

FUERTEVENTURA



20191224-20191231

Jens Stålberg

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Summary

The trip to Fuerteventura was not a dedicated birding trip, it was a family vacation with my wife and mother, where I spent five half days birdwatching, and the rest was lazy days with the family.

I did not aim for an as long trip list as possible, my goal was a number of target species in three categories.

1. Local birds, lifers to me: Houbara Bustard, Cream-colored Courser, Barbary Partridge, Egyptian Vulture, Lesser Short-toed Lark and Fuerteventura Chat.
2. Birds I wanted photos, or better photos, of: Plain Swift, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Ruddy Shelduck, Trumpeter Finch, Spanish Sparrow, African Blue Tit and Spectacled Warbler.
3. Local rarity: The since two years present Dwarf Bittern. I'm not that much into WP twitching, but could not resist trying to see this bird.

When I succeeded in seeing a bird and getting decent pictures of it, I moved to the next species, so I have not visited all the locations where they should be easy to spot, so don't take my list of locations as the best ones for each bird, they were good enough for me and my target.

As said, my goal was not a long trip list, I did not try to find the recently spotted local rarities that I have seen at home in Sweden, such as Olive-backed Pipit, Yellow-browed Warbler and Brambling. They were not far from my hotel, but I prioritized other birds.



Ruddy Shelduck, Barranco de Rio Cabras, 2019-12-27

Travel arrangements and preparations

Traveler

Jens Stålberg from Lund Sweden. jens.stalberg@gmail.com. Please contact me if you have any questions. For pictures from this or other trips, and my birding in general, please visit my website: www.mybirdies.se

The trip

This was a Charter Trip with Ving (the Swedish part of the recently bankrupted Thomas Cook, but the nordic part was not affected and everything worked really smooth.) We left Sweden on Christmas Eve and got back on New Years Eve. It was an all inclusive trip, the hotel was the 3+ (according to Ving) or 4 (according to the hotell) star hotel Drago Park in Costa Calma. The cost was about €1000 per person, a bit more expensive than normal due to the time of year, but pretty price worthy compared to other All-inclusive trips I have went for.

For birding, Costa Calma is not the ideal starting point, it is a bit too much to the south. But the distances are ok, I did not have to start any morning with more than 70 minutes of driving.

The car

We had a rental car from Avis all week. It was a Volkswagen Polo, that had done about 25.000 km. It was working very well and the roads were pretty good, so the 2WD was not an issue. My way of driving is that I drive as long as I'm fully comfortable, if I'm not I turn around, that was no problem during this trip. There were a few unpaved roads, but by travelling slowly and watching for potholes it was no issue. The suggestion from the Swedish motor society is to go for the cheapest insurance when you book, and then to make your trip as easy on your heart as possible, go for the full insurance on location. I paid about €200 for a week from home, and completed with an insurance of €135 while on location. About what I expected, and at least to me, it feels nice to know that I'm fully insured.

The bigger roads are good but small, so the average speed is pretty low. If you use Google Maps, the estimated times are fairly accurate, so use these to estimate your travel times on the island.

Litterature

I bought two new books, or rather two books and a DVD, and used my regular field guide.

- **Crossbill guides: Canary Islands I**

This is the last time I buy a Crossbill guide, those almost €30 did not give me anything at all. They are very focused on long walks, and that is not my aim when I'm abroad. It might suit other people, but not me.

- **Finding birds in the Canaries, Dave Gosney**

I have used Gosney's guide to Mallorca previously, both the book and the DVD, and I like them. The tempo is nice, and if you spend a little extra time to prepare, the maps are ok, but I really think he should switch to a better map format, the hand drawn ones are cute, but not perfect to follow. That said, the book and DVD gave me a lot. I watched the DVD a couple of times before leaving, and added the spots from the book/DVD to google maps before traveling, a really nice way of using modern IT to its best.

- **Collin's Bird Guide (Fågelguiden in Swedish), Lars Svensson**

There is no reason to use any other guide when going to the Canary Islands. I did not bring the book, I only used the app during my stay, it worked perfectly.

Other resources

- **EBird**

eBird is pretty frequently used on the Canary Islands, and I used it a lot when preparing for the trip. By combining the eBird results with the Gosney book and other visitor's trip reports, I could prepare myself pretty good before going.

- **Trip reports**

I read the trip reports I could find on club300.se and cloudbirders.com as I always do before my trips. My most important tip is to try to find reports from the same period of the year, since some tips can be pretty obsolete if the reports are from completely different parts of the year.

- **Google Maps**

I must add Google Maps to this list of resources. Before the trip started, I added over 80 different points to my Google Map, everything from parking lots, ponds, areas and so on. I created lists for each of my target species, so that I could easily search and sort for what I wanted to look at. This made my days very effective and I always know where to go when I was done with one spot, either due to success or failure at my goal.

Locations

As said in the summary, I did not visit all the locations I prepared. I visited the ones that looked the best, and if got my target, I did not visit other locations for the same species.

I have tried to summarize the best spots I visited. If you go through the species list and the itinerary, you will find some other spots, but these are the hotspots I want to recommend.

Approximate position of the locations described in this chapter.

A: Tindaya Plain

B: La Oliva

C: Barranco de las Peñitas

D: Barranco de Rio Cabras

E: La Calabaza



Eurasian Hoopoe, La Oliva, 2019-12-30

Tindaya Plain

The area between the towns of Tindaya, La Oliva and El Cotillo is often referred to as Tindaya Plain. The roads are not perfect throughout the whole area and I just visited the parts just north west of Tindaya. This was by far the best place I visited for the desert species.

Just a kilometer north west of Tindaya, there is a great spot to look for Houbara Bustard, Cream-colored Courser, Black-bellied Sandgrouse and Lesser Short-toed Lark. (28°36'16.6"N 14°00'02.3"W, "A" at the map below).

A couple of Bustards and Coursers was also seen from the red marked roads on the map.



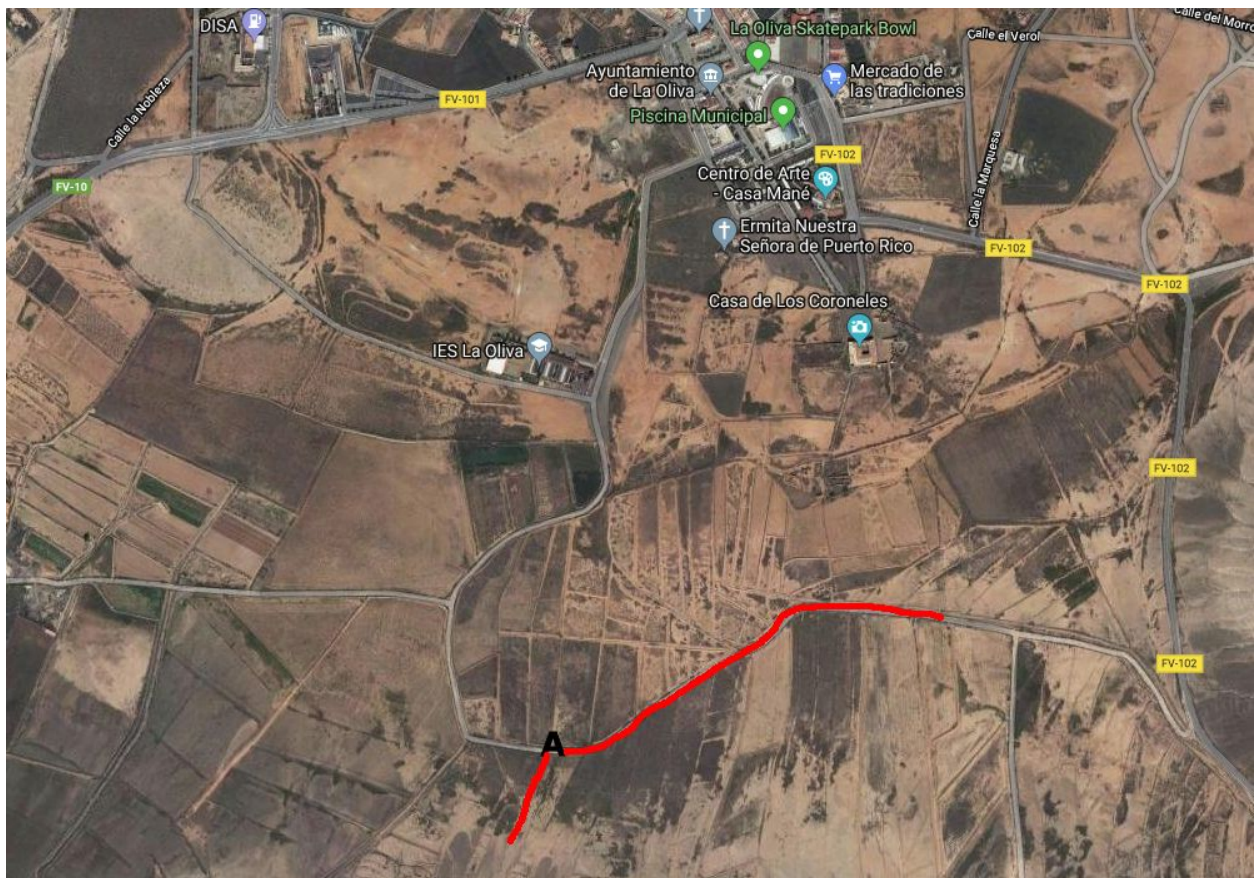
Tindaya Plain, NW of the village of Tindaya

La Oliva

Just south of the town of Oliva not far from Tindaya, was a great little spot for especially Barbary Partridge. They are present all over the island, but this was the only place I managed to get pictures of them.

Spectacled Warbler and Fuerteventura Chat was also there in good numbers, as well as Trumpeter Finch and Grey Shrike of the canary subspecies *koenigi*.

From the position “A” at the map ($28^{\circ}36'01.8''\text{N}$ $13^{\circ}55'49.8''\text{W}$) I had all the above species, and driving on the red marked roads gave close views of all of them and a few others.



Area south of the village of La Oliva

La Calabaza

This is not a place I have read about in any trip report, but for me, it was the best place for one of my target species. During the dry month of December, birds look for water, and just along the road is a small pond that attracts birds. Two of the three times I passed it and scanned it, there were a lot of swallows and swifts in the air, and I got really good views of Plain Swift, that was a target bird for me. I assume there are dozens of similar ponds in the area, but this one worked well for me. I stopped at the small parking at “A” ($28^{\circ}14'59.5''\text{N}$ $14^{\circ}06'36.4''\text{W}$).



Pond along the road FV-511 through La Calabaza



Plain Swift, La Calabaza, 2019-12-29

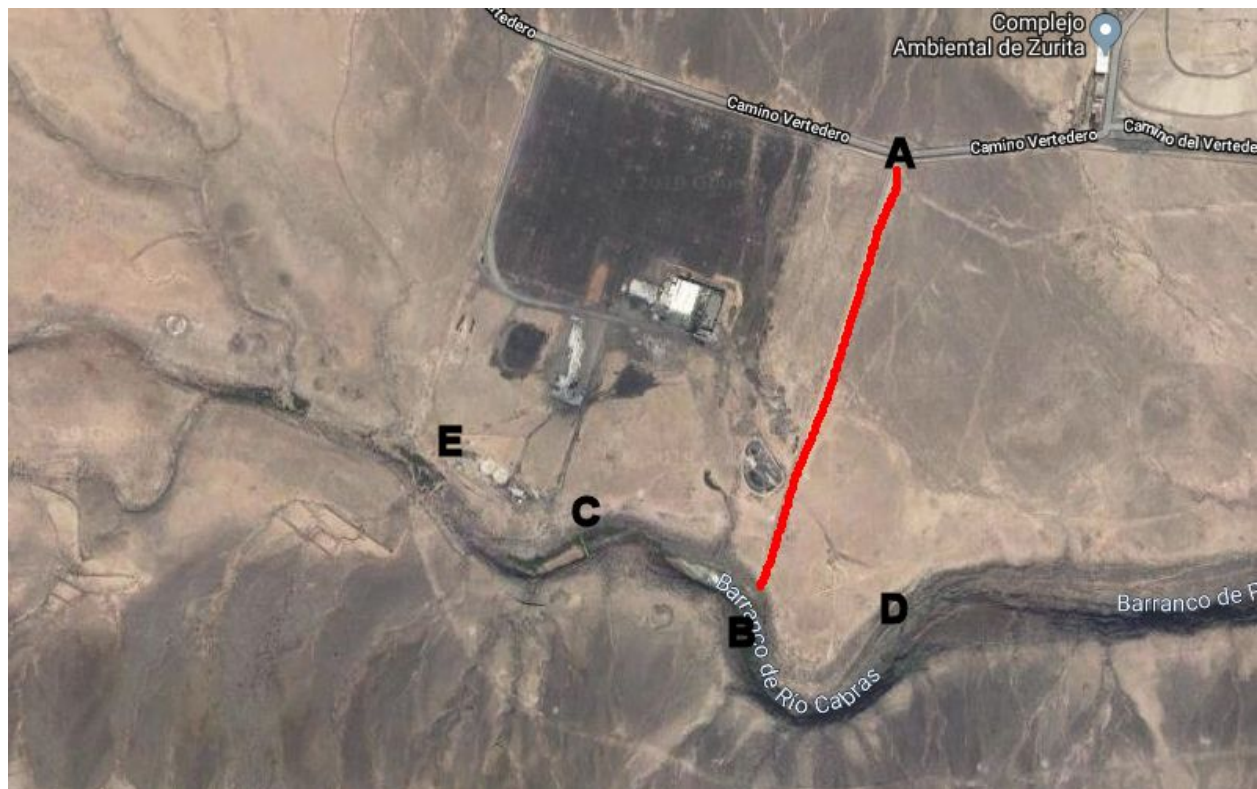
Barranco de Rio Cabras

This location is mostly famous for the Dwarf Bittern, the rarity that has been present during both 2018 and 2019. I was lucky enough to get a short observation of it, but far from everyone succeed. Park at "A" ($28^{\circ}28'49.3''\text{N}$ $13^{\circ}53'57.7''\text{W}$). There is a road a few hundred meters earlier on the road, but don't go down there, as it might be closed with a road barrier at noon. Walk down the red marked road to the barranco.

You will not see it at the map, but the barranco is really steep and is pretty tricky to walk and climb. I saw the Dwarf Bittern at "B". You can see it from the edge, but if you want to enter the barranco, do it from "C" or "D". To walk between "C" and "D" requires either to get your feet wet or some pretty serious climbing, so be prepared for that, turn back if you are not comfortable! The area is also by far the best place I found at the island for Egyptian Vulture. When I visited early morning, about 15 of them, both immature and adult, were sitting at the electricity poles at "E". A pair of Common Buzzard (ssp insularum) was there on all my visits as well.

Other birds at the location was Trumpeter Finches in good numbers and many pairs of Fuerteventura Chat down in the barranco.

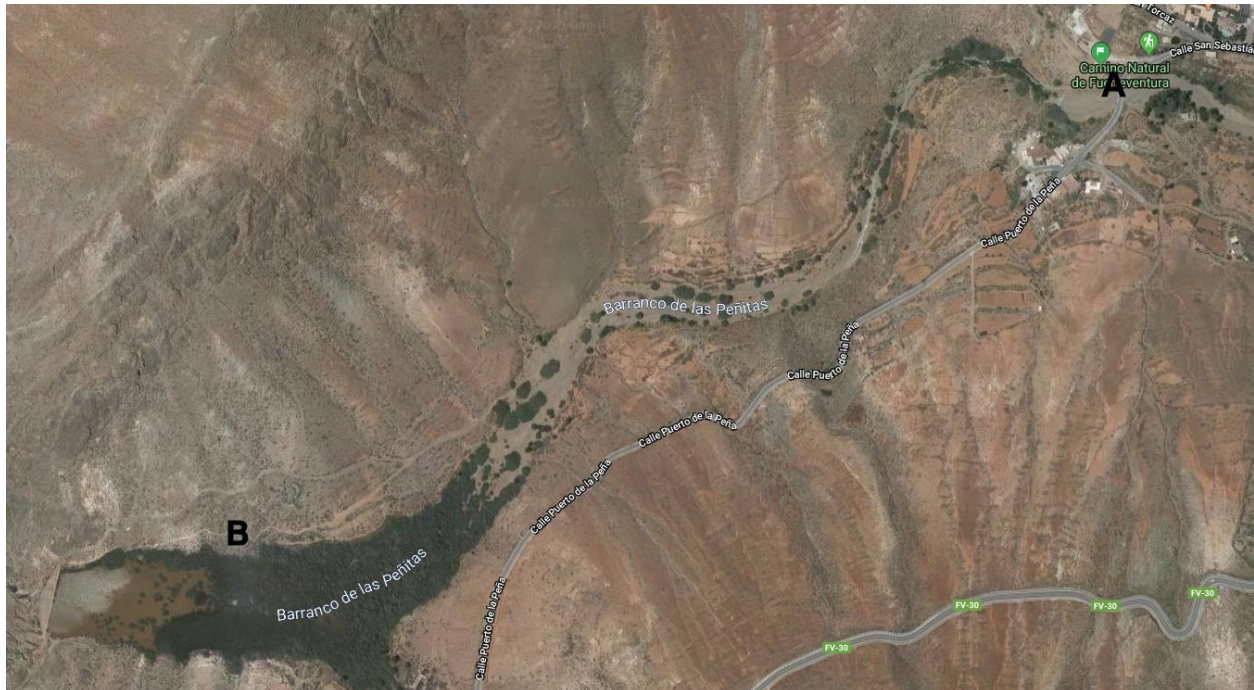
So even if the Dwarf Bittern would leave the area, it is still a site I'll recommend to pay a visit.



The segment of Barranco de Rio Cabras where the Dwarf Bittern has been seen

Barranco de las Peñitas

From the village of Vega de Rio Palma, you can enter the barranco. This was a good spot for African Blue Tit and I also had my only sighting of Peregrine Falcon (ssp pelegrinoides, previously Barbary Falcon). Compared to most other areas, the density of birds here were pretty good, so it might definitely be worth a visit. Park at “A” (28°23'37.0"N 14°05'15.9"W) and walk the barranco. I found birds pretty much all along the way down to “B” where I turned around.



Barranco de las Peñitas, SW of the village Vega de Rio Palma



African Blue Tit, Barranco de las Peñitas, 2019-12-29

Itinerary

So here is the birdwatching I did during my time at the island. Some species were seen on the “none birding days” and that is present in the bird list at the end, but not here, there are the focused birding (half) days.

December 26th

I left Costa Calma at 06.50, to reach Tindaya Plain at about 08.00. It was a bit cloudy so it was a bit darker than expected during the morning. On my way north I saw a Barbary Partridge, the first for the trip. It was sitting next to the road and I had no chance of getting a picture of it, but it was nice to see one at least.

After about an hour at Tindaya Plain, I had seen Black-bellied Sandgrouse and Ruddy Shelduck, but not much more, when the first Houbara Bustard showed up. It was a displaying male, a few hundred meters north of the road. Only minutes later a second one turned up south of the road. A flock of Lesser Short-toed Larks showed up as well as about 10 Cream-colored Coursers along the roads in the Area. I followed an unpaved road south and got really good views of both the Larks and a Houbara Bustard, a really magnificent sighting!



Lesser Short-toed Lark, Tindaya Plain, 2019-12-26

After Tindaya, I aimed for Los Molinas, a harbour and the biggest fresh-water reservoir at the island. Target species was Fuerteventura Chat. During the drive I had a couple of Plain Swifts over the road, but impossible to stop and take pictures of them, pretty frustrating. At the sea, a pair of chats have often been seen at the parking lot, but I didn't have any there. I had

Spectacled Warblers and Berthelot's Pipit. Two good birds, but not really targets to me since I have had them on other of the Canary Islands. I drove the road back inland and took off towards the fresh water reservoir and on my way there, I had a really nice sighting of a mail Fuerteventura Chat! It was sitting at the fence along the road displaying beautifully. I just turned around at the reservoir, the distances are huge, and it was pretty empty apart from some Ruddy Shelduck when I got there. I only had binoculars and a camera, no spotting scope, and as I stated earlier, my goal was not a long trip list.

After that, I went to a couple of locations stated as good for Egyptian Vulture. Raptors are always pretty special, and since I got a good look at an adult vulture from the trip from the airport to the hotel a couple of days earlier. I had high hopes but the suggest locations gave me nothing. So I headed back to the hotel at about 12.30.

December 27th

The second day started at about 07.00 from the hotel, and the goal was to search for the Dwarf Bittern at Barranco de Rio Cabras. Several Common Ravens (*ssp tingitanus*, possibly a split to African Common Raven), and Common Buzzards were seen on the way. The first real treat at the location was about 15 Egyptian Vultures at the Electricity Poles just west where I arrived at the barranco. First all of them sat on the posts, but later on, when it started to heat up, they flew by displaying the different moults beautifully. There where everything from 1st CY to adult birds.

Before entering the barranco, I also got nice views of Trumpeter Finches. In the barranco there is a bigger pool of water, and there were Eurasian Spoonbills, Black-winged Stilts, Little Ringed Plovers and a few other species. Several pairs of Fuerteventura Chats were there as well, but no bittern.



Eurasian Spoonbill, Barranco de Rio Cabras, 2019-12-27

I spent a couple of hours there, then I continued, this time through the western parts of the island. The landscape was a lot more dramatic, with higher mountains and steeper roads, but not many birds. A few soaring Egyptian Vultures and a couple of Barbary Partridges flying over the road was pretty much it.

December 28th

This was a bonus day, the idea was not to bird watch, but when we left the hotel pool area at about 15.00, I went out for a little drive in southern parts of the island, around Costa Calma. I tried to look for Black-bellied Sandgrouse in the village of La Pared, but I found nothing at all. I scanned the sea from the east just north of Costa Calma, and the only interesting bird was Lesser Black-backed Gulls that was flying along the coast. Some nice sightings of the Canary subspecies of Common Kestrel was the best view during this little extra trip.



Common Kestrel, Montaña Cardon, 2019-12-28

December 29th

I had got a tip regarding good views of Barbary Partridge, so I went to El Pinar, just south of the village of Betancuria. I arrived at about 08.00, it was really cold and windy at the location, not more than just above 10 degrees celsius, make sure to bring some warm clothes for this type of birding in the mornings. I heard a few of the partridges, but despite climbing around the hill sides for a few hours I did not get any good views or photos. Great Grey Shrike, Sardinian Warblers, Spectacled Warblers and African Blue Tits were possibly the best birds at the site.

After that I continued to Barranco de las Peñitas, where I got even better views of the species above, and there were also a pretty good amount of raptors, with both Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel and Peregrine Falcon present. All of these are interesting subspecies for the

Canary Islands. When leaving the area, I also got the journey's only view of Laughing Dove in the village of Vega de Rio Palma.



Spectacled Warbler, El Pinar, 2019-12-29

I did another try at the Dwarf Bittern this day, but still no luck. During this stay at the Barranco de Rio Cabras I got the same birds as at my previous visit.

December 30th

The last day started with a visit to the area south of the town La Oliva and this time I got lucky with the Barbary Partridges. I saw several of them, and got some nice photos. Other good birds in the area were Trumpeter Finches and Fuerteventura Chats.



Barbary Partridge, La Oliva, 2019-12-30

Happy with that achievement, I decided to make a last attempt to see the Dwarf Bittern, and this time I got lucky. I climbed down in the barranco and, long story short, I got a brief but good view of it, before it ran into the bushes and remained unseen for an hour when I tried to wait for it. With that nice experience in hand, my birding for this trip was over.

I found all my target species and the only little miss fortune was that I got no pictures of the Dwarf Bittern and no pictures of the Black-bellied Sandgrouse. But that is a nice price to pay considering all the nice experiences I got.

Bird List

A total of 41 species (plus two []-species) was seen during the trip. I could easily have been more if I had focused on migrants, ducks and shorebirds, but none of these were the targets, so I did not put no effort into that.

1. Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)

Common, seen in many different areas and biotopes. At least 30 seen in total.

2. Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

One pair seen in Los Molinos reservoir.

[Muscovy Duck] (*Cairina moschata*)

Several pairs seen at the harbour of Los Molinas.

3. Barbary Partridge (*Alectoris barbara*)

Seen 5 times, best south of La Oliva, 6. Other sightings: North of La Pared, south of Betancuria, in Almacigo and north of La Lajita.

4. Dwarf Bittern (*Ixobrychus sturmii*)

Known individual at Barranco de Rio Cabras, seen one time in three visits.

5. Western Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

1 seen flying of Costa Calma on Dec 24th.

6. Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Seen at all three visits at Barranco de Rio Cabras, 3 individuals.

7. Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

1 at Barranco de Rio Cabras on Dec 30th. 1 at Barranco de los Molinas on Dec 26th.

8. Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)

3 at Barranco de Rio Cabras on Dec 27th.

9. Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus majorensis*)

Seen at many places, soaring raptors are most likely Common Buzzards or Egyptian Vultures. Best place morning at Barranco de Rio Cabras 15, mixed ages from 1CY to adult.



Egyptian Vulture, Barranca de Rio Cabras, 2019-12-27

10. Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo insularum*)

Seen at many places, soaring raptors are most likely Common Buzzards or Egyptian Vultures. Best place morning at Barranco de Rio Cabras, what appeared to be a pair present at all three visits.



Common Buzzard, Barranco de las Peñitas, 2019-12-29

11. Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus dacotiae*)

Seen at many places, totally about 8-10 records, no specific spot better, just keep your eyes open and a few will be seen.

12. Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus pelegrinoides*, Barbary Falcon)

1 seen at Barranco de las Peñitas on Dec 29th.



Peregrine Falcon, Barranco de las Peñitas, 2019-12-29

13. Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

2 seen in the pond at La Calabaza on Dec 30th.

14. Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*)

2 seen in the pond at La Calabaza on Dec 30th.

15. Houbara Bustard (*Chlamydotis undulata fuertaventurae*)

3 individuals seen at Tindaya Plain on Dec 26th.

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

6-8 birds seen on every visit to Barranco de Rio Cabras.

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

8-10 birds seen in pairs at Tindaya Plain on Dec 26th.



Cream-colored Courser, Tindaya Plain, 2019-12-26

18. Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)

2-4 birds seen on every visit to Barranco de Rio Cabras.

19. Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)

1-2 birds seen on every visit to Barranco de Rio Cabras.

20. Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

1-2 birds seen on every visit to Barranco de Rio Cabras.

21. Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus michahellis atlantis*)

Abundant, seen pretty much anywhere at any time, both on the coasts, on smaller water bodies and inland.

22. Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)

A few seen by the sea just north of Costa Calma on Dec 28th. Not seen well enough to distinguish subspecies.

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

6 seen at Tindaya Plain on the 26th. No other sightings despite a few attempts at possibly good locations.

24. Rock Dove (*Columbia livia*)

Abundant, seen in most villages and hillsides in the barrancos. A lot in the villages with "Feral Pigeon colors" but many of the ones on the hill side looked more like "genuine" Rock Doves.

25. Eurasian Collared Dove (*Streptopelia Decaocto*)

Abundant, seen in all types of habitats, numerous at the hotel area as well as in the most remote mountains.

[African Collared Dove] (*Streptopelia roseogrisea*)

In many locations doves that both sounded like and looked good for African Collared Dove was spotted. But since these are not considered a twitchable species on the island, they were not really paid attention to or documented properly.

26. Laughing dove (*Spilopelia senegalensis*)

1 seen in the village of Vega de Rio Palma, at the parking to the Barranco de las Peñitas on Dec 29th.

27. Plain Swift (*Apus unicolor*)

2 seen at FV-221 1 km west of the crossing with FV-207 on Dec 26th. 15-20 seen on Dec 29th and 30th at La Calabaza together with Common House Martins.

28. Eurasian Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)

Seen in 4-5 places on the island. Best views on all visits to Barranco de Rio Cabras and to the area south of La Oliva on Dec 30th.

29. Lesser Short-toed Lark (*Alaudala rufescens polatzeki*)

A group of 30-40 birds seen at Tindaya Plain on Dec 26th. A few possible other groups spotted from the roads, possibly easy to spot if more time is spent on those groups.

30. Common House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*)

3-4 birds seen on Dec 29th and 30th at La Calabaza together with Plain Swifts.

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

Abundant, seen in pretty much any type of habitat and on most stops. The last one was seen in the rental car parking at the airport just before leaving.



Berthelot's Pipit, Barranco de Rio Cabras, 2019-12-27

32. White Wagtail (*Motacilla Alba*)

1-2 birds seen on all visits to Barranco de Rio Cabras, down in the barranco.

33. Fuerteventura Chat (*Saxicola dacotiae*)

Seen in 4-5 different locations, best was 4-6 birds south of La Oliva on Dec 30th and 6-8 birds at all visits to Barranco de Rio Cabras.



Fuerteventura Chat, Barranco de Rio Cabras, 2019-12-30

34. Sardinian Warbler (*Sylvia melanocephala*)

Common, seen and heard in many places, most numerous at Barranco de las Peñitas on Dec 29th and El Pinar south of Betancuria on Dec 29th.

35. Spectacled Warbler (*Sylvia conspicillata*)

Common, seen and heard in many places, most numerous at Barranco de las Peñitas on Dec 29th, El Pinar south of Betancuria on Dec 29th, Los Molinas Harbour on Dec 29th and south of La Oliva on Dec 30th.

36. African Blue Tit (*Cyanistes teneriffae degener*)

Seen in 4-5 places, best with 10-15 birds at Barranco de las Peñitas on Dec 29th and 2-3 birds at all visits to Barranco de Rio Cabras.

37. Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor koenigi*)

Common, seen at many places, best at El Pinar south of Betancuria on Dec 29th, the area south of La Oliva on Dec 30th and at all visits to Barranco de Rio Cabras.



Great Grey Shrike, Barranco de Rio Cabras, 2019-12-30

38. Common Raven (*Corvus corax tingitanus*)

Abundant, seen in all different habitats, even flying over the hotel in Costa Calma.



Common Raven, Tindaya Plain, 2019-12-26

39. Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*)

Abundant, seen and heard in every village and in most Barrancos.

40. Common Linnet (*Linaria cannabina harterti*)

10-15 birds seen south of La Oliva on Dec 30th.

41. Trumpeter Finch (*Bucanetes githagineus*)

Seen on all visits to Barranco de Rio Cabras and south of La Oliva on Dec 30th.



Trumpeter Finch, La Oliva, 2019-12-30