

Trip report Tenerife 09 – 16 May 2025

Our trip to Tenerife was a family holiday and thus did not include birdwatching from dusk till dawn, in which case a shorter trip would likely allow for a similar number of species. However, birds, plants and butterflies tend to be the focus of our holidays, mainly through a combination of longer or shorter walks in suitable areas and targeted visits to certain locations. Tenerife was no exception.

To prepare ourselves we used the most recent [Crossbill guide](#), the slightly dated [Gosney](#), a couple of [Rother walking guides](#) and a trip report by a good friend. From those, it was obvious that most of the biodiversity of interest to us would be found in the greener Northern parts of the island, where we thus looked for accommodation (Tejina). Far away, thankfully, from the resorts in the Southwest.

Finally, you will not find too many pictures in this report. Travelling with a toddler meant choosing between a telescope and a decent camera. We chose the former, leaving us with one of the first digital cameras produced. Even back in the day it wasn't the best available, which is a rather accurate description of the quality of the photo's, especially by today's standards.

Friday 09 May 2025

We had an afternoon flight from the conveniently small airport of Eindhoven. After a delay of close to an hour due a fake bomb threat, a nearly five hour flight and a drive of a little under an hour we arrived at our accommodation around 20.00. There was no time for birdwatching on the way (I am not the most relaxed traveller), so the only bird we noticed sufficiently well was an Eurasian collared dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) while picking up the car.

Although Tenerife belongs to Spain, it seemed that people here were a bit more easy going, with a little less temperament. Compared to our experiences in Spain (and back home), traffic was a lot more forgiving, less hurried, for example.

After putting the little man to bed, sitting out in the garden of our cottage lifers started flowing in. Excellent views of low flying Plain swift (*Apus unicolor*), Atlantic canary (*Serinus canaria*) and Canary Islands Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus canariensis*), as well as plenty of Blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) and a Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*). The latter two of the local subspecies, although for the Blackbird it isn't very obvious. It was quite obvious for Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*), which to us appeared to have a noticeable white eye ring and a much lighter breast compared to back home.

The flowers were full of Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) and Canary Speckled Wood (*Pararge xiphioides*) and the walls were alive with Tenerife Lizards (*Gallotia galloti*). We could have been off to a worse start, I'm sure. Also, it made me wonder about what else would be in store, given that in a sense there was nothing special about the garden or our location.

Saturday 10 May 2025

It should be an easy day. Recovering from the trip and time for grocery shopping since one cannot take anything useful on a plane. We also noticed that the roads in the center of our village would be closed Saturday and Sunday due to celebrations. Something to do with religion and mother's day, apparently, but we never quite learned the details.

In any case, we postponed looking for Tenerife Blue Chaffinch (*Fringilla teydea*) - the species to find - until Monday, as we expected the particular picnic site to be full of people, killing any hopes of seeing the birds well.

Instead, we tried Punta del Hidalgo. A scenic spot, overlooking the ocean. On the inevitable way down to the beach cacti and succulents made way for more salt tolerant species, eventually giving way to bare rock, also known as beach. Enough stones to play with for the

little man. The sea was full of Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris borealis*), passing at close range. The species is on the Dutch list, but nearly impossible to connect with when living inland. Goes without saying it was great to get excellent views and get a feel for the details determining identification. No sign of any Barolo shearwater (*Puffinus baroli*). The tidal pools didn't hold any waders, apart from a single Eurasian Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*). Given that migration was in full swing back home, this was to be expected.

On the way up, after filtering through near endless numbers of Canary Islands Chiffchaff we finally heard a pipit! Given that Berthelot's Pipit (*Anthus berthelotii*) is the only species available, we were confident but excellent views in good light allowed identification with certainty. Lifer number four.

Our accommodation had a private trail up a mountain, which we tried in the afternoon. The gentle sloping bit consisted of abandoned agriculture fields grazed by a small herd of sheep and hosted a healthy number of butterflies, including a few species common back home. Just before the real incline started, we flushed a Barbary Partridge (*Alectoris barbara*), but the scenery was perhaps the biggest attraction of the trail, allowing excellent views over the valley and the ocean.



Orchis canariensis

Sunday 11 May 2025

Near Aquamansa we went to explore a mixed Laurel and pine forest scarred by forest fires in 2022. We misinterpreted a small sign that in hindsight told us part of the trail was closed to allow for repair work and went on our way, greeted by several Canary Red Admiral (*Vanessa vulcania*). Although we shortly used to have a domestic Atlantic Canary at my parent's house when I was little, I wasn't too familiar with their sounds. So while finding yet another Atlantic Canary uttering a sound I couldn't identify, my spouse suddenly pointed at a few *Orchis*

canariensis still in flower! That we hadn't expected! But here they were, growing in an inaccessible spot in the deep shade of a barranco close to a bridge (28.3559, -16.4977).

After we managed to tear ourselves away, we found that not much further along the path was thoroughly closed. Just before the bit we were interested in because of the promised quality of the forest and the fact that more of said orchid could grow there. The trail that was open offered African Blue Tit (*Cyanistes teneriffae*) and the local subspecies of Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*) and Great spotted woodpecker (*Dendrocopus major*), but took us in the wrong direction. We decided our best bet was to walk the trail in the opposite direction. This way, we would see most of the trail anyway. So without a real plan of how to return to the car from the other end, we retraced our steps.

After walking downhill for a scary amount of time (one needs to make its way back up at some point) I suddenly spotted a pigeon with a two-toned upperside and a single band across the tail: Bolle's Pigeon (*Columba bollii*)! No doubt. I didn't quite see it go down, but my spouse found a pigeon in the trees close to where I thought it should have landed. Looking for a better view of Bolle's Pigeon, we found a pigeon with an evenly dark upper side and a distinct white trailing edge to the tail: Laurel Pigeon (*Columba junoniae*)! Within a few minutes we had seen both endemic pigeon-species.

Two species we were expecting to be hard to find, despite a friend of ours indicating he had had no trouble at all finding them during a family holiday. Amazing. Just a little further down the trail I heard a finch, which turned out to be an amazing male Canary Islands Chaffinch (*Fringilla canariensis*). It had become irrelevant if we would ever return to our car, it was the right call to just start walking! We had already managed 10 lifers!

Arriving back at the picnic place where we left our car, it became apparent that waiting a little with Tenerife Blue Chaffinch was a good idea. The place was heaving with families packing an extraordinary amount of food. The three of us clad in hiking clothes, eating whatever was left of our measly sandwiches, stood out like a sore thumb! People here do take mother's day seriously!

Monday 12 May 2025

The hunt for Tenerife Blue Chaffinch was on! According to all our books and friends the picnic place at Las Lajas was the place to be. So we set out on a one and a half hour drive up and over El Teide. The scenery was more than excellent all the way and in the crater we picked up the local subspecies of Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). But the many bends in the road and the quick rise in altitude proved a bit too much for the little man, who couldn't really see the horizon from the rental. Car and altitude sickness combined.

He wasn't best pleased, but at Las Lajas they had a play area for kids. This made up for all inconveniences suffered! I was too restless because of the prospect of Tenerife Blue Chaffinch and started looking for benches with water taps close to them. As promised by the trip report from our friend, it didn't take long for a striking male to appear in plain sight (28.1909, -16.6656).

What a bird. Large for a chaffinch in my book, but not as blue as in the books. More greyish blue. After a little while my spouse and I switched roles, but now the chaffinch was nowhere to be found! We were left with the local subspecies of Raven (*Corvus corax*) and Great spotted woodpecker. Not to mention domestic pigeons. Eventually we found one bird. Much more distant, but never got another decent view. It hurt, although it didn't seem to matter to my spouse. I couldn't help but remember the Snowy owl (*Bubo scandiacus*) that still stands between us at times.

We decided to head back into the crater for a walk, looking for *Echium wildpretii*. In the guides it said the trails would be closed Tuesday and Thursday due to Mouflon (*Ovis gmelini*) control. By now control had changed to Monday, Wednesday and Friday. One may conclude

that controlling Mouflon isn't going too well. However, it meant we really couldn't make much of a walk out of it.

We learned however that the lizards are more curious than is good for them when food is around. Even nibbling at our backpacks and water bottles! I doubt breadcrumbs are very good for them, but then again, we also started our holiday at McDonalds!?!

Also, we got good views of Tenerife Green-striped White (*Euchloe evers*) and Canary Blue (*Cyclorius webbianus*), both endemic. And again, just the scenery was worth it. Somehow walking through the desert of stones in the caldera, looking up at El Teide is impressive.

Because we couldn't make much of a walk, we decided to take a look in the botanical garden at the back of the visitors centre where we parked our car. We saw flowering Teide Violet (*Viola cheiranthifolia*), we weren't expecting to see in the wild and ended up at a small, artificial pond (28.3044, -16.5666). Here we found five (!) Tenerife Blue Chaffinches bathing, pruning. Not a care in the world! Let's just say I'd choose the botanical garden over Las Lajas next time. By now we found 11 lifers, all of which gave at least good enough views to allow identification with certainty.



Tenerife Blue Chaffinch (*Fringilla teydea*)

Tuesday 13 May 2025

After the stunning deserts of El Teide, we set out for Laurel forests again. Starting at sea level at Los Silos, the trail would take us through a barranco all the way up to Erjos, some one kilometer higher up.

Plant life was exquisite! Slowly changing from the succulents at sea level into the lush richness of the Laurel forest. On the bare rocks *Monanthes polyphylla* was a highlight. Such

a small, dome shaped delicacy in such a harsh environment. Surprising was that signs of (former) cultivation could be found at even the steepest slopes.

At a bridge some 400 meters up we took a break and decided that it was time to turn back. By now my spouse's fear of heights had kicked in full swing and the backpack with the little man started to weigh a bit as well. It's a holiday after all, not bootcamp. By now we had seen and heard the local subspecies of Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*) and Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*).

Also, we found a pair of Sardinian Warbler (*Curruca melanocephala*). According to our information, this should be one of the commonest species around, but it took us a long time to find them. I could well imagine they are more common in the dry Southwest we were purposely avoiding.

But as always the way down is very different from the way up. Simply because of the change of angle, but also because it tends to be less work. We found all kinds of plants, mainly ferns, that we missed while working our way up. We found some wild Canary Islands Dragon Trees (*Dracaena draco*) on rocky outcrops that we missed on the way up! Stunning trees in their natural context. And then, at about the same spot where I saw a pigeon too briefly to identify on the way up, a Laurel pigeon flew over. After a short while, another one from the same direction. Then a Bolles pigeon, followed by yet another Laurel pigeon. All coming from the same direction. We had found ourselves a pigeon highway! The views were relatively short as the birds were flying by, but the scenery they were flying in made it quite special.

At a place with ample flowering plants we found Canary Islands Large White (*Pieris cheiranthi*), identified by the large black spots on the wing. I trust people really thought about separating this as a species, but I am not quite certain I haven't seen an aberrant Large White back home with at least similarly large spots on the wing... .

On the way to our cottage we stopped at a place highly recommended by Dave Gosney: Barranco de Ruiz. The little man just fell asleep when we got there, so I had to make my way up alone. After only a short walk I saw the first Laurel pigeons flying, one of them perching in a dead tree. I am fairly confident I heard them calling and within a few minutes there were five birds around giving the best views of the species so far. The car park had Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*) and a ringed, tame individual of the local subspecies of Raven. To date I haven't been able to submit the ring with the relevant program.

We finished the day at a restaurant and found that people really seem fond of little kids, joking and playing around with our little man.



Monanthes polyphylla



Viola anagae

Wednesday 14 May 2025

We couldn't quite get enough of the Laurel forest. But I was naïve about the permit system and we couldn't quite work out how to get one before our trip. When we finally managed, all permits were gone for the week of our visit, meaning we sadly couldn't go walking in any of the strict reserves. Too bad. There were however some suggestions for walks in comparable areas. So we went to the Anaga area and indeed found ourselves in a really nice Laurel forest with a relatively complex understory. In our opinion, that was a difference between some of the other, fire scared forests we visited. In the latter, most of the understory and herbs were missing and the forests were quite open. The trail was already busy before 10.00, so birdlife was comparatively low.

Despite our lack of permits, we decided to visit a trailhead of a permitted walk. My spouse had learned that the roadsides at this particular parking place reflected the diversity found in the reserve itself quite well.

The little man was sleeping in the car, so we took the same roadside walk separately. My wife among others managed to find *Viola anagae*, endemic to this particular barranco, which was a highlight of the day! Together with *Ixanthus viscosus*, a species of gentian for which I keep a world-list.



Echium wildpretii



Viola cheiranthifolia (above) and its habitat (below)

Thursday 15 May 2025

Time flies when having fun. We already had to decide what to do with our final full day on Tenerife. We decided on going back to El Teide, since all trails would be open Thursdays.

The trail we chose started from one of the busy visitors centers. Busses of tourists were unloaded, took the same picture and boarded the bus again. Luckily, after a couple of hundred meters the trail became quiet and we could enjoy the scenery and plantlife. Here, for the first time, we found *Echium wildpretii* in flower in its natural habitat, not counting roadsides. Even the little man thought it was a great plant to see.

The walk was short, so we had time for another walk in the caldera. We decided to give the endemic *Viola cheiranthifolia* a proper go. Apparently the walk is immensely popular, given that the carpark was more than full, as were all other possibilities along the road. We managed to find a spot at a viewpoint, a kilometer down from the starting point.



It was a harsh walk, really. Tracking up El Teide through a desert of stones under a scorching sun, but soon enough we noticed an enclosure where we thought *Viola cheiranthifolia* might be found. We weren't wrong, but the plants were growing distantly and could only be observed through binoculars. We decided to push on a bit further, when all of a sudden my spouse found a couple of *Viola cheiranthifolia* growing among the rocks next to the path. Exquisite! Looks everything like a viola, but the leaves are adapted to the dry, sunny environment.

Tired and slightly overheated, we returned to our car for a swim in the pool! But not before eating at one of the tourist places in the caldera (8.2941, -16.5653). While eating I noticed something blue moving in the corner of my eye: Tenerife Blue Chaffinch! Picking leftovers from under the tables. Admittedly, this somehow tarnished the near magic status of the bird in my mind ever so slightly. Not much later a Rock sparrow (*Petronia petronia*) perched on the wall surrounding the terrace.

Friday 16 May 2025

Again we were on an afternoon flight, leaving time for one last excursion in the morning. We decided to end with Laurel forests. Specifically we went to Erjos, also recommended by Dave Gosney for Bolle's Pigeon. The track connected to the trail we hiked from Los Silos earlier, had we not turned around.

Even before we properly reached the Laurel forest, we found Bolle's Pigeons perched in a couple of dead trees close to the path. Excellent views, finally also for this species we so far had only seen in flight. There seemed to be a healthy population there, since we could easily find at least six birds perched or foraging.

The forest itself was perhaps the best example of Laurel forest we had seen so far, with a complex understory and a lot of herbaceous species at ground level. Would a reserve have looked similar? Of course the easy access and the well maintained paths might have helped. Oh, Dave Gosney mentioned this track can be driven. It can't anymore and is properly closed for cars after a small parking place.

After a couple of hours we had to return to the car and head for the airport. As I am not too relaxed while travelling, we didn't pick up anything else worth mentioning. However, we took a Southwesterly route from Erjos and were still thankful we hadn't chosen to stay in any of the resorts. They are also quite far away from the sites we had our best birding.

Closing remarks

In the time available we managed 11 out of 12 available lifers when it comes to birds, including all endemic species. Although very late for orchids, we still managed the enigmatic *Orchis canariensis*, along with a suit of other endemic plants. In general, without proper literature identifying plants to species level with any degree of certainty was a challenge. As

far as butterflies go, we noticed that the number of species we found was a bit lower than we expected. We were likely both late and early in the season.

A list of the observations can be found [here](#) (when needed further details are provided in the text. We usually only logged each (sub)species ones, at first occurrence).