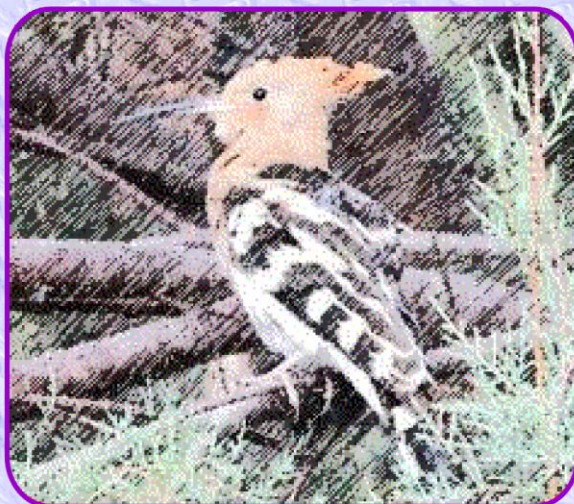


# Gran Canaria



# Spain



5<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2011



Thursday, 10th	Maspalomas Punta de las Carpinteras	7.00 – 10.30 10.30 – 11.15
Tuesday, 15th	Maspalomas Castillo del Romeral	7.00 – 9.00 9.30 – 11.00
Thursday, 17th	Puerto de Mogan seawatch	7.10 – 8.50

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## Introduction

After some misgivings and misapprehensions about visiting one of the Canary Islands, we chose Gran Canaria for a walking based holiday after some research revealed some excellent potential for this, and also the finding of an excellent base in Puerto de Mogan. The birding option was never part of the decision process, due to the importance of the hiking, or a better option in the islands would have been Fuerteventura. Indeed, Gran Canaria is probably one of the sparsest of the islands for variety of birds and also endemic mix. Having already seen some of these

Canarian endemics on an earlier visit to Tenerife, I didn't feel the need to trudge around the island chasing ticks, and with most of the holiday being based around hiking, I was happy to limit specific birding to a couple of mornings, and to see what popped up while trudging the countryside.

We were based in the small fishing town of Puerto de Mogan. This is geographically one of the poorer locations to be based, since it is on the far South-western coast of the island, but the decision was driven by the wont for charm rather than distance. This is one of the few tourist spots along the coast which still retains some character – no high rise, no brash manufactured activities or loud bars, and no McDonalds! Result. For convenience, somewhere like Maspalomas is somewhat nearer the main arterial roads, and also the lagoon near the beach, but it all depends on the type of base that is required. We also booked our flights and accommodation separately, rather than a cheaper package, which gave us the benefit of a very comfortable and well located apartment. There is a good bus service around the island, but a car can be hired for a more than reasonable price (we paid £150 for 2 weeks on the internet beforehand). The roads away from the main coastal carriageway can be very winding and narrow which makes for a longer journey than would be predicted. It is worth getting hold of the Kompass 1:50000 map of the island – a German legend, but probably the best one available.

There aren't a huge amount of birding specific sites on the island, and correspondingly not too many site guides. The most complete is the "Birdwatchers' Guide to the Canary Islands" by Clarke & Collins, although its publication date of 1996 does mean that many of the locations have changed in character (such as the lighthouse at Maspalomas). There are one or two endemics on the island, and many of the species are a distinct subspecies, yet are well covered in the more recent editions of the Collins Bird Guide (Mullarney et al).



## Hiking & Weather

The main objective of the trip was to cover some of the many walking trails in the mountains, which in itself should then uncover birds on the trails. We initially bought a copy of the Sunflower guide to Gran Canaria car tours and walks. This isn't a bad guide, but we found what we felt was a much better publication from the website of the self styled Rambling Roger (at [www.ramblingroger.com](http://www.ramblingroger.com)). He has produced a detailed and straight forward book outlining 25 mainly circular walks on the island, almost exclusively based in the interior. The book is apparently loose leaf, so that only the current walk needs to be carried. Of even more practical value is the PDF form which can also be purchased, and from this, again single routes can be printed off.

The Canaries are well known as having a warm and temperate climate all year round. We chose November in the hope of still warm but not too hot temperatures, and also a minimum of rain. Both were found – temperatures ranged from 14-28°C during the day (lowest was on one of the higher mountain walks), and with only the odd smattering of rain. Rain gear should still be packed for the higher altitudes in particular, since clouds seemed to threaten during the afternoon on many days.

## Maspalomas

(Day 1)



Parking seems to be a premium in the area of the Chaca (lagoon), in particular later on in the morning, so I was lucky to find one of the last spaces for on street parking adjacent to the oasis streets. This street cut through a few openings to find the lagoon directly in front of me. There were a few people around at this time of the morning, but not the crowds who would be more than an irritation later on. There is a boulevard which runs along the length of the lagoon, with the sand dunes on the opposite side. That side of the reserve is supposed to be off limits, but that dictat was of course ignored by a wanderer disturbing the birds. The boulevard does give excellent views of the chaca, which is very good for wading birds.

The best part of two hours was spent just strolling up and down this section, scouring the surrounding vegetation and small enclosed "park" (adjacent to the boulevard) as well as the water and surrounding mud. Most common water birds were Coot and Moorhen, with supporting Greenshank, Little Ringed Plover, & Grey Heron, but I was surprised to find three species classed as accidental – 3 Spoonbills (2 juveniles and an adult), 9 Ruddy Shelducks (all together on the mud to the North of the water), and a juvenile Greater Flamingo, initially circling over, and then coming to rest at the sea end of the lagoon. I had expected this part of the reserve to be open to the tidal influence of the sea, which it probably once was, but the sandy beach now bars this action. As with all other parts of the island, the most common passerines were Canary Islands Chiffchaffs, calling constantly from just about any habitat, but a small group of Waxbills came fairly close to in the reeds after a single Sardinian Warbler. In the "park" opposite the wet chaca – not so much a park as more a collection of loose trees surrounded by a fence – a small group of Hoopoes were playing and chasing, with seemingly a lack of regard for my presence.

Parakeets were also noisy residents within – Rose-ringed the most common and raucous, but a small group of Monk appeared, landing on a small fruiting tree to feed. I did walk a little further along to where the first bridge crossed the dry bed to meet with the camel riding area, but there didn't seem to be much of interest here.

As time progressed, the tourists and weirdos became a lot more abundant, along with a more than comfortable amount of exposed flesh that was more suited to being covered up making their way to the lure of the beach. So I decided to have a look around the lighthouse, which was at one time reported to be a good area for specialities such as Lesser Short-toed Lark. Predictably, the whole of the promenade following the sea from the lighthouse West has been built on, replacing the once rocky area with shops and restaurants. Unfazed, I set up the telescope seawards, and turned up a small group of Cory's Shearwaters circling what may have been a shoal of fish. Perched on some of the rocks were Whimbrel, Herring Gull, Ringed Plover, Sanderling and single Grey Plover. I did return again to the lagoon, but the masses of tourists were quite an annoyance by then.

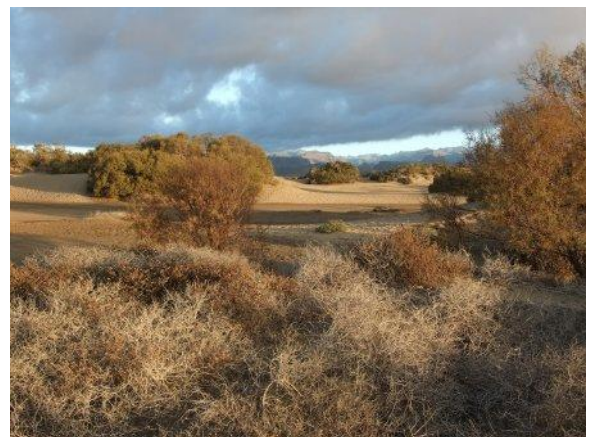
To try again for Lesser Short-toed Larks, I drove about 4km West out of Maspalomas towards Punta de las Carpinteras, and parked up next to a stony area which looked like suitable habitat. None were found, but I did turn up 4 Southern Grey Shrikes, Kestrel and Common Buzzard.



## Maspalomas

(Day 2)

The return here had an unexpected first hour or so. I arrived at the on street parking just after 7am, and decided to walk along the seaward end of the lagoon towards the sand dunes (and ranks of sun beds on the adjoining beach). They at first look like the imposing strength sapping mounds of sand, but a few minutes trudge towards the interior reveals a relatively well vegetated base with quite hard compacted ground to walk on. I had been excited by the (albeit unlikely) potential of such birds as Cream-coloured Courser here, due to signs next to the boulevard seemingly indicating a possibility of reintroduction or even re-colonisation. The reality may be that despite the potential which was apparent, and the presence of commoner birds such as Sardinian Warbler, Chiffchaffs, Canaries, Kestrel and Hoopoe, I also suspect that this is heavily trafficked by tourists, witnessed by the amount of footprints and waste bins throughout.



An hour or so back at the chaca followed. The Greater Flamingo present the previous visit seemed to leave seawards earlier, but was back again at its favoured spot at the sea end of the lagoon on my return. Predominant birds were again Coot (lesser numbers of Moorhen), but the Ruddy Shelduck were back on the exposed mud (with an increased

number of 11) and stayed around this time. There was only 1 Spoonbill with the 5 Grey Herons and single Little Egret, but there were slightly more waders – 8 Greenshank, 2 Curlew Sandpipers, and 6 Little Ringed Plovers. Surprisingly, the only new trip species was a single Swallow flying over the lagoon – still no sign at any part of the island of any swift species, which may indicate that they are more of a breeding visitor than the books would indicate. Only 1 group of 4 Rose-ringed Parakeets flew through, but the Spanish Sparrows and Waxbills were again in the reeds next to the boulevard fence.

With the tourists at Maspalomas starting to proliferate, I drove a short way further North-east to the rocky area just South of Castillo de Romero. According to some of the reports, this was a potential area for Lesser Short-toed Lark. After finding a parking spot next to here, I began to track over the very rocky ground, noting that there was a line of coastal scrub dividing this plain of rock and the shingle of the beach. I headed towards and behind a pink and green building, skirting the scrub, to find a semi tidal lagoon further on, which was surprisingly quiet apart from a quartet of Sanderling. However, despite the absence of the larks, there were many Berthelot's Pipits, and a Southern Grey Shrike next to the building. Nevertheless, a couple of surprises were unearthed – the low scrub was a good area for Spectacled Warbler, and an Osprey was found on one of the telegraph wires with a fish that it had presumably just caught from the sea. All in all a worthwhile visit here, and the potential for Lesser Short-toed Larks can clearly be seen, but there is a chance that they are now not here or move around outside of the breeding season.



## SPECIES SEEN

### **Red-legged Partridge**

*Alectoris rufa*

One or two groups of these were heard in the hills before the first group was seen (Cazadores – pair then group of 7 flew over valley)

### **Ruddy Shelduck**

*Tadorna ferruginea*

A group of 9 were initially at the mud end of the Maspalomas lagoon on the first visit, and subsequently flew off. 11 more static birds were present on the second visit



### **Cory's Shearwater**

*Calonectris diomedea*

A small group of birds (~6) were circling from the shore of Maspalomas mid morning, with a further 2 flying East a little earlier. During the seawatch from Puerto de Mogan, ~30 birds were mainly flying East, with 5 birds fairly close in. A reasonably sized group was circling over the water some distance from the shore

### **Greater Flamingo**

*Phoenicopterus roseus*

Described as an accidental to the island, a juvenile was present at the seaward end of the Maspalomas chaca on both visits. It appeared to be leaving over the sea the second time, but was back again later in the morning



### **Eurasian Spoonbill**

*Platalea leucorodia*

Another accidental, 2 juveniles and an adult were on the Maspalomas chaca on the first visit, with only one inanimate juvenile the second time

### **Grey Heron**

*Ardea cinerea*

Maspalomas lagoon (3, 5); 1 flying adjacent to the cliffs towards Puerto de Mogan

### **Little Egret**

*Egretta garzetta*

Maspalomas lagoon (5, 1); Castillo del Romeral (1 along the shoreline)



### **Western Osprey**

*Pandion haliaetus*

A single bird was perched with a fish on top of a telegraph pole just South of Castillo del Romeral. It was still there half an hour later on return past this spot

### **Common Buzzard**

*Buteo buteo insularum*

Quite commonly seen, especially in the hills, where they were either in singles or occasionally pairs. Many of the birds were rather vocal, even when heard at some distance. Puerto de Mogan to Playa de Veneguera (2); San Bartolome (1); Roque Nuble (3); Cazadores (~8); Santa Lucia (3); Altavista (3)

**Common Kestrel***Falco tinnunculus canariensis*

Regularly seen over the whole island – Puerto de Mogan to Playa de Veneguera (~10); journey to Puerto de la Aldea (3); San Bartolome (3); Maspalomas (2); Roque Nuble (1); Cazadores (~6); Castillo del Romeral (1); Santa Lucia (6); Altavista 4)

**Barbary Falcon***Falco pelegrinoides*

A pair of birds was mobbed by a Kestrel as they passed through the valley below Santa Lucia

**Common Moorhen***Gallinula chloropus*

~30 Maspalomas lagoon

**Eurasian Coot***Fulica atra*

~100 Maspalomas lagoon

**Grey Plover***Pluvialis squatarola*

1 on the rocks on the rocks at Maspalomas

**Common Ringed Plover***Charadrius hiaticula*

~25 on rocks at Maspalomas

**Little Ringed Plover***Charadrius dubius*

Up to 6 at Maspalomas chaca

**Whimbrel***Numenius phaeopus*

Maspalomas lagoon (3); Maspalomas rocks (1); Castillo del Romeral (1)

**Common Greenshank***Tringa nebularia*

Maspalomas lagoon (8)

**Common Sandpiper***Actitis hypoleucos*

Maspalomas lagoon (2); Puerto de la Aldea (1 on shoreline)

**Sanderling***Calidris alba*

Maspalomas shoreline (4); Castillo del Romeral (4 on lagoon, ~8 on shoreline)

**Ruddy Turnstone***Arenaria interpres*

Castillo del Romeral (~12)

**Curlew Sandpiper***Calidris ferruginea*

Maspalomas chaca (2)

**European Herring Gull***Larus argentatus*

A single bird on rocks at Maspalomas

**Yellow-legged Gull***Larus michahellis*

Very common along any coastline. The only inland birds were ~10 on a reservoir below Altavista

**Lesser Black-backed Gull***Larus fuscus*

Local race Yellow-legged Gulls are reputed to be as dark as this species, but they seemed a lot lighter in practice. Small numbers of this species were occasionally seen at Puerto de Mogan and Castillo del Romeral

**Rock Dove***Columba livia*

Many feral doves are seen around the island. However, some groups of birds all showing the plumage of wild Rock Doves were seen regularly in the hills to the interior of the island

**Eurasian Collared Dove***Streptopelia decaocto*

Abundant everywhere

**Rose-ringed Parakeet***Psittacula krameri*

Common at Maspalomas (~20)

**Monk Parakeet***Myiopsitta monachus*

~12 birds landed in a group landed on a fruiting tree at Maspalomas

**Eurasian Hoopoe***Upupa epops*

Puerto de Mogan (2); Maspalomas (5); Maspalomas dunes (1); Roque Nuble (1); Santa Lucia (1)

**Great Spotted Woodpecker***Lanius meridionalis koenigi*

On the first of our mountain walks, 3 were heard. On the last (Alta Vista), 2 more were heard, before one was finally seen near the end of the walk

**Southern Grey Shrike***Lanius meridionalis koenigi*

Birds on the island seemed to have no white above the black face mask – Puerto de Mogan (1); Playa de Veneguera (1); Puerto de la Aldea (1); open rocky area South of Maspalomas (4); Roque Nuble (1); Castillo del Romeral (1)

**African Blue Tit***Cyanistes teneriffae*

Seen regularly in all habitats (even had one on the TV aerial on our apartment) – Puerto de Mogan (1); Playa de Veneguera (3); Puerto de la Aldea (3); San Bartolome (2); Roque Nuble (~6); Cazadores (~8); Santa Lucia (2); Altavista (~20)

**Barn Swallow***Hirundo rustica*

2 singles – 1 over the lagoon at Maspalomas, and 1 over the beach at Puerto de Mogan

**Canary Islands Chiffchaff**

*Phylloscopus canariensis*

The most common bird sound on the island. This species is very common and seen in more or less any habitat



**Spectacled Warbler**

*Sylvia conspicillata orbitalis*

Probably one of the more sought after of the warblers on the island, small numbers were seen in a few locations – Puerto de la Aldea (3 in the dry area just South of the small shingle lagoon); Castillo del Romeral (2 seen, and a few more heard in the scrub area behind the beach); Santa Lucia (1 on the circuit we walked)

**Sardinian Warbler**

*Sylvia melanocephala*

Quite common and widespread – Puerto de Mogan to Playa de Veneguera (~6); San Bartolome (2); Maspalomas (2); Roque Nuble (4); Cazadores (3); Santa Lucia (5)



Male



Female

**Common Blackbird**

*Turdus merula cabrerae*

Puerto de Mogan (~8); Maspalomas (2); Roque Nuble (2); Cazadores (~15); Santa Lucia (2)

**European Robin**

*Erithacus rubecula superbus*

Only heard (song is notably different from the birds of the UK – San Bartolome (1); Cazadores (1); Altavista (3)

**Spanish Sparrow**

*Passer hispaniolensis*

Puerto de Mogan (~10); Maspalomas (~8); Puerto de la Aldea (~20)



**Common Waxbill**

*Estrilda astrild*

Group of ~10 feeding in the reeds next to the fence on the boulevard at Maspalomas (both visits), and a group of 6 in one of the squares in the centre of Puerto de Mogan

**Grey Wagtail**

*Motacilla cinerea*

Puerto de la Aldea (1); San Bartolome (1); Roque Nuble (1); Santa Lucia (8)



**Berthelot's Pipit**

*Anthus berthelotii*

Seen fairly regularly, but not in quite the numbers I was expecting – Puerto de Mogan (group of 4 often from the balcony of the apartment); Roque Nuble (4); Cazadores (3); Castillo del Romeral (~12); Santa Lucia (3); Altavista (8)

**Atlantic Canary**

*Serinus canaria*

Very common throughout



**European Goldfinch**

*Carduelis carduelis parva*

2 seen at San Bartolome, with a few more heard, and 2 more seen at Santa Lucia

**Trumpeter Finch**

*Bucanetes githagineus amantum*

The only ones seen were a group of 8 on rocky ground next to the track on the walk from Puerto de Mogan to Playa de Veneguera

**TOTAL SPECIES = 45**