

# Go Slow ... in Fuerteventura

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Fly Fuerteventura
<b>Day 2/7</b>	Day excursions on the island
<b>Day 8</b>	Fly UK

### Departs

November/December and February

### Focus

Birds, plus a small range of butterflies

### Grading

Grade A. Limited amounts of easy walking only

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ESP60)

### Highlights

- Relaxed birding on Fuerteventura
- Superb chance to see the endangered Houbara Bustard
- Further specialities include Cream-coloured Courser and the unique Canary Islands Stonechat
- African Blue Tit, Berthelot's Pipit, Plain Swift and Desert Grey Shrike
- Cory's Shearwaters and shorebirds include Kentish Plover
- Chances to stumble upon Afro-European migrants and perhaps an odd vagrant
- African Tiger, Greenish Black-tip and Green-striped White among possible butterflies
- Single-centre, small group tour



Canary Islands Stonechat



Houbara Bustard by James Lees



Cream-coloured Courser



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**NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations (such as ferry timetables) can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.**

## Introduction

Fuerteventura is the perfect location for a week of relaxed birding. Standing 100 kilometres off the coast of Morocco – and one of the two most easterly islands of this fascinating Atlantic archipelago - it enjoys an interesting and varied avifauna. With its birdlife and climate strongly influenced by neighbouring Africa, it possesses its own endemic bird, the Canary Islands Stonechat, and is now, due to hunting in North Africa, the best place in the world to watch the vulnerable Houbara Bustard strutting across a stony desert plain.

There are three further Macaronesian endemics to enjoy: the widespread and perky Berthelot's Pipit, plus the more localised Plain Swift and Atlantic Canary. It is a great place to catch up with other specialities, including the charismatic Cream-coloured Courser, Egyptian Vulture, Barbary Falcon, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, African Blue Tit and Trumpeter Finch. Our late autumn and winter visits are timed to give a great chance of interesting migrants – and sometimes rarities, too. Though the range of species is relatively low, with perhaps 50-65 bird species possible during the week, this is more than made up for in quality.



Atlantic Canary (James Lees)

Our seven-night stay on the island is based at a very comfortable rural hotel in the north of the island, within 20km of most of the key locations, resulting in a relaxed pace to the tour and more time in the field to really watch the birds carefully and less time in the vehicle!

Amongst rocky slopes of ancient volcanoes and deeply incised stream beds – *barrancos* - the arid, semi-desert landscape of Fuerteventura is home to the Canary Islands Stonechat, a smart bird only found on this one island. Sometimes elusive, with a bit of

local knowledge it can be seen well as it flycatches along the deep ravines and rocky slopes. Fuerteventura is also a stronghold of the endangered Houbara Bustard – here with its own unique subspecies *fuertaventurae* (slightly richer in colour and more heavily barred than those in North Africa.) Indeed, the island is nowadays probably the best place in the world to see this fast disappearing species. As we search for these two scarce and very special birds, we'll come across a range of other desert-dwelling specialists, such as Cream-coloured Courser, Black-bellied Sandgrouse and Trumpeter Finch.

Of the three other Macaronesian endemics, Berthelot's Pipit is by far the easiest to find, often appearing about the hotel grounds, welcoming you with its cheery call. Plain Swift and Atlantic Canary are more localised and will take a bit more effort to find. Also finding a home on Fuerteventura are Egyptian Vultures (the endemic Canarian form *majorensis* is known locally as *Guirres*), North African Raven, Black-bellied

Sandgrouse, African Blue Tit, Desert Grey Shrike, Barbary Partridge and a recent colonist Laughing Dove. Trumpeter Finch, Lesser Short-toed Lark and Spectacled Warbler are easy to find in the right habitat.

With its rocky coastline, Cory's Shearwaters can be seen cruising past and amongst the waders to be found are Whimbrel and Kentish Plover. Barbary Falcons – nowadays treated as a race of Peregrine Falcon - roam widely and we might be lucky to find them. Fuerteventura can also pick up migrants from Europe, Africa or even a trans-Atlantic vagrant or two from North America.

## Day 1

## Fly Fuerteventura

Fly to Fuerteventura from the UK with a scheduled Easyjet flight from London Gatwick direct – although we hope to also be able to offer regional departures. A short drive takes us to our rural hotel in the heart of the island, where we spend all seven nights of our tour.

## Day 2-7

## Fuerteventura

We have five days to fully explore the varied habitats of the island at a relaxed pace. A typical day would be an optional pre-breakfast walk near the hotel or short drive to a nearby *barranco*, followed by a day's excursion to a variety of local habitats, where we make short walks. Lunch will be taken at local tavernas, followed by an afternoon itinerary and late afternoon return to the hotel.

At approximately 100km long by 30km wide, Fuerteventura is the second largest and one of the easternmost of the Canary Islands. Its geography and climate are closely linked to North Africa just 100km off its east coast; similarly, its birding highlights are typical of desert or semi-desert landscapes with Cream-coloured Courser and Black-bellied Sandgrouse. The area near the small town of Tindaya offers a great chance of both species. The widespread North African Raven has a characteristic dog-like bark and loiter about in groups, whilst Egyptian Vultures soar over the island, their numbers bolstered recently by on-going conservation efforts. Flocks of Lesser Short-toed Larks skip across the stony steppe. However, the star of this landscape is the furtive Houbara Bustard, which despite its size somehow manages to hide incredibly well. Whilst the population of Houbara Bustard continues to decline due to persistent hunting, here we have the best chance to see this gravely endangered bird. The busy Berthelot's Pipit is widespread, and we should come across the 'beefy' Trumpeter Finch, small flocks of Stone-curlew, Laughing Dove, Desert Grey Shrike and Spectacled Warbler.



Incised into the relatively barren plains are deep, steep-sided gorges – *barrancos* – which have stretches of vegetated streambed where we look for Canary Islands Stonechat, a species found nowhere else in the world. Often in pairs, this neat Fuerteventuran endemic is a real treat to find and watch. Isolated patches of water

along the valley bottoms provide habitat for wintering Green and Common Sandpipers and Little Ringed Plover, plus Grey Heron and sometimes Spoonbill, whilst African Blue Tit and warblers occupy the bushes. Wary Barbary Partridge, Song Thrushes and wintering Ring Ouzels can be found lurking here, too.

An afternoon visit to the lighthouse north of El Cotillo, Faro del Tostón, will enable us to scan offshore for Cory's Shearwater and watch the coastal skies for Barbary Falcon. Here a range of shorebirds include Kentish and Ringed Plover, Turnstones plus bleached white Sanderling and Spoonbills feed in sandy coves.

Betancuria nestles in the hills to the southwest of our hotel, and as the old capital of the island is a cultural and agricultural centre. This picturesque old town offers a glimpse into Fuerteventura's past and acts as the centre for a day exploring the hills. In places Barbary Ground Squirrels scurry amongst the rocks about the feet of visitors, and both Atlantic Canary and Plain Swift can be found here, if we are lucky. On warm sunny days, Canary Islands Blue-banded Bee *Amegilla canifrons* can be seen about the flowers in the north of the town.

Close to the west coast is the reservoir of Los Molinos, which unsurprisingly in a dry landscape such as this acts as a magnet to wetland and migratory birds. Ruddy Shelduck and Black-winged Stilt occur here in good numbers alongside a big flock of European Coot. On the shores and streambed below the dam Little Ringed Plover, Green Sandpiper, Snipe Dunlin and Little Stint could all be about – as can more Canary Island Stonechats. Above the slopes the distinctive island race of Common Buzzard – actually genetically related to Long-legged Buzzard – can be seen at eye level.



Black-bellied Sandgrouse by James Lees

On one day we will go a little further afield, driving 55km to Costa Calma to walk in the largest patch of woodland on the island, which often attracts wintering migrants like Brambling, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, even Woodcock, plus occasionally more unusual species like Yellow-browed Warbler. Hoopoes are common here as can be Cattle Egret and Atlantic Canary. As we head back north, we will enjoy lunch en route in a small town as well as checking large goat pens for Black-bellied Sandgrouse and Ruddy Shelduck.

## Day 78

## Fuerteventura then Fly UK

If airline schedules allow, we should have time to enjoy some final birding on the island – perhaps a last look at the Houbaras - before we head to the east coast, the airport and our flight back to London.

## Tour Grading

Easy. Mostly short, leisurely walks of up to 2km. Good walking shoes or lightweight boots are recommended; trainers are okay if you prefer. Walking sticks are useful as are walking seats at times, if you like to use them. Ground transport will be by minibus.

## Climate

Lying closest to Africa, the more easterly island of Fuerteventura is drier and averages a little warmer than other Canary Islands, being pleasant and near perfect all year round. As the island's name suggests, there is often a wind crossing the island, usually from the northeast.

## Food & Accommodation

Seven nights at a charming rural hotel on Fuerteventura with a pool. All rooms are en suite.

## Flights

Return scheduled flights from London Gatwick to Fuerteventura, nonstop with Easyjet. Flying time is approx. 4 hrs 30 mins

## Birds & Butterflies

We expect to see c. 50-65 species of bird. Fuerteventura has a short list of butterflies. We will be out of season for some, but those could include the tiny African Grass Blue, Greenish Black-tip, African Tiger, Southern Blue and Monarch.

## How to book your place!

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.