tranquil now and there were lots of birds around. There were many Blue Chaffinches, Tenerife Blue Tits, Canaries, Great Spotted Woodpeckers and Tenerife Goldcrests, who all showed very well. We went back the same way and visited El Medano-pools with no birds at all present. Then back to the hotel where we saw a large (mixed) group of Pallid and Plain Swifts. The Flamenco-show in our hotel kept us awake for some time before we fell asleep.

21-03

On our last day of this trip we tried to see some of the birds that had eluded us so far. We checked out from our hotel en with the luggage in the car we first drove to the golf-court Los Palos. Here we were denied access so we had to watch from the clubhouse, only seeing a large group of mixed swifts and another migrant 'Common' Chiffchaff. We continued to the reservoir near El Fraile, which was easy to find. Here we saw Ringed Plover, Greenshank, the long-staying female Ring-necked Duck and a pale morph Booted Eagle. After this successful 'twitch' we tried to reach the area near Punta de la Rasca but initially all the access-roads we tried were fenced off. So we drove back in the direction of Guaza and took the first unmetalled road to the left after the banana-greenhouses. This gate had a pat-lock too but was fortunately open so we tried our luck and criss-crossed on some tracks to the big abandoned barn with a yellow roof and the famous row of 'Indian Laurel Trees'. I checked the first tree on the right and there were a lot of owl-castings underneath, so I looked closer and almost immediately a Long-eared Owl dropped out of this tree and flew to the nearby sheds where I saw it a few more times. Also a Southern Grey Shrike, surprisingly the only one on this trip, was seen here in a low bush. Because our flight to Amsterdam would only leave at 19.15h we had some hours to spend and went to the harbour of Las Galletas to search for terns and gulls. Here we had lunch while watching dozens of Yellow-legged Gulls, but nothing else. One 2<sup>nd</sup> calendar-year Yellow-legged Gull wore a metal Madrid-Icona ring and, using the remains of our lunch, we were able to read this ring completely with a telescope. In a last attempt to see Lesser Short-toed Larks or Trumpeter Finch we went back to Amarilla Golf and searched for another hour but we saw neither of these birds. At 16.00h we packed our birding stuff and went to Reina Sofia-airport, where this holiday ended.

## **Sites visited on El Hierro**

On El Hierro we visited all the sites that are mentioned in Clark's guide: Charco Azul, Charco Mansa, Restinga, the area between Valverde and Frontera and the south-site of the island. The directions in this guide are still adequate but note that the Faro de Orchilla can only be reached by a 4x4 and mobile phones have no coverage here. The roads on El Hierro have improved a lot and are generally good.

The reservoir about 1 km north-west of Frontera has potential for waders and is easy to find using Google Earth. This reservoir is also indicated on the very good map we used (Kompass, 1:30.000 ISBN 3-85491-194-7, see [www.kompass.at](http://www.kompass.at) ). Other good sites to watch birds were: Raya la Llania, Hoya de El Pino, Hoya del Morcillo and k23 along the TF-912.

## **Sites visited on Tenerife**

On Tenerife we visited a number of well-known sites: the fields south of Los Rodeos-airport, La Caldera, Las Lajas, Erjos, Garachico, Golf del Sur, Amarilla Golf, El Medano pools, Los Palos, El Fraile-reservoir, Punta de la Rasca and Las Galletas. Note that especially the areas around the golf-courses in the south have changed considerably in the last years and still a lot of building is going on.

## **Systematic list of birds recorded**

The following birds were recorded during this trip. The taxonomy is according to the Dutch committee for avian systematics (CSNA) (Dutch Birding magazine volume 28, 1-2006). The list does not contain feral birds like Monk Parakeet, Ring-necked Parakeet, Domestic Pigeon and Barbary Dove, which were all recorded especially around Playa de las Américas.

### **Cory's Shearwater**      *Calonectris borealis*

- 16-03 5 at sea, from Las Puntas, El Hierro  
17-03 3 at sea, from Las Puntas, El Hierro  
20-03 30 at sea, from San Eugenio Bajo, Tenerife  
21-03 200 at sea, from San Eugenio Bajo, Tenerife

Macaronesian endemic (Canary Islands, Madeira, Selvagens, Azores). In the Canary Islands this is a common summer visitor between February and November that can be seen from any coast. This taxon is monotypic after the splitting of *diomedea* as Scopoli's Shearwater and *edwardsii* as Cape Verde Shearwater.

### **Cattle Egret**      *Bubulcus ibis ibis*

- 19-03 6, Golf del Sur, Tenerife

### **Little Egret**      *Egretta garzetta garzetta*

- 20-03 180 at sea on floating fish-rafts, San Eugenio Bajo, Tenerife  
21-03 60 at sea on floating fish-rafts, San Eugenio Bajo, Tenerife

### **Ring-necked Duck**      *Aythya collaris*

- 21-03 female, El Fraile-reservoir, Tenerife

This bird was first discovered on November 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 and was intermittently present here since (information from [www.rarebirdspain.net](http://www.rarebirdspain.net)).

### **Buzzard**      *Buteo buteo insularum*

- 16-03 2, between San Andres and El Pinar, El Hierro  
16-03 2, near Frontera, El Hierro  
18-03 1, fields west of Los Rodeos-airport, Tenerife  
19-03 2, Erjos del Tanque, Tenerife

Canary Islands endemic subspecies and a resident breeding bird on all islands, but scarce on the eastern islands.

### **Booted Eagle**      *Aquila pennata*

- 21-04 1 pale morph, El Fraile-reservoir, Tenerife

Booted Eagle is a regular migrant on Tenerife although this winter more birds than usual were seen (information from Juan Antonio Lorenzo).

**Kestrel***Falco tinnunculus canariensis*

Common on both El Hierro and Tenerife, from sea-level to at least 2100 metres above sea-level (at Las Lajas, Tenerife).

Canary Islands endemic subspecies (El Hierro, La Palma, Gomera, Tenerife and Gran Canaria) and a common roadside bird. On the eastern islands the subspecies *dacotiae* occurs, another Canary Islands endemic subspecies.

**Barbary Partridge***Alectoris barbara ssp.*

- 16-03 2 seen and several more heard, between Echedo and Charco Manso, El Hierro
- 16-03 2, 5km south of Valverde along TF-911, El Hierro
- 17-03 2, near Santuario de Nuestra Senora de los Reyes, El Hierro
- 18-03 2, between Valverde and airport, El Hierro
- 19-03 1, ponds near Erjos del Tanque, Tenerife
- 19-03 5, area just north of Golf del Sur, Tenerife

It is likely that all Barbary Partridges on the Canary Islands originate from introduced birds, probably the subspecies *koenigi* (from north-west Morocco), and therefore not 'tickable'. We were surprised to find this bird on El Hierro, but later found out that it was also introduced here in the 1980s (information from Juan Antonio Lorenzo) and apparently now well established.

**Quail***Coturnix coturnix coturnix*

- 18-03 1 heard, fields west of Los Rodeos-airport, Tenerife

Birds from the Canary Islands (and Madeira, the Cape Verde Islands and the Azores) are sometimes separated as *confusa*, but included here in the nominate *coturnix* with only the birds from the Azores separated as *conturbans*.

**Moorhen***Gallinula chloropus chloropus*

- 19-03 several including pulli, ponds near Erjos del Tanque, Tenerife
- 19-03 5, Golf del Sur, Tenerife
- 21-03 2, Golf Los Palos, Tenerife

**Coot***Fulica atra atra*

- 19-03 2, ponds near Erjos del Tanque, Tenerife
- 21-03 18, El Fraile-reservoir, Tenerife

**Stone-curlew***Burhinus oedicnemus distinctus*

- 19-03 1, north of Amerilla Golf, Tenerife

Canary Islands endemic subspecies (El Hierro, La Palma, Tenerife and Gran Canaria), but scarce and only occurring in arid, desert-like habitat with Euphorbia scrub. We did not see any habitat that seemed suitable for this bird on El Hierro. On the eastern islands the subspecies *insularum* occurs, another Canary Islands endemic subspecies

**Snipe***Gallinago gallinago gallinago*

- 19-04 1, Golf del Sur, Tenerife

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*

16-03 5, reservoir near Frontera, El Hierro  
17-03 6, reservoir near Frontera, El Hierro

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius curonicus*

20-03 6, Amerilla Golf, Tenerife  
21-03 2, Amerilla Golf, Tenerife

**Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula hiaticula*

21-05 4, El Fraile-reservoir, Tenerife

**Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*

21-06 1, El Fraile-reservoir, Tenerife

**Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michahellis ssp.*

Common on both El Hierro and Tenerife, mainly near the coast but sometimes also more inland (for instance at San Andres and Hoya del Morcillo, El Hierro). Largest group recorded on 21-08 near the marina of Las Galletas: 200, mainly 2<sup>nd</sup> cy, including one ringed bird (ring read).

Birds from the Canary Islands, Madeira and the Selvagens are usually separated as *atlantis*, but perhaps they should be included in the nominate *michahellis*, with only the birds from the Azores separated as true *atlantis*.

**Rock Dove** *Columba livia livia / Columba 'domesticus'*

We did not differentiate between 'wild' and 'feral' birds. Especially at higher altitudes on both El Hierro and Tenerife birds were seen that looked genuine wild, but even these can sometimes be very difficult to separate from feral birds who can closely resemble the real thing. If there are any pure 'wild' birds left, they belong to the nominate *livia*.

**Bolle's Pigeon** *Columba bollii*

19-03 2 seen and several more heard, Erjos del Tanque, Tenerife

Canary Islands endemic (El Hierro, La Palma, Gomera, Tenerife). Not scarce in the right habitat (Laurel forest) on La Palma, Gomera and Tenerife, but very scarce on El Hierro and only discovered there fairly recently. In good weather conditions I saw 15 flying bird on August 13<sup>th</sup> 1990 during a 4 hour watch from the second viewpoint at Erjos, Tenerife.

**Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto decaocto / Streptopelia 'risoria'*

We did not differentiate between 'wild' and 'feral' birds. Most Collared Doves on Tenerife showed mixed characters between Collared and Barbary Doves, especially in the coastal areas on Tenerife, and probably originate from escaped or introduced birds. On El Hierro and the higher areas on Tenerife birds were seen who looked like pure Collared Doves, perhaps worth mentioning are 4 birds that looked very good at Las Puntas, El Hierro on 15 up to 18-03. This could indicate that colonisation of this islands has already taken place.

**Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur turtur*

16-03 1, along TF-912 at k23, El Hierro

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

21-03 1, near Punta de la Rasca, Tenerife

Canary Islands endemic subspecies (El Hierro, La Palma, Gomera, Tenerife, Gran Canaria and very likely also Fuerteventura). Probably widespread but difficult to find and unobtrusive.

**Plain Swift** *Apus unicolor*

15-03 15, circular walk near Raya la Llania, El Hierro  
17-03 20, near Santuario de Nuestra Senora de los Reyes, El Hierro  
20-03 10, Costa Adeje, Tenerife  
21-03 70, Golf Los Palos, Tenerife  
21-03 80 (perhaps the same group as above), El Fraile-reservoir, Tenerife  
21-03 60, Amerilla Golf, Tenerife

Macaronesian endemic (Canary Islands and Madeira). The only swift seen on El Hierro, but occurs together with Pallid (and Common ?) Swift on Tenerife. Monotypic.

**Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus brehmorum*

20-03 10, Costa Adeje, Tenerife  
21-03 200, Golf Los Palos, Tenerife  
21-03 200 (perhaps the same group as above), El Fraile-reservoir, Tenerife  
21-03 160, Amerilla Golf, Tenerife

**Hoopoe** *Upupa epops epops*

18-03 1, near Los Rodeos-airport, Tenerife  
18-03 1, Vilaflor, Tenerife  
19-03 3, Amerilla Golf, Tenerife (also 20-03, 21-03)  
21-03 1, near Punta de la Rasca, Tenerife

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major canariensis*

18-03 1, La Caldera, Tenerife  
18-03 1, Las Lajas, Tenerife  
20-03 2, between Vilaflor and Las Lajas, Tenerife  
20-03 4, Las Lajas, Tenerife

Tenerife endemic subspecies. Locally common in pine forest and often remarkable tame. Gran Canaria has its own endemic subspecies *thanneri*.

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

Common on both El Hierro and Tenerife, from sea-level to at least 2100 metres above sea-level (at Las Lajas, Tenerife).

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

**Grey Wagtail***Motacilla cinerea cinerea*

- 19-03 2 (nesting pair), Golf del Sur, Tenerife

Birds from the Canary Islands are usually separated as *canariensis* but are included here in the nominate *cinerea* following 'Pipits & Wagtails' by Alström and Zetterström.

**Robin***Erithacus rubecula rubecula*

- 15-03 2, Hoya de El Pino, El Hierro  
15-03 15, circular walk near Raya la Llania, El Hierro  
16-03 several, between El Pinar and Hoya del Morcillo, El Hierro  
16-03 common, along TF-912 at k23, El Hierro  
17-03 1, near Santuario de Nuestra Senora de los Reyes, El Hierro

Robins breeding on El Hierro, La Palma and Gomera, somewhat surprisingly, all belong to the nominate *rubecula*. Birds of continental European origin are also regular winter visitors on the eastern islands.

**Tenerife Robin***Erithacus superbus*

- 18-03 5, La Caldera, Tenerife  
19-03 4, Erjos del Tanque, Tenerife  
20-03 1, Vilaflor, Tenerife

Canary Islands endemic (Tenerife and Gran Canaria). A fairly common breeding bird in parks, gardens and mixed and deciduous forest on Tenerife. This taxon is split from Robin *Erithacus rubecula*. The situation regarding Tenerife Robin on Gran Canaria has yet to be clarified, this could be another subspecies or even a separate (cryptic) species, see the article in Birding World, volume 18, no. 6, 2005.

**Blackbird***Turdus merula cabrerae*

Common on both El Hierro and Tenerife in parks, gardens and other areas with enough suitable vegetation.

Macaronesian endemic subspecies (Canary Islands and Madeira). A common breeding bird on the five western Canary Islands.

**Spectacled Warbler***Sylvia conspicillata orbitalis*

- 16-03 several heard, between El Pinar and Restinga, El Hierro  
19-03 6 (3 pairs), area just north of Golf del Sur, Tenerife  
20-03 1, Amerilla Golf, Tenerife

Macaronesian endemic subspecies (Canary Islands, Madeira, Cape Verde Islands). A fairly common resident breeding bird on all Canary Islands. Birds from the more humid western Canary Islands are darker than birds from the arid eastern islands (and approach the nominate *conspicillata*), a situation which is identical to those on the Cape Verde Islands.

**Sardinian Warbler** *Sylvia melanocephala melanocephala*

- 16-03 4, Las Puntas, El Hierro (also 17-03)  
16-03 several, between Echedo and Charco Manso, El Hierro  
16-03 3, near El Pinar, El Hierro  
16-03 2, reservoir near Frontera, El Hierro (also 17-03)  
17-03 several, near Santuario de Nuestra Senora de los Reyes, El Hierro  
19-03 6, Erjos del Tanque, Tenerife  
19-03 2, Golf del Sur, Tenerife  
21-03 2, Golf Los Palos, Tenerife

Birds from the Canary Islands are sometimes separated as *leucogastra* but are included here in the nominate *melanocephala* for various reasons following ‘Sylvia Warblers’ by Shirihai, Gargallo & Helbig. The situation regarding (aberrant) Sardinian Warblers on Gran Canaria has yet to be clarified, this could be another subspecies or even a separate (cryptic) species, although from my own (limited) experience I cannot tell any difference from birds on Tenerife.

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla heineken*

- 15-03 2, Hoya de El Pino, El Hierro  
16-03 several heard, between San Andres and El Pinar, El Hierro  
16-03 several heard, between El Pinar and Restinga, El Hierro  
16-03 several heard, between El Pinar and Hoya del Morcillo, El Hierro  
16-03 several, along TF-912 at k23, El Hierro  
17-03 1, near Santuario de Nuestra Senora de los Reyes, El Hierro  
19-03 several, Erjos del Tanque, Tenerife  
20-03 2, Amerilla Golf, Tenerife  
21-03 3, Golf Los Palos, Tenerife

This subspecies also occurs on Madeira and in Portugal and south-west Spain. The nominate *atricapilla* is a migrant and winterer. The melanistic morph of *heineken* is most common on Madeira, where I saw a male on May 30<sup>th</sup> 1997 in the Jardim Bôtanica in Funchal. I never saw this melanistic morph on any of the Canary Islands.

**Canary Islands Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus canariensis canariensis*

Common on both El Hierro and Tenerife, from sea-level to at least 2200 metres above sea-level (at Montana de Roque, Tenerife). Even recorded on the grounds of our hotel in Costa Adeje.

Canary Islands endemic (El Hierro, La Palma, Gomera, Tenerife, Gran Canaria). An abundant resident breeding bird. The form *exsul*, that occurred only on Lanzarote, is sadly almost certainly extinct. This taxon is split from both Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* and Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus* (formerly named *Phylloscopus brehmii*). Both occur on migration, primarily on the eastern islands.

**Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita collybita*

- 19-05 1, Golf del Sur, Tenerife  
21-03 1, Golf Los Palos, Tenerife

### **Canary Islands Goldcrest** *Regulus teneriffae teneriffae*

- 18-03 8, La Caldera, Tenerife
- 19-03 heard, Erjos del Tanque, Tenerife
- 20-03 15, Las Lajas, Tenerife

Canary Islands endemic (Gomera and Tenerife). A fairly common breeding bird in both pine- and mixed forest on Tenerife. This taxon is split from Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*.

### *Regulus teneriffae ellenthalerae*

- 15-03 5, circular walk near Raya la Llania, El Hierro
- 16-03 4, Hoya del Morcillo, El Hierro
- 16-03 20, along TF-912 at k23, El Hierro

Canary Islands endemic (El Hierro and La Palma). A fairly common breeding bird on El Hierro. This taxon has only recently been described and is probably another cryptic (sub)species. A potential split. See the article <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/mksg/jab/2006/00000037/00000004/art00011;jsessionid=aqhd0kc6jp6q3.alice?format=print> and the taxonomic note under Tenerife Kinglet.

### **Tenerife Blue Tit**

### *Cyanistes teneriffae*

- 18-03 4, La Caldera, Tenerife
- 19-03 heard, Erjos del Tanque, Tenerife
- 20-03 14, Las Lajas, Tenerife

Canary Islands endemic (Gomera, Tenerife, Gran Canaria). A common resident in all kinds of vegetated areas. This taxon is considered monotypic after the splitting of the *Caeruleus*-group as Blue Tit, *ultramarines* and *cyrenaicae* as Ultramarine Blue Tit, *palmensis* as Palma Blue Tit, *degener* as Fuertaventura Blue Tit and *ombriosus* as Hierro Blue Tit.

### **Hierro Blue Tit**

### *Cyanistes ombriosus*

- 15-03 4, Hoya de El Pino, El Hierro
- 15-03 20, circular walk near Raya la Llania, El Hierro
- 16-03 6, Hoya del Morcillo, El Hierro
- 16-03 12, along TF-912 at k23, El Hierro
- 17-03 7, Hoya del Morcillo, El Hierro
- 17-03 2, Las Puntas, El Hierro

El Hierro endemic. A common resident on El Hierro in all kind of vegetated areas, from sea-level to at least 1300+ meters above sea-level. See also the taxonomic notes under Tenerife Blue Tit.

### **Southern Grey Shrike**

### *Lanius meridionalis koenigi*

- 21-03 1, near Punta de la Rasca, Tenerife

Canary Islands endemic subspecies (Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Fuertaventura, Lanzarote). A resident breeding bird on the Canary Islands, more common on the eastern islands. This subspecies is part of the *Meriodionalis*-group. The *Excubitor*-group is considered a separate species (Great Grey Shrike), as well as the taxon *pallidirostris* (Steppe Grey Shrike).

**Raven***Corvus corax ssp.*

- 15-03 1, Hoya de El Pino, El Hierro  
16-03 1, near San Andres, El Hierro  
16-03 3, just south of El Pinar, El Hierro  
16-03 2, between El Pinar and Hoya del Morcillo, El Hierro

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. This subspecies itself is sometimes considered a separate species (African Common Raven), see the article in Dutch Birding, volume 28, no. 5, 2006.

**Spanish Sparrow***Passer hispaniolensis hispaniolensis*

Common on both El Hierro and Tenerife in villages and towns.

**Rock Sparrow***Petronia petronia petronia*

- 16-03 35, just south of El Pinar, El Hierro

The birds from the Canary Islands and Madeira are sometimes separated as *madeirensis* but are included here in the nominate *petronia*.

**Chaffinch***Fringilla coelebs canariensis*

- 18-03 10, La Caldera, Tenerife  
19-03 heard, Erjos del Tanque, Tenerife

Canary Islands endemic subspecies (Gomera, Tenerife, Gran Canaria), synonym *tintillon*. Although described as a common bird we found it rather scarce and localised and only in mixed and deciduous forest. This subspecies is part of the *Canariensis*-group, which consist of the subspecies *canariensis*, *palmae* (La Palma), *ombriosa* (El Hierro), *maderensis* (Madeira) and *moreletti* (Azores). The *Canariensis*-group is sometimes considered a separate species (Atlantic Chaffinch) or even 5 different species. A potential split.

*Fringilla coelebs ombriosa*

- 15-03 10, Hoya de El Pino, El Hierro  
15-03 12, circular walk near Raya la Llania, El Hierro  
16-03 heard, Hoya del Morcillo, El Hierro

El Hierro endemic subspecies. A rather scarce and localised bird, only found in mixed and deciduous forest. See also the taxonomic notes under Chaffinch. A potential split.

**Blue Chaffinch***Fringilla teydae teydae*

- 18-03 6, La Caldera, Tenerife  
20-03 20, Las Lajas, Tenerife

Canary Islands endemic. On Tenerife the subspecies *teydae* is a common bird in mixed and pine forest and often remarkable easy to observe. On Gran Canaria rare and difficult to find and of the different subspecies *polatzeki*.

**Canary***Serinus canaria*

- 15-03 12, Las Puntas, El Hierro (also 16-03, 17-03, 18-03)  
16-03 common, between Echedo and Charco Manso, El Hierro  
17-03 common, reservoir near Frontera, El Hierro (also 18-03)  
18-03 2, Vilaflor, Tenerife (also 20-03)  
19-03 15, Garachico, Tenerife  
19-03 20, ponds near Erjos del Tanque, Tenerife  
20-03 22, Las Lajas, Tenerife

Macaronesian endemic (Canary Islands, Madeira, Azores). In the Canary Islands this is a common bird (except on the eastern islands), recorded in a variety of habitats. Monotypic.

**Linnet***Carduelis cannabina meadewaldoi*

- 16-03 3, near San Andres, El Hierro

Canary Islands endemic subspecies (El Hierro, La Palma, Gomera, Tenerife and Gran Canaria). Apparently quite common but we recorded only three birds. On the eastern islands the subspecies *harterti* occurs, another Canary Islands endemic subspecies

**Corn Bunting***Emberiza calandra*

- 15-03 3, near San Andres, El Hierro (also 16-03, 17-03)  
20-03 2, Vilaflor, Tenerife

Now generally considered monotypic and occurring on all Canary Islands, but scarce on the eastern islands.

## Other interesting Canary Islands birds (we did not see)

**Bulwer's Petrel***Bulweria bulwerii*

Macaronesian endemic (Canary Islands, Madeira, Selvagens, Cape Verde Islands). Is generally present from April to September, colonies on offshore islands are present on Tenerife, El Hierro and off northern Lanzarote. We were probably too early to see this bird although it is often only seen from ferries between the islands (that we did not use this trip). I saw 4 birds on an evening-crossing between Tenerife and Gran Canaria on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 1990.

**White-faced Storm Petrel** *Pelagodroma marina hypoleuca*

Birds from the Cape Verde Islands are usually separated as *eadesi* but following 'The Birds of the Cape Verde Islands' by Hazevoet all breeding birds from Macaronesia are attributed to the subspecies *hypoleuca*. This is a common breeding bird on the Selvagens but rarely recorded in the waters of the Canary Islands (and Madeira) and only breeding on some remote islands north of Lanzarote.

**Madeiran Petrel***Oceanodroma castro*

In the Western Palearctic this bird is known as a breeding bird from the Canary Islands, Madeira, Selvagens, Azores and off Portugal. This is an apparent winter breeder on the Canary Islands, present from September to February. On Tenerife there are offshore colonies on remote islets like the Roques de Anaga on the North coast. Madeiran Petrels are usually not recorded from land or ferry-crossings, so the best way to see this bird is perhaps visit the more accessible breeding colonies on Madeira or the Selvagens. To complicate things: in the Azores, Madeira and probably also the Cape Verde Islands, there is both a winter-breeding and a summer-

breeding-population, that differs to such an extent that they both are perhaps better considered separate species. I was lucky enough to see a Madeiran Petrel (my only one ever) from the ferry Funchal (Madeira) - Porto Santo on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 1997. This bird was seen on the return trip in the evening at about 20.05h, when the ferry was closest to the Desertas, foraging in a small group of Bulwer's Petrels close to the ferry. This was probably a 'summer-breeding' bird.

**Little Shearwater** *Puffinus baroli*

Macaronesian endemic (Canary Islands, Madeira, Selvagens, Azores). This bird is a scarce resident in the Canary Islands, it apparently breeds from March to June and is therefore most likely observed from the shores in the summer and autumn when they visit their colonies. During a visit to Tenerife in August 1990 I saw for instance 4 on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 51 on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August in the evening from Puerto de la Cruz (flying to the colony on the Roque de Garachico ?). This taxon is considered monotypic after the splitting of *boydi* as Cape Verde Little Shearwater, *persicus* as Persian Shearwater (vagrant in the WP), *bailloni* as Baillon's Shearwater (vagrant in the WP) and *iherminieri* as Audubon's Shearwater.

**Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus granti*

Macaronesian endemic (Canary Islands and Madeira). In the Canary Islands breeds on El Hierro, La Palma, Gomera and Tenerife. Apparently quite common but we did not record it on this trip. I saw 2 birds (a pair) on August 13<sup>th</sup> 1990 from the second viewpoint at Erjos, Tenerife.

**Houbara Bustard** *Chlamydotis undulata fuertaventurae*

Canary Islands endemic subspecies, only occurring on Fuerteventura and Lanzarote. This taxon is split from *macqueenii* (Macqueen's Bustard) and consists of the subspecies *fuertaventurae* and the nominate *undulata*. All my efforts to see this bird in August 1990 on Fuerteventura failed and any useful tips to see this bird are most welcome !

**Cream-coloured Courser** *Cursorius cursor cursor*

Birds from the Canary Islands (Fuerteventura, Lanzarote and perhaps Gran Canaria) are sometimes separated as *bannermani* (and those from the Cape Verde Islands as *exsul*) but are all included here in the nominate *cursor* following BWP and 'The Birds of the Cape Verde Islands' by Hazevoet. I saw 9 birds on Fuerteventura on August 18<sup>th</sup> 1990.

**Laurel Pigeon** *Columba junoniae*

A Canary Islands endemic. A scarce breeding bird on Tenerife, but more common and easier to see on Gomera and La Palma. I saw 1 flying bird on August 11<sup>th</sup> and 2 on August 13<sup>th</sup> 1990 from the second viewpoint at Erjos, Tenerife. Due to bad weather-conditions (fog) we did not see this bird on this trip.

**Barn Owl** *Tyto alba alba / gracilirostris*

All birds from the Canary Islands belong to the nominate *alba* except birds from the eastern islands (Fuerteventura and Lanzarote), that belong to the Canary Islands endemic subspecies *gracilirostris*. I never saw this bird on any of the Canary Islands due to its secretive behaviour.

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

Canary Islands endemic subspecies. There is now general consensus that on Tenerife two different subspecies occur: *rufescens* in a small area of cultivated fields around La Laguna and Los Rodeos-airport in the North and *polatzeki* in the arid south (contra BWP). Both subspecies are rare on Tenerife and it is even feared that *rufescens* is on the brink of extinction. On the other hand, *polatzeki* is a common bird on the eastern islands and also occurs on Gran Canaria. Reports of birds seen on La Palma need confirmation. I recorded numerous *polatzeki* on a visit to Fuerteventura in August 1990, but searched in vain for *rufescens* on this trip.

**Canary Islands Chat**      *Saxicola dacotiae dacotiae*

Fuertaventura endemic. Not a common bird but easy to find in the right habitat. The form *murielae*, that formerly occurred on Alegranza and Montaña Clara (off northern Lanzarote), is sadly extinct since 1913.

**Greenfinch**      *Carduelis chloris ssp.*

It is unclear to what subspecies Greenfinches belong that occur on the Canary Islands. Sometimes they are attributed to *aurantiiventris*, but on geographical grounds the subspecies *vanmarli* is more likely. If these birds are introduced (as happened on the Azores) it will be even more difficult to establish their true taxonomic status.

**Trumpeter Finch**      *Bucanetes githagineus amantum*

Canary Islands endemic subspecies. Scarce on Gomera, Tenerife and Gran Canaria but common on Fuertaventura and Lanzarote.

For any questions, remarks, et cetera please contact:

E.J. Alblas, The Netherlands  
[ej.alblas@kpnplanet.nl](mailto:ej.alblas@kpnplanet.nl)