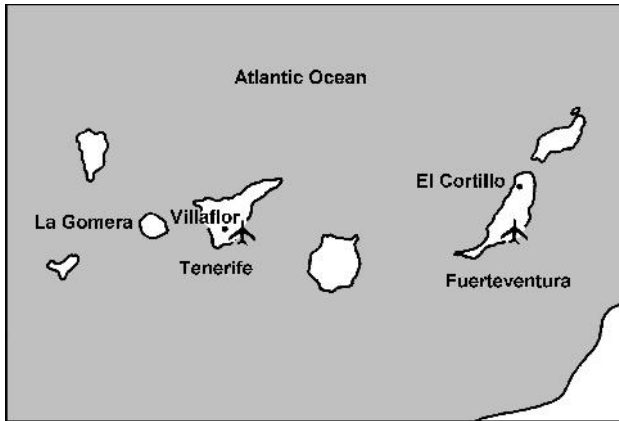


# CANARY ISLANDS

*the endemic birds of Tenerife, La Gomera and Fuerteventura*



Few of the many thousands of tourists who visit this archipelago stray far from its sun-kissed beaches. But the volcanic grey sands which give the beaches a very unusual appearance are just a tiny part of the natural wonders of the Canaries. Dormant volcanoes, remote mountain valleys, cloud forests and deserts combine with endemic birds to make this a holiday not to be missed.

On Tenerife, a journey of less than an hour takes us from the coast, through euphorbia scrub, past numerous extinct small volcanoes, into pine forests and finally to the foot of Mount Teide. At 12,198 feet it is higher than any mountain in the Pyrenees.

Fuerteventura's dry climate has produced a very different landscape, which more closely resembles North Africa than the western islands. The birdlife too is very different and is characterised by those species which prefer dry stony deserts and sand dunes. Furthermore, it is home to the most restricted of all the endemics, the Fuerteventura Chat.

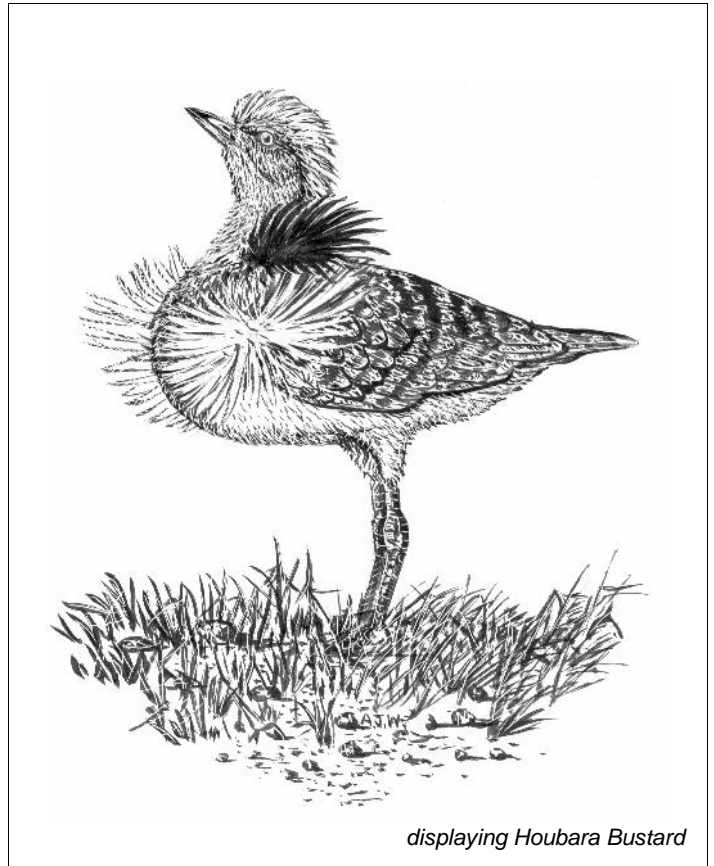
In order to appreciate the full diversity of birdlife that these islands have to offer we will spend three nights on Fuerteventura and four nights on Tenerife. From Tenerife we will also visit La Gomera on a day trip. The species list is not long and the birdwatching will be unhurried, but there is great quality in the rare and endemic species that we will see. We know of reliable sites for all the key species.

## ITINERARY

### FUERTEVENTURA

Fuerteventura closely resembles the hot, sandy deserts of North Africa, just 70 miles to the east. It still gives away its origins with impressive extinct volcanoes and craters, but the dry climate has made its mark on the landscape. Huge sand dunes are home to a few North African species while others prefer the stony deserts which cover most of the island.

First and foremost, our visit to Fuerteventura will take us in search of the most restricted of all the eastern Atlantic endemics. The Fuerteventura Chat, a relative of our Stonechat, is not difficult to find in suitable habitat. These beautiful birds favour dry stony river beds and broken ground. In the same dry barrancos we can also find Southern Grey Shrikes and Sardinian Warblers, alongside the common and easy to see Spectacled Warbler. In the stony desert-like plains a number of birds typical of North Africa can be found. Black-bellied Sandgrouse are fairly common and Lesser Short-toed Larks are very numerous. Hoopoes can be seen



*displaying Houbara Bustard*

feeding at the edge of cultivated fields and Spanish Sparrows frequent the towns. Trumpeter Finches call to each other as they move about in small parties, scratching out a living from this dry habitat. Stone Curlews can be heard giving their evocative, melancholy calls at dawn and dusk. While walking through the broken ground we may flush a party of Barbary Partridges and we must always keep an eye open for Egyptian Vultures.

Plain Swifts breed throughout the islands and are fairly common, and we can also expect to see Pallid Swift.

A large pool in the centre of the island has recently attracted a few immigrant Marbled Ducks, alongside Coot and Moorhen, two species which are themselves scarce on these islands. Even Ruddy Shelduck has started to breed, but whether these remain for future years, when the original population is so small, remains to be seen. Our recent tours also yielded surprises, including Ring-necked Duck, Baillon's Crake, Little Crake, Spoonbill, Collared Pratincole and Palm Dove.

We shall endeavour to find the two most exciting North African species; the Cream-coloured Courser and Houbara Bustard. Both frequent the sandy dunes and stony deserts which are a feature of the island. The former is one of the most elegant of all birds while the latter is highly endangered. The sight of a magnificent Houbara Bustard will provide one of the many highlights of this holiday.

## TENERIFE

After a short flight we will find ourselves on Tenerife, our base for the next four nights. The island is home to most of the Macaronesian endemic birds, as well as numerous endemic subspecies. It is the largest island in the Canaries archipelago. However, as the crow flies, one has only to travel about six miles from the coast to Mt Teide.

We will stay in the beautiful interior of the island, at Vilaflor. Our hotel is the lovely Hotel Villalba, a spa hotel which boasts five or six Canary Island endemics in its garden!

At about 5000 feet the endemic Canary Island Pine starts to predominate. Here, life is very difficult for wildlife as there is practically no standing water due to the porous volcanic rocks. Any bird that lives here must be totally adapted to its environment. Tenerife's most famous endemic, the Blue Chaffinch lives here. Very few other species share this demanding habitat, though Great Spotted Woodpeckers have found a niche. We will also see the Tenerife race of the recently split African Blue Tit, with neat black crown and brilliant blue mantle.

At about 6500 feet we leave the pine forests and come to a gigantic crater called Las Canadas del Teide. With a diameter of about 12 miles, it is visually awe inspiring, but supports very little bird life. One species does scrape out a living here. The Berthelot's Pipit is so perfectly adapted to life on these islands that it can survive in even the most inhospitable parts.

On the north facing slopes, where the wind brings damp air from the Atlantic, there is a totally different habitat. The Laurel forests are home to a much richer diversity of bird and plant life. Two species of bird have evolved to live in this habitat and are found nowhere else but in the laurel forests of Tenerife and La Gomera. These are the rare Bolle's Laurel Pigeon and the White-tailed Laurel Pigeon.

The Tenerife Kinglet is common here. Taxonomists have switched between treating it as a race of the Firecrest and Goldcrest, but more recently some believe it is a species in its own right.

The Chaffinch which inhabits this threatened forest habitat has also evolved a very different appearance to the mainland birds. Although not as far down the evolutionary path as Blue Chaffinch, these birds are nevertheless very striking, with blue backs and peachy underparts.

Avoiding the dense Laurel forest, the sprightly Canary inhabits woodland edges and hedgerows in northern Tenerife. This wild ancestor of the familiar domestic bird is fairly common and should give good views.

Barbary Falcons nest in small numbers. Little Egrets can be seen feeding in coastal rock pools, alongside the dark-

looking local race of the Yellow-legged Gull and there is a small population of Cattle Egrets.

On one day we will take a car ferry across to La Gomera. From the boat we hope to see both Barolo Shearwater and Cory's Shearwater. As well as the seabirds, there are large numbers of Bottle-nosed Dolphins and Short-finned Pilot Whales, which also take advantage of the rich feeding. On La Gomera, there is some well preserved laurel forest with easy access, where we have a good chance of seeing the Canary Islands' most elusive endemic, the White-tailed Laurel Pigeon. La Gomera is a very peaceful island, with great beauty in its forests and rocky peaks. It will provide a lovely ending to an exciting week's birdwatching.

## CLIMATE AND PACE

We can expect warm, sunny weather on Fuerteventura. The island is named after it's wind, but we have not found this to be a feature of our March trips. On Tenerife and La Gomera we can expect sunny weather, but with a chance of cloud developing over the north side of the island. Breakfast will be taken at about 7.30am most mornings. Basic fitness is all that is required. Full days will be spent in the field and short walks on the flat will be undertaken regularly. There will be little or no uphill walking.

## ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD

Full-board accommodation will be provided, with three nights at the Hotel Cortillo Beach, El Cotillo, Fuerteventura and four nights at the Hotel Villalba, Vilaflor, Tenerife. Rooms are en-suite. The Hotel Villalba is a fantastic hotel; one of the best that we use. Packed lunches will be provided every day.

## PRICE INCLUDES .....

All birdwatching excursions with expert leader, full-board accommodation (starting with dinner on 13<sup>th</sup>, ending with breakfast on 20<sup>th</sup>), soft drinks at meal times, bottled water throughout, local transport by minibus, internal flight between Fuerteventura and Tenerife, ferry to La Gomera, and international flight and airport taxes.

## WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

Travel insurance. Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

## INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Return flights from Manchester to Fuerteventura, returning from Tenerife, using the scheduled services of Jet2. Outbound flight departs early/mid morning, return flight arrives back early evening. It is also possible to join this trip from Leeds/Bradford and London Gatwick Airport.

<b>7 nights:</b>	<b>13<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> March 2015</b>
<b>Principal leader:</b>	<b>Paul J. Willoughby</b>
<b>Maximum group size:</b>	<b>7 clients with one leader or 13 clients with two leaders</b>
<b>Cost with discount (if you book before 28<sup>th</sup> November 2014):</b>	<b>£1595 per person sharing (£210 single supplement)</b>
<b>Full Cost:</b>	<b>£1695 per person sharing</b>
<b>Deposit:</b>	<b>£300 per person</b>