

# Fuerteventura 18-25/8 2015

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## Finding a Houbara



Tindaya Plain – but where are the bustards.

### Introduction

Fuerteventura is together with Lanzarote the ones of the Canary Islands that is situated closest to African mainland. The island is actually not a birding destination, more popular among wind surfers of different types.

To go there is easy, just grab a cheap charter trip, rent a car and go birding. The flight from Stockholm is a 5 ½ hour trip, no stop over.

We had chosen to stay in Corralejo, a rather small, but touristy town on the northern coast, far away from the very touristy Jandia peninsula in the south. Also close to birding areas like Tindaya Plain and the dam at Los Molinos.

It's a mainly deserted island with just a few dams, no woods and only with smaller stands of tiny trees and bushes in the "barrancos" making the number of species quite low, especially late summer. So don't expect an impressive trip list any time of the year.

Of course more species will be seen if going during the winter months or during migration periods. August is definitely **not the** month to go.

This was a family vacation with just the two endemics as target species. Houbara Bustard and Fuerteventura Chat is seen nowhere else in the world but on Fuerteventura.

## **Litterature**

For the sites we used:

A birdwatchers' guide to the Canary Islands, Tony Clarke & Dave Collins, 1996

Purchased 20 years ago but still very useful, at least for the sites we visited.

As field guide we used the one and only Fågelguiden (Field Guide), Svensson, Zetterström & Mullarney.

## **A few visited sites**

### **Los Molinos dam and barranco**

We followed the directions from the site guide and approached the dam from the northern end. The dirt road from the goat farm is really good so we drove all the way to ruin and parked. We scanned the dam and the only visible birds were Eurasian Coot, Ruddy Shelduck, Black-winged Stilt and one or two Gray Herons. After have used the scope a while some species of waders were added to the trip list. We also walked down in the barranco and found a number of passerines. Overhead a few Plain Swifts and flocks Black-bellied Sandgrouse were seen.



Los Molinos Dam

### **Tindaya Plain**

Leave the main road towards the village (first turnoff to the right if coming from Corralejo) and make the way through the village towards the sea. There is a poor but sealed road and

partly with quite big potholes just at the end of the village, can't be missed. Drive carefully, slowly will be the pace anyway if looking for the Houbaras.

**WARNING:** In Houbara Bustard habitat **do neither drive off the tracks nor leave the car!** Avoid any disturbance of the birds. The car is the best hide. You will not get Houbara Bustard down to your lens' minimum focus distance. First it will run, second it will fly. Hopefully eventually disturbed birds will not collide with a power line.

There are nowadays signs along the tarmac road out of Tindaya village begging visitors to stay on the public tracks and NOT walk out on the plain. Most of these tracks are passable with 2WD cars and ends up by the sea near a small beach. There were actually quite a lot of vehicles out here on all our visits. Probably it's less driving around during the winter.

***I found this "warning" from someone involved in the Houbara project on the internet.***

### La Oliva

If coming from Tindaya take to the left in La Oliva towards El Cotillo (signed) and just where the village ends (signed) take a dirt road to the left. Easy noticed due to a short but steep uphill. This road goes downhill past a settlement and then goes uphill and on the top one will be met by a fenced off area. This is a huge Houbara habitat, **nowadays fenced off** for preservation and studies of this species. We did not bother to look carefully as we had either short of time (first evening) or already seen Houbara (second visit).



La Oliva – signs at the fence.

### Las Peñitas/Vega de Rio Palmas

5 km south of Betancuria is the small village of **Vega de Rio Palmas**. At the end of the village there is a small sign towards the "barranco". Drive all the way down to the small bridge and park just before, it's space for 5-6 cars. The dam was empty when we visited the site. The walk through the area with reeds and tamarisks was nice. Sardinian and Spectacled Warbler, Turtle Dove, Hoopoe, Linnet and African Blue Tit were easily seen. This must be a very good spot to visit during the winter, seems to have a great potential.

### Parque Rural Parra Medina

Between Betancuria and Vega de Rio Palmas we found a dirt road that was fenced off, but with good parking space beside and easy to pass the fence (actually just a chain). We

walked the road uphill to find a few houses and some plantations in the "barranco". The area was quite bushy and seems to have a good potential in winter or at migration. Here we found a few Canaries, which was unexpected though this species should be absent on Fuerteventura according to the field guide. After some search on the internet showed that the canary is starting to spread on the island.



The dirt road up towards Parque Rural Parra Medina

## Species list

### **Ruddy Shelduck** (*Tadorna ferruginea*)

Around 200 Los Molinos 19 and 22/8.



### **Barbary Partridge** (*Alectoris barbara*)

10 La Oliva 18/8, 7 Tindaya plain 19/8 and 8 Betancuria 20/8.

**Cory's Shearwater** (*Calonectris diomedea*)  
15 Corralejo 24/8.

**Gray Heron** (*Ardea cinerea*)  
1 Los Molinos 19/8, 1 Vega de Rio Palma 20/8 and 2 Los Molinos 22/8.

**Little Egret** (*Egretta garzetta*)  
1 El Cotillo 24/8.

**Egyptian Vulture** (*Neophron percnopterus*)  
1 pair Vallebron 24/8.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** (*Accipiter nisus*)  
1 male Vega de Rio Palma 23/8.

**Eurasian Buzzard** (*Buteo buteo*)

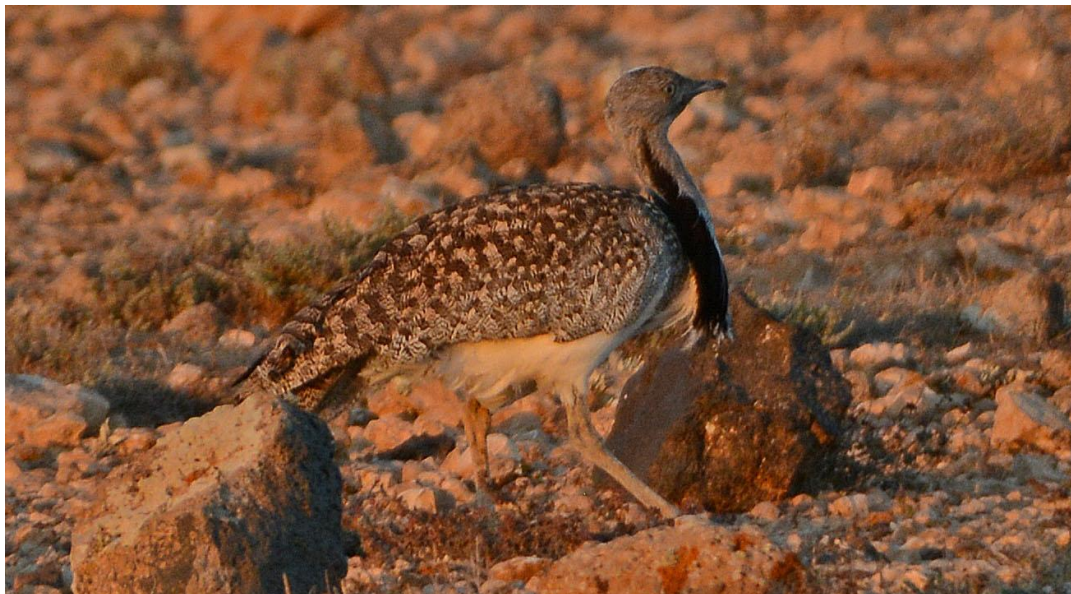
Fairly common.

Pairs or singles seen La Oliva, Tindaya plain, Los Molinos, Vega de Rio Palma, Parque Rural Purra Medina and Vallebron.

**Houbara Bustard** (*Chlamydotis undulata*)

1 male Tindaya plain 20/8 and 3 (2 males and 1 female) there 23/8.

*Excellent and quite close views from the car in the late afternoon.*



Houbara Bustard

**Eurasian Coot** (*Fulica atra*)  
70 Los Molinos 19 and 22/8.

**Black-winged Stilt** (*Himantopus himantopus*)

45 Los Molinos 19 and 22/8.

**Black-bellied Plover** (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

1 adult moulting into winter plumage El Cotillo 24/8.

**Snowy Plover** (*Charadrius alexandrinus*)

2 young ones Los Molinos 19/8.

**Common Ringed Plover** (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

15 adult El Cotillo 24/8.

**Little Ringed Plover** (*Charadrius dubius*)

10, mostly young birds, Los Molinos 19 and 22/8

**Common Sandpiper** (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

3 Los Molinos 19 and 22/8, 2 Corralejo 21/8 and 1 El Cotillo 24/8.

**Common Greenshank** (*Tringa nebularia*)

1 Los Molinos 22/8.

**Whimbrel** (*Numenius phaeopus*)

6 Corralejo 21/8, 1 Corralejo 23/8 and 3 El Cotillo 24/8.

**Eurasian Curlew** (*Numenius arquata*)

1 El Cotillo 24/8.

**Ruddy Turnstone** (*Arenaria interpres*)

15 Corralejo 21/8 and 1 Corralejo 23/8.

**Ruff** (*Calidris pugnax*)

4 female colored Los Molinos 22/8.

**Cream-colored Courser** (*Cursorius cursor*)

5 Los Molinos 22/8 and 4 La Oliva 24/8.

**Yellow-legged Gull** (*Larus michahellis*)

Common.

**Black-bellied Sandgrouse** (*Pterocles orientalis*)

2 Los Molinos 19/8 and 50 (40+3+7) 22/8.

*All flying over, landing somewhere on the other side of the dam, but behind a ridge and therefore out of sight.*



Cream-colored Courser

**Domestic Dove** (*Columba livia domestica*)

Very common, some very much reminding of original Rock Doves, were seen at Vega de Rio Palma.

**European Turtle-Dove** (*Streptopelia turtur*)

3 Vega de Rio Palma 20 and 23/8 and 3 Parque Rural Purra Medina 23/8.



European Turtle-dove

**Eurasian Collared-Dove** (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

Common.

**Plain Swift** (*Apus unicolor*)

3 Los Molinos 19/8 and 2 there 22/8.

**Pallid Swift** (*Apus pallidus*)

Up to 25 seen most days near our hotel in Corralejo.

**Eurasian Hoopoe** (*Upupa epops*)

1 La Oliva 19/8, 2 Los Molinos 19/8, 1 Corralejo 20/8 and 2 Vega de Rio Palma 20/8.  
*Also some more flying by along the road on various days.*

**Eurasian Kestrel** (*Falco tinnunculus*)

Common.

**Great Grey Shrike** (*Lanius excubitor*)

Common, up to 10 seen on a single day.



Great Grey Shrike of local race koenigi.

**Common Raven** (*Corvus corax*)

Common.

**Lesser Short-toed Lark** (*Calandrella rufescens*)

10 Tindaya plain 18/8, 50 La Oliva 20 and 24/8

**African Blue Tit** (*Cyanistes teneriffae*)

8 Vega de Rio Palma 20/8, 2 roadside some km south of Betancuria 20/8, 2 Betancuria 20/8, 5 Vega de Rio Palma 23/8 and 10 Parque Rural Purra Medina 23/8.  
*Only seen around Betancuria.*

**Sardinian Warbler** (*Sylvia melanocephala*)

3-5 Vega de Rio Palma 20 and 23/8, 1 Corralejo 21/8 and 5 Parque Rural Purra Medina 23/8.

**Spectacled Warbler** (*Sylvia conspicillata*)

2 Tindaya plain 18/8, 10 Vega de Rio Palma 20/8 and 5 Parque Rural Purra Medina 23/8.  
*More common than the previous species.*





African Blue Tit

**Fuerteventura Stonechat** (*Saxicola dacotiae*)

1 male Tindaya plain 19/8, 2 male Los Molinos 19/8, 1 pair Los Molinos 22/8 and 1 pair Parque Rural Purra Medina 23/8.

*The observations around Los Molinos were at two different places along the "barranco", at least 2 km from each other.*



Fuerteventura Stonechat

**Berthelot's Pipit** (*Anthus berthelotii*)

Common.

**Trumpeter Finch** (*Bucanetes githagineus*)

30 Los Molinos and 7 Tindaya plain 19/8, also 3 Tindaya plain 23/8.

**Eurasian Linnet** (*Carduelis cannabina*)

1 Tindaya plain 20/8, 10+20 Vega de Rio Palma 20 and 23/8.

**Island Canary** (*Serinus canaria*)

3 Parque Rural Purra Medina 23/8.



Berthelot's Pipit

**Spanish Sparrow** (*Passer hispaniolensis*)

Common.

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