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Influx of African Saharan rarities to Canary islands after a Calima storm in February - March 2020

Compiled by Ricard Gutiérrez and the Rarebirdspain group

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Abstract

At least ten passerine species coming from Sahara desert were recorded in the Canary islands from 24.2.2020 onwards, after experiencing a severe sand and dust (calima) storm coming from Africa. Minimum figures up to 10.3.2020 included -shown in 1st finding order - 76-81 Desert Wheatears (*Oenanthe deserti*), 2 to 5 Desert Warblers (*Sylvia deserti*), one Hoopoe Lark (*Alaemon alaudipes*), one pallid Crag Martin sp (*Ptyonoprogne*), 26-27 Isabelline Wheatears (*O.isabellina*), 2-3 Bar-tailed Desert Larks (*Ammomanes cinctura*), one White-crowned Black Wheatear (*O.leucopyga*), one Tristram's Warbler (*Sylvia deserticola*), one Desert Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor elegans*) and a probable Brown-throated Martin (*Riparia paludicola*). Different Crem-coloured Coursers *Cursorius cursor* were also recorded elsewhere perhaps including birds from the continent but numbers were not compiled. This is by far the largest invasion of African birds to the Canaries recorded to date. Figures updated to early March 2020.

Introduction

There was a severe sand storm (calima) at Canary islands going on from 22.2.2020 onwards. It caused [many effects on traffic, tourism, visibility and more](#) but it, as expected, brought birds from the continent. What it was not expected was the number of birds and species involved, but only having a look to the NASA satellite images you may expect that something had to happen.

Birdwatchers gathered in the Rarebirdspain group, either through facebook, twitter or phone begun spreading news. There are regular observers at Tenerife, Gran Canaria and Lanzarote with many visitors to Fuerteventura too. Collected numbers are shown below but there are, for sure, more birds. There may be also some duplication or some misidentification problems, particularly between *Oenanthe oenanthe* and *O.isabellina*. But that can be clarified when the records will be properly collated and analyzed, this page being an attempt to show what happened that last week of February 2020, to be remembered for a long time.

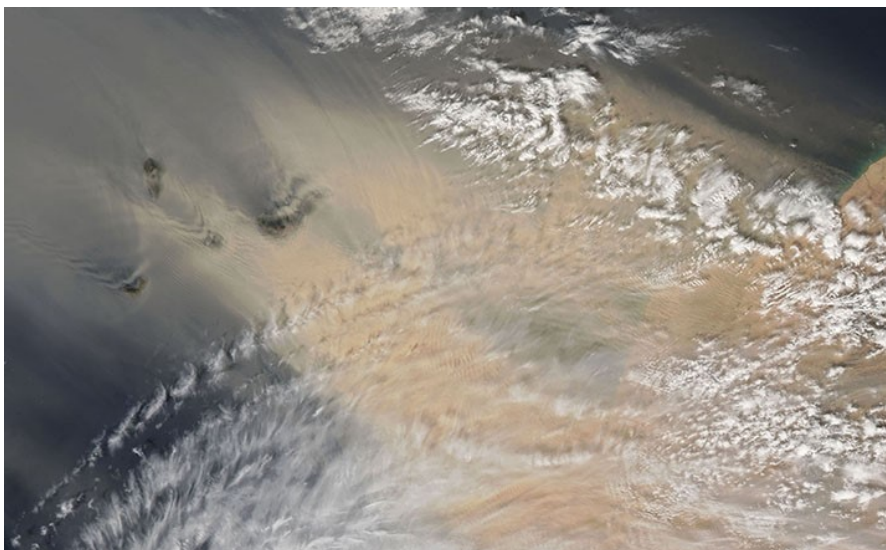


Figure 1
NASA Modis image (cropped) showing the massive influx of Sahara sand to the Canaries. Lanzarote and Fuerteventura are not visible (!) (© NASA)

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Oenanthe deserti © Francisco Guerra



Oenanthe isabellina © Gorka Ocio

Influx of African Saharan rarities to Canary islands after a Calima storm in February 2020

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Figure 2
The storm was heavy. Risco de San Nicolás, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, from San Juan. 23.2.2020 (© Jessica Martín Olivares at [Diario de Avisos](#)).

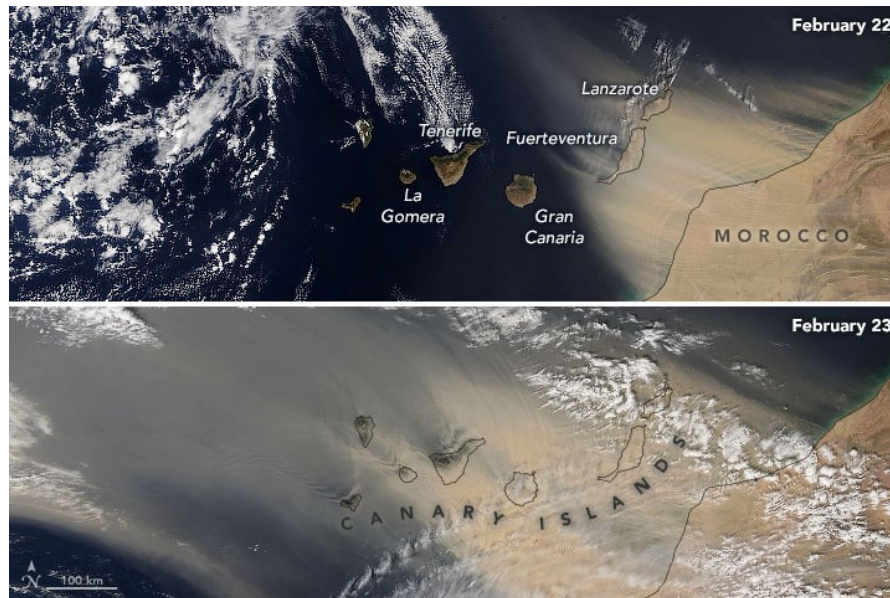


Figure 3
NASA Modis image composition showing the situation on 22-23.2.2020 (© [NASA](#))

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* (84 birds)

Difficult to establish figures due to lack of thorough coverage but numbers may well involve hundred birds or more. Reported birds:

• Lanzarote (n=5)

24.2.2020 1 ♂ Jim Teague; 25.2.2020 1 ♀ El Cable (F.J. García Vargas); 25.2.2020 1 El Jable (Jesús Palmero); 26.2.2020 1 ♂ Playa Quemada (F.J. García Vargas); 25.2.2020 1 El Golfo (Manuel Rocha Tabares ©eBird).



Photo above: ♀El Cable, © F. Javier García Vargas, 25.2.2020



Photo above: ♂Playa Quemada, © F. Javier García Vargas, 26.2.2020

- **Fuerteventura (n=30)**

- Barranco rio Cabras (n=1)

On 24.02 there was a ♂ (Lee Fuller).

- Embase de los Molinos (n=1)

A ♂ was seen on 24.02 (Mario Fernández Tizón, Juan Lorente Rejano @eBird), photo below.



(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/211504121>)

Collalba desértica (<https://ebird.org/species/deswhe1>) *Oenanthe deserti*

© Mario Fdez Tizon

Canarias, Spain | 24 Feb 2020

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- Faro de Tostón (n=1)

On 24.02 a ♀ was there (Mario Fernández Tizón, Juan Lorente Rejano @eBird).



(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/211508331>)

Collalba desértica (<https://ebird.org/species/deswhe1>) *Oenanthe deserti*

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| eBird S64949404 (<https://ebird.org>)

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- Tindaya plains (n=2)

On 24.02.2020 2 ♂ were seen (Lee Fuller, one, then Steve Grimwade, two). On 7-9.3 a male was there (Gonzalo Deán @eBird).

- La Pared, Jandia Natural Park (n=1)

One was seen on 25.2 (Ashley Wooton @Canary Islands Rare Bird Alert SOC). One ♂ was there on 3.3.2020 (Thomas W. Johansen @eBird).

- Faro and Punta de Jandía (n=12)

One was seen by the lighthouse on 26.2.2020 (Daniël Huis); 10 were seen on 27.2.2020 (Frederik Johansen @Canary Islands Rare Bird Alert SOC). On 1.3 there were 10 males and 2 females (Thomas W. Johansen @eBird).



(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/212736841>)

Collalba desértica (<https://ebird.org/species/deswhe1>) *Oenanthe deserti*

© Thomas W. Johansen

Canarias, Spain | 1 Mar 2020

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- El Cotillo, playa Esquinzo (n=3)

A ♂ was seen on 24.02.2020 (Julia Bland @Canary Islands Rare Bird Alert SOC); on 27.02.2020 there were 2 at Reserva de Lajares, Cotillo, Esquinzo (Carlo ter Haar, Daniël Huis @observado.es). One was cited there on 3.3 (Paul van Nuys @observado.es).

- Barranco del Valluelo (n=6)

Six birds were seen on 27.2.2020 (Alfonso Luengo @eBird).

- Pico de la Zarza (n=1)

A ♂ was seen on 2.3 around the 4km marker on the way up to Pico de la Zarza, Fuerteventura (Julia Bland @Canary Islands Rare Bird Alert (SOC)).

- Malpaís grande (n=1)

On 10.3 a bird was seen at Malpaís grande, Fuerteventura (J.A. Sarry @observado.es).

- Cuchillos de Vigán, Camino Saladillo (n=1)

On 10.3 a bird was seen at Camino Saladillo, Antigua, Fuerteventura (Javier Notario @eBird).

• Gran Canaria (n=26)

- La Minilla, Las Palmas (n=3)

On 24.2 there were 2 ♀ (Marcos Benito), on 25.2 2 ♂ (Antonio Portales, Luis Alberto Rodríguez, Paqui del Rosario, Marcos Benito y Xabier Ramirez). 3 ind on 26.2 (José Manuel Caballero @eBird), photo enclosed.



(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/212915151>)

Collalba desértica (<https://ebird.org/species/deswhe1>) *Oenanthe deserti*

© José Manuel Caballero Fernández

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| eBird S65175730 (<https://ebird.org>)

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Photo above: © Miguel Avelino Suárez, 25.2.2020



Photo above: © Miguel Avelino Suárez, 25.2.2020



Photo above: © Marcos Benito, 24.2.2020

◦ Gáldar (n=17+)

On 25.2.2020 there were 2 ♂♀ (Paqui del Rosario), then on 25.2.2020 at least 17 birds (Francisco Molina González). One female was seen on 1.3 (Xabier Remirez @eBird), but two birds on 5.3 (Eduardo García del Rey) and one on 7.3 (Luis Alberto Rodríguez, Miguel Rouco @eBird). On 8.3 two ♂♀ birds remained (Nick Brickle @eBird) and on 9.3 a male was relocated (Luis López Areal, Gorka Ocio), photo below.



Photo above: © Gorka Ocio, 9.3.2020

- Aldea Blanca (n=3)

On 28.2 there were two (Luis Alberto Rodríguez) but three on 2.3 (♂, ♀, 2cy ♂) there (Dominic Mitchell @eBird, Pepi Liberto). According to the author: "I was aware of 4 birds of this species being reported at this site in the wake of the recent severe Saharan sand storm. After wandering away from Pepe as we walked back towards the reservoirs, I spotted a female wheatear which I identified immediately as Desert when it spread its all-black tail. I called Pepe over to see it, and as we then started walking back again he picked up what appeared to be a 2cy male of the same species, showing partial black markings on the face, and then a pristine male. The all-black tail was noted on the two males as well, while other key features can be seen in the accompanying images."

- Las Moriscas (n=1)

24.2.2020 1 ♀ Pico del Viento, Las Moriscas (Paqui del Rosario).

- Los Espinales Este (n=1)

A bird was seen on 1.3 and 4.3 (Luis Alberto Rodríguez @eBird), photo below).



(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/212738991>)

Collalba desértica (<https://ebird.org/species/deswhe1>) *Oenanthe deserti*

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- Puntilla de la Caleta (n=1)

A male was seen near the entrance path (Nick Brickle @eBird).

• **Tenerife (n=14)**

- Faro de la Rasca, Arona (n=4)

On 25.2.2020 there were 4 (1♂3♀) at Faro de la Rasca (Mariano Martínez).



Photo above: © Mariano Martínez, 25.2.2020



Photo above: © Mariano Martínez, 25.2.2020

◦ Llanos de Arona (n=2)

On 25.2.2020 there was a ♂ (Pablo Olabe) and on 26.2.2020 a ♀ (Pablo Olabe).



Photo above: © Pablo Olabe, 26.2.2020



Photo above: © Pablo Olabe, 25.2.2020

- Los Silos (n=1)

On 25.2.2020 a bird was reported (Juan José Ramos Melo).

- Playa Las Americas (n=2)

Two were reported on 25.2 (Mark Stewart).

- Charca El Fraile (n=3)

There were there on 26.2 and one ♂ on 1.3 (Mariano Martínez).

- El Médano (n=1)

A bird was seen on 14.3.2020 (Mariano Martínez).

- Abades (n=1)

A male was found at Abades on 8.3 (Mariano Martínez). See a photo below.



Photo above: © Mariano Martínez, 8.3.2020

- **La Palma (n=8)**

Six birds were at El Tablado on 3.3 (Omar Pérez @ Canary Islands Rare Bird Alert (SOC). One female was at Risco de la Concepción, Breña Alta, on 24.2 (Sonia L. Suárez) and a female was at the same place from 29.2 to 2.3.2020 (Irene Scheidt).

- **El Hierro (n=1)**

A male was found at Arenas Blancas, Frontera, on 22.3.2020 (Samuel Padrón). See two photos below.



Photo above: © Samuel Padrón, 22.3.2020



Photo above: © Samuel Padrón, 22.3.2020

Desert Warbler *Sylvia deserti* (2-5 birds)

• **Gran Canaria (n=2)**

A bird was found near Telde, Gran Canaria on 24.2.2020 (Miguel Avelino Suárez). On 25.2 another was present at las Minillas, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Antonio Portales; Xabier Remirez, Antonio Portales, Luis Alberto Rodríguez, Paqui del Rosario, Marcos Benito and others).



Photo above: © Miguel Avelino Suárez, 24.2.2020



Photo above: © Miguel Avelino Suárez, 24.2.2020



Photo above: © J. Marcos Benito, 25.2.2020

- **Other islands (n=3)**

There are so far unconfirmed reports of a bird at Fuerteventura (Uca Díaz *in litt*) and two at Lanzarote (Juan Sagardía *in litt*.)

Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes* (n=1)

- **Tenerife (n=1)**

A bird was found at Iguete de San Andrés, Tenerife, on 25.2.2020 (Mariano Martínez). Only seen for a day.



Photo above: © Mariano Martínez, 25.2.2020



Photo above: © Mariano Martínez, 25.2.2020

A pallid suspicious Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne* (n=1)

A bird named by some as a Moroccan race of *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*, local rarity, as *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta* (would be a 1st for Spain) by others, was seen at Risco del Paso, Fuerteventura, on 24-25.2.2020 (Robin Mawer).



Photo above: © Robin Mawer, 25.2.2020

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* (n=26-27)

There may be some confusion with *Oenanthe oenanthe* in some cases. Post-claim assessment is desirable in some cases.

- **Lanzarote (n=5)**
 - Pocillos (n=1)

A bird was seen at Pocillos, Lanzarote on 24.2 (David Pérez).

- Puerto del Carmen (n=1)

On 24.2 a female was seen at Puerto del Carmen (David Astins).

- Costa Tegui (n=1)

Another was reported at Costa Tegui, Lanzarote on 25.2 (David Astins).

- Playa Quemada (n=1)

On 28.2.2020 a bird was seen at Playa Quemada, Tenerife (F. Javier García Vargas). See a photo below.



Photo above: © F. Javier García Vargas, 28.2.2020

- Puerto Calero (n=1)

On 3.3.2020 a bird was at Puerto Calero (F. Javier García Vargas), see photos below.



Photo above: © F. Javier García Vargas, 3.3.2020



Photo above: © F. Javier García Vargas, 3.3.2020



Photo above: © F. Javier García Vargas, 3.3.2020



Photo above: © F. Javier García Vargas, 3.3.2020

• **Fuerteventura (n=14-15)**

- Jandia. La Pared Natural Park (n=4)

On 25.2.2020 two birds were at La Pared (Ashley Wootton). One individual was seen on 1.3. 2020 (Thomas W. Johansen @eBird, photo below); 2.3 (Pajot Maxence @eBird), and 4 on 3.3 (Thomas W. Johansen @eBird; Pajot Maxence @eBird).



(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/212736781>)

Collalba Isabel (<https://ebird.org/species/isawhe1>) *Oenanthe isabellina*

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- Punta de Jandia (n=3)

Three were reported on 27.2.2020 (Frederik Johanssen). At least one bird remained on 15.3 (Javier Notario @eBird, J.A. Sarry @observado.es).

- Tindaya plains (n=1-2)

On 28.2.2020 one or two were at Tindaya plains (Greg Mc Ivor@ facebook Canary Islands Rare Bird Alert SOC). On 29.2 one was seen there (Eduard Villar) [Photo fb rarebirdspain]. Still there on 5.3 (Stefan Bruhn @eBird) and on 9.3 (Gonzalo Deán, Juan I. Deán @eBird).



Photo above: © Eduard Villar, 29.2.2020

- Jandía golf course (n=1)

On 28.2.2020 one was at Jandia golf course (Frederik Johanssen).

- Cotillo (n=4)

On 27.2 one was at Reserva de Lajares, Cotillo, Esquinzo (Carlo ter Haar, Daniël Huis @observado.es). Four were cited there on 3.3 (Paul van Nuys @observado.es). Still there on 19.3 (J.A. Sarry @observado.es).

- La Oliva (n=1)

On 11.3 a new bird was seen foraging near the little dirt road at the east end of the loop at La Oliva, Fuerteventura (Daniel Pettersson @eBird). Photo below. On 14.3. it was still there (Daniel Pettersson @eBird).



(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/214974381>)

Collalba Isabel (<https://ebird.org/species/isawhe1>) *Oenanthe isabellina*

© Daniel Pettersson

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- **Gran Canaria (n=4)**

◦ Gáldar (n=2)

There was at least a bird at Gáldar, Gran Canaria on 25.2.2020 (Francisco Molina). 1+ ind on 1.3 (Xabier Remirez @eBird), photos, 2 birds on 5.3 (Eduardo García del Rey) and 6.3.2020 (Xabier Remirez @eBird) and 2 on 7.3.2020 (Miguel Rouco @eBird). On 8.3 one was seen (Nick Birckle @eBird), but two on 9.3 (Luis López Areal, Gorka Ocio), photos below. On 10.2 one was seen (Pablo Santonja @eBird)



(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/212761081>)

Collalba Isabel (<https://ebird.org/species/isawhe1>) *Oenanthe isabellina*

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Canarias, Spain | 1 Mar 2020

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| eBird S65334233 (<https://ebird.org>)

| The **Cornell** Lab 



(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/212761111>)

Collalba Isabel (<https://ebird.org/species/isawhe1>) *Oenanthe isabellina*

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© Gorka Ocio 2020

Photo above: © Gorka Ocio, 9.3.2020



© Gorka Ocio 2020

Photo above: © Gorka Ocio, 9.3.2020

◦ La Minilla, Las Palmas (n=1)

A bird was seen on 1.3.2020 (Dominic Mitchell @eBird) 'Initially seen perched briefly and then flew, when tail looked eyecatchingly black with no visible white to create classic black 'T' pattern of Northern Wheatear. When seen on ground again supercilium noted as strong in front of eye, stance very upright and overall structure subtly longer legged and shorter tailed than Northern (female of which seen nearby shortly afterwards). Black lores suggest male. Photographed.'



◦ Puntilla de la Caleta (n=1)

A new bird was seen on 9.3 at Puntilla de la Caleta, Gran Canaria (Nick Brickle @eBird), photo below.



(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/214602151>)

Collalba Isabel (<https://ebird.org/species/isawhe1>) *Oenanthe isabellina*

© Nick Brickle

Canarias, Spain | 9 Mar 2020

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• **Tenerife (n=3)**

◦ Charca de El Fraile (n=1)

One bird was seen at Charca El Fraile on 1.3 to 8.3 (Mariano Martínez) and 10.3 (Gorka Ocio, Luis López Areal, Antonio Acedo), thumbnail in the right sidebar. .



(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/214268521>)

Collalba Isabel (<https://ebird.org/species/isawhe1>) *Oenanthe isabellina*

© Mariano Martínez

Canarias, Spain | 8 Mar 2020

Macaulay Library ML214268521

(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/214268521>)

eBird S65589248 (<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S65589248>)

The **Cornell** Lab 
(<http://birds.cornell.edu/>)

- Finca San Miguel, Tenerife (n=1)

A bird was seen at Finca San Miguel, S Tenerife on 12.3 (Pablo Olabe). See a photo below.



Photo above: © Pablo Olabe, 12.3.2020

- Abades (n=1)

A bird was seen at Abades, Tenerife, on 8.3 (Mariano Martínez).

Bar-tailed Desert Lark *Ammomanes cinctura* (n=2-3)

- **Tenerife (n=1)**

A bird was seen at Llanos de Arona, Tenerife on 27.2.2020 (Antonio Acedo, Daniele Aridizzone). On 29.2 the bird was seen again at Arona, Tenerife (Fluyendo Photography, Antonio Acedo). Seen later too (Eduardo García del Rey, Pablo Olabe, Víctor Cardoso). And from 7-8.3.2020 as well (Mariano Martínez) to 10.3 (Gorka Ocio, Luis López Areal, Antonio Acedo), photo below.



(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/214268441>)

Terrera colinegra (<https://ebird.org/species/batlar1>) *Ammomanes cinctura*

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| eBird S65589248 (<https://ebird.org>)

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Photo above: © Gorka Ocio, 10.3.2020

- **Gran Canaria (n=1)**

- Gáldar (n=1)

One of these larks was found at Gáldar, Gran Canaria, on 27.2 (Paqui del Rosario, Francisco Molina @observado.es). On 29.2 it was seen again (J. Marcos Benito et al) to 5. 3 (Eduardo García del Rey) and 6.3 (Xabier Remirez @eBird), photos below, and 7.3 too (Miguel Rouco @eBird; Luis Alberto Rodríguez @eBird) to 8.3 (Nick Brickley @eBird) and 9.3 (Luis López Areal, Gorka Ocio), photo below.



Photo above: © Francisco Molina @ observado.es, 27.2.2020



Photo above: © Francisco Molina @ observado.es, 27.2.2020



(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/213782081>)

Terrera colinegra (<https://ebird.org/species/batlar1>) *Ammomanes cinctura*

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Canarias, Spain | 6 Mar 2020

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| eBird S65499293 (<https://ebird.org>)

| The **Cornell** Lab 



(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/213782091>)

Terrera colinegra (<https://ebird.org/species/batlar1>) *Ammomanes cinctura*

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Canarias, Spain | 6 Mar 2020

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| eBird S65499293 (<https://ebird.org>)

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(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/213782101>)

Terrera colinegra (<https://ebird.org/species/batlar1>) *Ammomanes cinctura*

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Photo above: © Gorka Ocio, 10.3.2020

- **Other islands (n=1)**

There are so far unconfirmed reports of a bird at Lanzarote (Juan Sagardía *in litt.*)

White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga* (n=1)

- **Tenerife (n=1)**

A bird was seen at Llanos de Arona, Tenerife on 27.2.2020 (Daniele Aridizzone), the 3rd for the Canaries and Spain. On 29.2 it was seen again (Pablo Olabe).



Photo above: © Daniele Aridizone , 27.2.2020



Photo above: © Daniele Aridizone , 27.2.2020

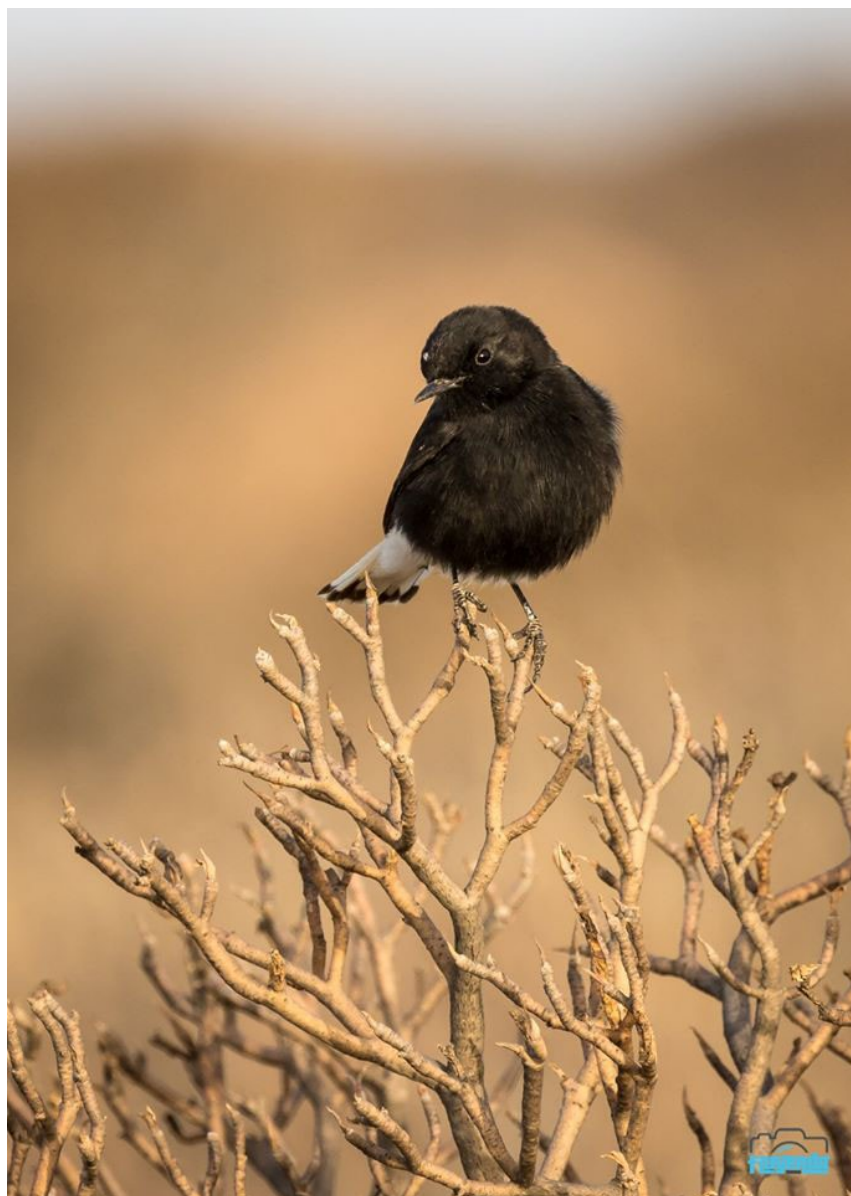


Photo above: © Daniele Aridizone , 27.2.2020



Photo above: © Daniele Aridizone , 27.2.2020



Photo above: © Daniele Aridizzone , 27.2.2020

Tristram's Warbler *Sylvia deserticola* (n=1)

- **Gran Canaria (n=1)**

A bird was seen at Aldea Blanca, Gran Canaria, on 28.2 (Luis Alberto Rodríguez).



© LUIS ALBERTO RODRIGUEZ SANCHEZ

(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/212292291>)

Curruca del Atlas (<https://ebird.org/species/triwar1>) *Sylvia deserticola*

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| eBird S65252069 (<https://ebird.org>)

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(<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/212290961>)

Curruca del Atlas (<https://ebird.org/species/triwar1>) *Sylvia deserticola*

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Desert Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor elegans* (n=1) FIRST FOR SPAIN IF ACCEPTED

- **Gran Canaria (n=1)**

A 1w male according to finder was seen on 28.2 (Lee Gregory, Juan Emilio Checa) then 1.3 (Marcos Benito; Dominic Mitchell) and 6.3 (Eduardo García del Rey @ Canary Islands Rare Bird Alert (SOC). See a photo here at [Turismo de Observación](#) and another below (Dominic Mitchell). Seen again on 9.3 (Luis López Areal, Gorka Ocio), photos below, but not on 13.3 (Miguel Avelino Suárez, Francisco Guerra).



Photo above: © Dominic Mitchell, 1.3.2020



Photo above: © Gorka Ocio, 10.3.2020



Photo above: © Gorka Ocio, 10.3.2020



Photo above: © Gorka Ocio, 10.3.2020



Photo above: © Gorka Ocio, 10.3.2020

Brown-throated Martin *Riparia paludicola* (n=1) FIRST FOR SPAIN IF ACCEPTED

• **Fuerteventura (n=1)**

On 4.3 a putative bird was seen at Llanos del Tequital, Fuerteventura (J.A. Sarry @observado.es).

Acknowledgments

To all observers making these sightings possible, particularly the allways cooperative Miguel Avelino Suárez, Xabier Remirez, Mariano Martínez, Francisco Javier García Vargas, David Pérez, Uca Díaz, Juan Sagardía, Gorka Ocio and all contributors and members of the Rarebirdspain groups.

Resumen

Al menos diez especies de passeriformes procedentes del Sahara fueron citados en las islas Canarias a partir del 24.2.2020 después de un episodio de calima, la más severa registrada en los últimos 20 años. Las cifras mínimas hasta el 10.3.2020 recogidas por esta web incluyen (en orden de descubrimiento específico): Se trata de 76-81 *Oenanthe deserti*, 2 a 5 *Sylvia deserti*, 1 *Alaemon alaudipes*, 1 avion roquero pálido que podría corresponder a una nueva especie para España *Ptyonoprogne*, 26-27 *Oenanthe isabellina*, 2-3 *Ammomanes cinctura*, una *Oenanthe leucopyga*, una *Sylvia deserticola*, un *Lanius excubitor elegans*, el primero para España si se acepta y una observación de un posible *Riparia paludicola* visto en vuelo. También se citaron diferentes corredores *Cursorius cursor* que alguno podría proceder del continente africano. De lejos es la invasión de aves africanas más importante registrada hasta la fecha en las islas Canarias.

Citation

Gutiérrez, R. (ed.) & Rarebirdspain group. 2020. Influx of African Saharan rarities to Canary islands after a Calima storm in February - March 2020 Rare Birds in Spain URL: <http://www.rarebirdspain.net/arbsi051.htm>

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Last updated / Última actualización / Darrera actualització

30.3.2020