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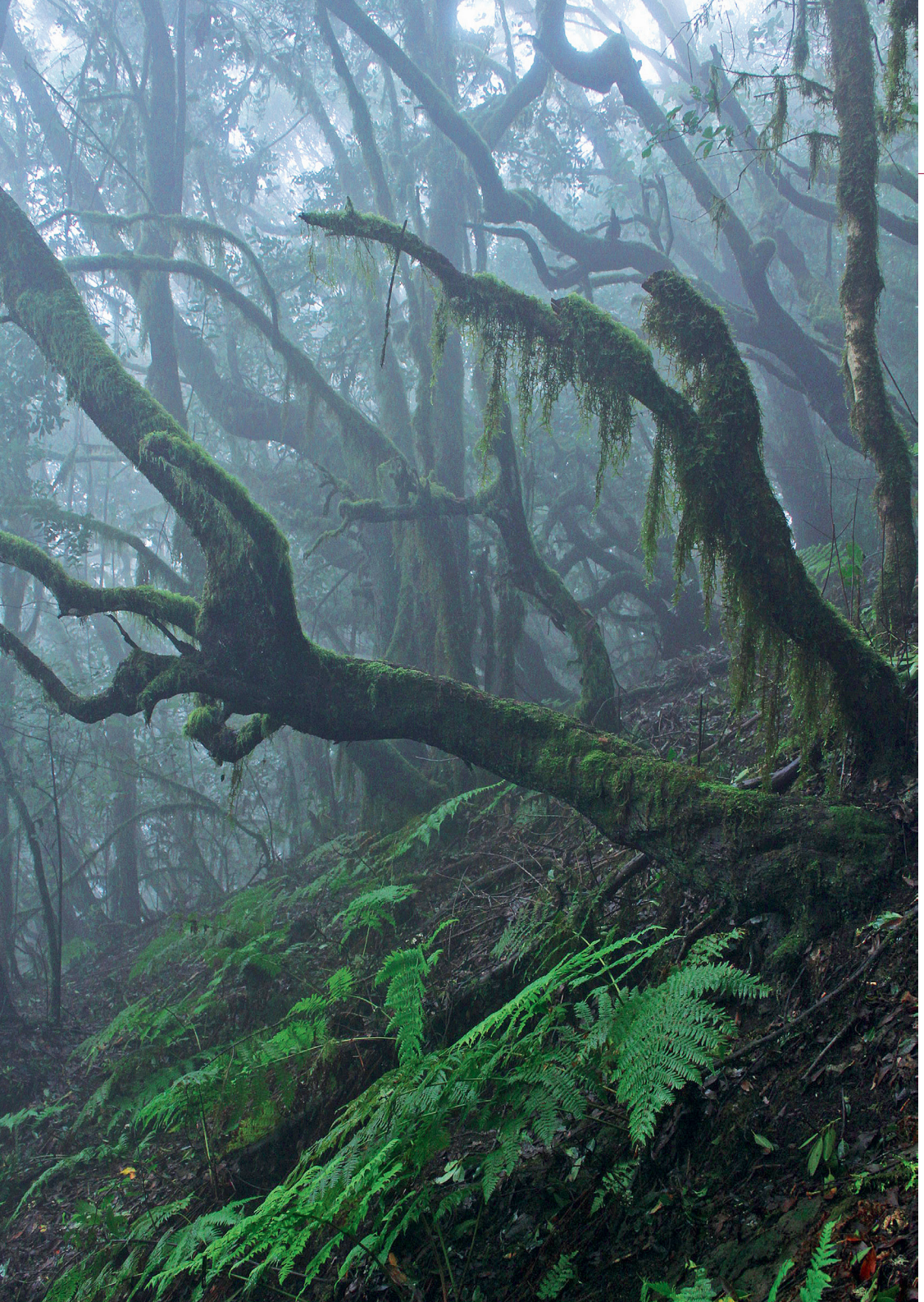


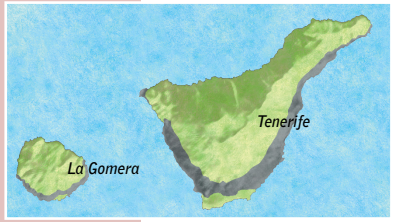
LANDSCAPE

Breaking out of the dreary winter weather for some sunshine. Sun, sea and sand with a cocktail in your hand. A cool beer on a terrace by a seaside boulevard. Holiday life. This is the usual image of Tenerife.
Now for something different. Imagine an 18th or 19th century schooner arriving on the shores of a pristine island. The rush of excitement as the explorer-naturalist first sets foot in the new world. It is full of life. There are wondrous plants and animals he never knew existed. Like a boy in a sweet shop, he starts collecting...
This is the weird dual character of the Canary Islands, to which Tenerife and La Gomera belong. On the one hand, they are a favoured destination for sunseekers, predominantly northern European pensionados. The islands breathe the air of semi-permanent retreat for the elderly, tethering on the edge of dullness. Yet on the other hand, much less known, these islands are a strange and wonderful world for naturalists. Scenically superb, rough and diverse, they are terra incognita, in which every nook and cranny is filled with species never seen before. This is as close as one can get to the excitement of the 18th and 19th century naturalist explorers like Darwin, von Humboldt and Wallace, who travelled new parts of the world and discovered countless new species. In fact, as recently as 1999, a new species of Giant Lizard was discovered on a remote cliff on La Gomera!
Where the pavement of the tourist resort ends, the strange vegetation of succulent bushes begins. Literally right at its edge, as you can see on route 12. As you are drawn further afield, you'll come across alien-looking bushes with thick, sausage-like trunks and small, stiff leaves growing out of the black lava. Grey, bone-like stems grow up from between the rocks like the skeleton of a hand. Going further inland, moving up through palm-clad gorges you soon find yourself rambling through thick, moss-draped cloud forests. And you haven't even seen the desert-like environment of the central crater yet, with its white pumice fields, laced by black lava streams.
Tenerife and La Gomera, indeed all the Canary Islands, are in a different league from the Mediterranean Islands. Whereas the latter show clear resemblances to the mainland, the Canary Islands form a world of their own. The flora and fauna only show similarities with a few other Atlantic islands, particularly Madeira.

Fog in Garajonay National Park (route 14).

Succulent scrub

Beautiful examples of succulent scrub can be seen on routes 5, 6, 9, 12 and 13, and sites E and F on page 172-173, site D on page 180 and L on page 208.



Position of the succulent scrub zone.

When you land on Tenerife south airport, the succulent scrub is the first thing you'll see. After picking up your hire car and driving up the slope of the Teide, you are greeted by a desert garden.

The dominant plants in this habitat are succulents – plants that store moisture in thick, leathery leaves and stems. They look somewhat like cacti, but these are native only to the Americas. However, the cactus growth form (thickly swollen stems and leaves – extreme succulence in other words), is widespread on the Canary Islands. It is an adaptation to the prolonged periods of drought.

This particular type of succulent scrub is unique to the Canary Islands, although a similar vegetation type is found on the Cape Verde Islands. Some of the dominant plants, such as Balsam and Canary Spurge, also occur on African and Middle-eastern coasts.

The succulent scrub, with the cactus-like Canary Spurge. This is Punta de Teno (route 5 / site B on page 150).

Originally, the succulent scrub covered the entire low-lying, south-facing slopes up to roughly 700 metres. On the northern side, only a thin strip is found, up to about 100 metres. There are sizeable areas of succulent scrub in the south-eastern and western part of Tenerife, the southern slopes of the Anaga mountains and on the entire southern coast of La Gomera. Sadly, many areas are unprotected and seen as 'mere wasteland' – incredible when you realise that this ecosystem and many of its inhabitants are unique to the islands.

The succulent scrub is a heaven for plant lovers. The key players in this warmest and sunniest vegetation zone are the oddly-shaped bushes of the Balsam *(Euphorbia balsamifera)*, Blunt-leaved Spurge* *(E. obtusiolia)* and Canary Spurge (*E. canariensis*; the latter looking like a true cactus) and the fist-thick stems of the Verode (*Kleinia neriifolia*; member of the Aster family). In some places, the Prickly Pear, a true cactus that was introduced from Mexico, has invaded the scrubland. In addition, there are many other, non-succulent bushes like the Canary Silk-vine* (*Periploca laevigata*), Plocama* *(Plocama pendula)*, Schizogyne* *(Schizogyne sericea)* and the spiny Shrubby Launaea* *(Launaea arborescens)*. Not being succulents, their strategy against the drought, is to have hairy and waxy leaves to protect themselves against the fierce sun. The Plocama bushes invest in extremely long and elaborate root systems to reach the deep ground water. These are the only bushes that remain green during the dry summer months.

The succulent scrub is an important habitat for reptiles, in particular lizards and geckos (with each island its own species). They profit from the creviced lava rock, which offers plenty of hiding places. In summer, praying mantises (several species; see page 109) are frequently seen.

The birdlife in this zone is rather poor. Only Berthelot's Pipit is common, especially in level areas with few shrubs. A few Spectacled and Sardinian Warblers are found in suitable bushes, the odd Canary sits on an overhead wire and a Great Grey Shrike or Kestrel may be perched on a Canary Spurge.

Common succulent plants: Verode (top), Balsam Spurge (centre) and Canary Spurge (bottom).

Tenerife and La Gomera´s birdlife in a nutshell

Canarian and Macaronesian endemics Macaronesian (Little) Shearwater, Madeiran Storm-petrel, Bolle´s Pigeon, Laurel Pigeon, Plain Swift, Berthelot's Pipit, Canary Islands Chiffchaff, Blue Chaffinch, African Blue Tit, Canary

North-African and Mediterranean species Barbary Falcon, Barbary Partridge, Stone Curlew (rare), Kentish Plover (rare), Pallid Swift, Hoopoe, Spectacled Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Southern Grey Shrike, Lesser Short-toed Lark (rare), Spanish Sparrow, Trumpeter Finch (rare)

Other specialities Bulwer's Petrel, Cory's Shearwater, Manx Shearwater, European Storm-petrel, Osprey, distinct subspecies of Robin, Buzzard, Chaffinch, Goldcrest, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Raven, etcetera

Nevertheless, Tenerife has only a limited number of birds. Its small size in combination with an isolated position in the Atlantic makes for a low bird diversity. This holds true even more so for La Gomera, which is decidedly poor in birds. This was already the case when the naturalist Bannerman visited the island in 1920: *"I know of few places so entirely shut away from the world, and which convey such an impression of complete isolation... From an ornithologist's standpoint the valley of San Sebastian is terribly disappointing, birds being very scarce and confined to a few species only."*

Most birdwatchers come in winter, escaping from bad weather in their homelands. However, all months are good for finding the characteristic island species, though (late) summer is best for seabirds. Note that Plain Swift is scarce in mid-winter.

Sardinian Warblers breed in scrublands and gardens on both islands.

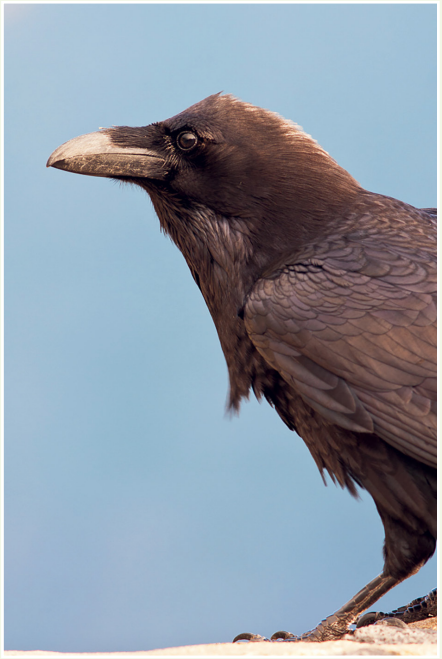
Birds of the succulent scrub and dry fields of the south

The desert and semi-desert birdlife forms a great attraction on Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, but on Tenerife and La Gomera there are only small and dwindling populations. Most desert birds require sizeable areas of relatively flat, arid land which is in short supply on Tenerife and even more so on La Gomera. Unfortunately, most suitable terrain in southern Tenerife has fallen prey to urban and tourist developments and agriculture, in particular those ugly, walled banana plantations. So, never numerous to begin with, the semi-desert birds on Tenerife and La Gomera are close to extinction. The curtain has fallen for the Cream-coloured Courser, while Lesser Short-toed Lark and Trumpeter Finch have become very rare.

Bird subspecies and their characteristics

Not only do Tenerife and La Gomera support a number of clearly distinct birds that are endemic to the Canary Islands, they also host various familiar birds which look (or sound) only a little different from those found elsewhere. These 'subspecies', as they are called, are listed below.

Sparrowhawk (Macaronesian subspecies *granti*) Darker above, thicker barring below.
Buzzard (Canary subspecies *insularum*) Smaller, lighter, underside more streaked.
Kestrel (West Canary subspecies *canariensis*) darker, male's head is darker.
Stone Curlew (West Canary subspecies *distinctus*) paler, heavy dark streaks.
Yellow-legged Gull (Macaronesian subspecies *atlantis*) – Generally darker and smaller.
Long-eared Owl (West Canary subspecies *canariensis*) darker and smaller.
Great Spotted Woodpecker (Canary subspecies *canariensis*) Underparts buff, bill longer.
Robin (West Canary subspecies *superbus*) larger, breast deeper red, underparts whiter, clearly separated from breast.
Blackcap (West Canary subspecies *heineken*) Smaller and darker.
African Blue Tit (West Canary subspecies *teneriffae*).
Tenerife Goldcrest (West Canary subspecies *teneriffae*) Deeper buff below and (like Fire-crest) black head stripes meet on forehead. Sometimes considered a full species.
Chaffinch (West Canary subspecies *canariensis*) Male upperparts deep slate-blue, rump bright green. Similar to North-African birds, which are sometimes considered a full species.
Great Grey Shrike (Canary subspecies *koenigi*) Smaller. Taxonomy and status under debate.
Raven (Canary / African subspecies *tingitanus*) Much smaller, higher call, brownish plumage.

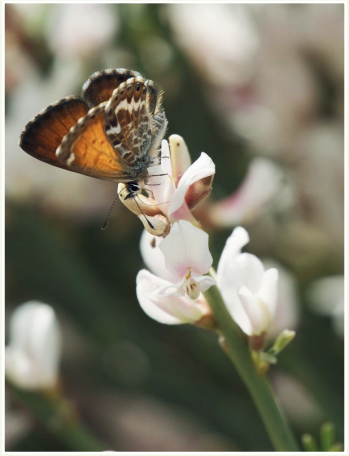


The Canarian subspecies of Raven has a brown neck and is much smaller than its European relative.

The Canary Red Admiral is frequent by roadsides and in flowery fields (top). A Canary Blue on Teide Broom (bottom).

In winter, the southern lowlands boasts plenty of Bath Whites, sometimes mixed with a Painted Lady or Canary Blue. The diversity on the northern slopes – the barrancos and the gardens – is higher, with Canary Speckled Wood, Common and Canary Red Admiral, Small Copper and Common Blue.

Numbers and diversity greatly increase as the season proceeds. In early spring, Canary Islands Large White and Canary Cleopatra are common in the barrancos, in some places joined by Canary Blue. In the second half of spring, when the high slopes of the Cañadas del Teide are in bloom, this is a superb area for butterfly watching. Tenerife Green-striped White, Tenerife Grayling and Cardinal are all common, but none of them occur in the numbers in which you'll see the Canary Blue. This is one of the star species of the Canary Islands. At last, this is a species of blue that is clearly recognisable from all the other species!



Canary Blues – another evolutionary puzzle

The Canary Blue belongs to a genus – *Cyclyrius* – that has only two species: one on the Canary Islands and another on the other side of Africa, on Mauritius. It has long puzzled evolutionary biologists how this was possible. The leading theory was that the parent species of both of them was widespread in Africa but went extinct. The problem with this theory is that the Canary Blue is a butterfly that seems to do well in an enormous variety of habitats – hardly a candidate for swift extinction.

Recent research indicates that Canary Blues become very picky in their habitat as soon as other blues enter the scene. Probably, other blues form strong competitors, so perhaps it is their absence on the Canaries that allows the Canary Blue to be abundant. On the mainland, the Canary Blue's parent species was pushed out by the competition.

Butterflies at various vegetation zones

Many butterflies on Tenerife and La Gomera are tied to one or two specific vegetation zones. Here are some typical species for each vegetation, plus their most prominent flying season. If no season is given, butterflies are on the wing year-round (although a lot less numerous in the winter moths).

Allotments, clearings in thermophilous scrub Canary Skipper (may-aug), Red Admiral, Canary Red Admiral, Small White, Bath White, Clouded Yellow, Meadow Brown (spring-summer), Small Copper, Common Blue, Long-tailed Blue, Gomera Grayling (spring-summer)

Barrancos and clearings in laurel forests Canary Speckled Wood, Canary Red Admiral, Red Admiral, Plain Tiger, Canary Islands Large White (march-sept), Canary Cleopatra (mar-sept), Canary Blue (feb-oct), Gomera Grayling (may-sept; Gomera only), Spanish Brown Argus

Cañadas del Teide and gullies in the pine forests Tenerife Green-striped White (mar-june); Canary Blue (may-aug; very common), Tenerife Grayling (april-sept), Cardinal (summer)

Lowland gardens and parks Monarch, Plain Tiger, African Migrant (some years), Geranium Bronze, African Grass Blue, Small White, Canary Speckled Wood

Dragonflies

Bath Whites are common on the hot, south-facing lowlands.

The porous volcanic bedrock has, by its nature, little surface water. Therefore, dragonflies are few and restricted to specific sites. There are no local species, with the exception of the Island Darter, which is unique to the Canaries and Madeira. There are quite a few African dragonflies that do not occur in Europe, or only very locally. These are highly attractive species like Ringed Cascader, Red-veined Dropwing and Sahara Bluetail. Most of them are restricted to the few permanent streams on Tenerife, such as the Barranco de Afur (route 10) and Barranco del Infierno (site E on page 180). These are the dragonfly hotspots. In the vegetation and on rocks in the streambed, large numbers of brilliantly red Red-veined

! No shade

Best season
Oct-June

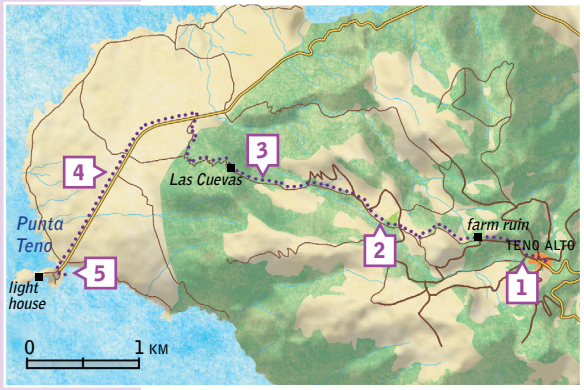
Route 5: From Teno Alto to Punta Teno

FULL DAY
MODERATE-STRENUOUS

Good bird watching with species of dry farmlands.
Tenerife lizards and sea birds on Punta Teno.

Habitats: Abandoned farmland, coastal scrub, thermophile forest, barranco
Selected species: Dark-red Spurge, Osprey, Barbary Partridge, Berthelot's Pipit, Canary, Corn Bunting, Raven, Spectacled Warbler, Tenerife Lizard

This scenic walk leads from the Teno plateau down to the coast and passes a wonderful range of habitats along the way. There are open grasslands and farmland on top, hosting a rich birdlife. From there you descend through a barranco along a hamlet (las Cuevas) with an endemic flora growing on abandoned terraces. The coastal zone further down has a beautifully zoned vegetation. Ultimately you end up at Punta Teno, where you can admire Tenerife Lizard, shearwaters and if you are lucky some dolphins or an Osprey. Combined this walk is scenically beautiful and has a rich flora and birdlife. Note that all the climbing takes place on your way back.



Starting point Teno Alto (GPS: 28.3435169,-16.8767762) Follow the trail to Punta de Teno (signposted).

1 Just outside the village, you walk through scrubland with open grasslands, sometimes combined with a patchwork of tree heath, broom and cistus vegetation. Much of this was farmland, sometimes on terraces, but is now abandoned. This habitat houses many birds. Canary, Corn Bunting, Kestrel, Berthelot's Pipit and Spectacled Warbler are easily to observe here. Along the way you can find some typical endemic plants of dry scrubland: Spiny Starwort* (*Pallenis spinosa*), Purple and Rough-leaved Viper's-bugloss* (*Echium aculateum*) and the Stemless Sow-thistle.

The road forks near a farm ruin. Take the right track following the yellow/white PR route. After 1 km you reach a small road and the first houses of the hamlet Las Cuevas. Cross the road and follow the trail to Punta de Teno.

2 On the right the terraced farmland dominates the view; on the left you look into the beautiful barranco. The Teno-bound endemic Dark-red Spurge grows between Lamarck's and Balsam Spurge, Prickly Pear, Agave and a number of field and roadside plants like Pelargonium and the white poppy *Papaver somniferum*. Further on the landscape becomes more open and rocky. This is the place where the Tenerife Lizard can be found. The birdlife remains rich, with Berthelot's Pipit, Buzzard, Raven and Barbary Partridge all frequently present.

3 The trail descends and as you walk down, the sea influence on vegetation becomes visible. Plants like Sea-heath, Canary Sea Fennel, Small-leaved Sea Lavender and Schyzogyne – all classics of the coastal scrubland – can be found here. They are well adapted to drought and salt, which comes as rain in drops from the sea, the so called salt spray. You'll still find some plants that were dominant in the barranco, such as Lamarck's Spurge and Prickly Pear, but here they are far less vital due to their low tolerance towards salt spray.

The trail ends at the road to Punta Teno, which is a little further to the left.

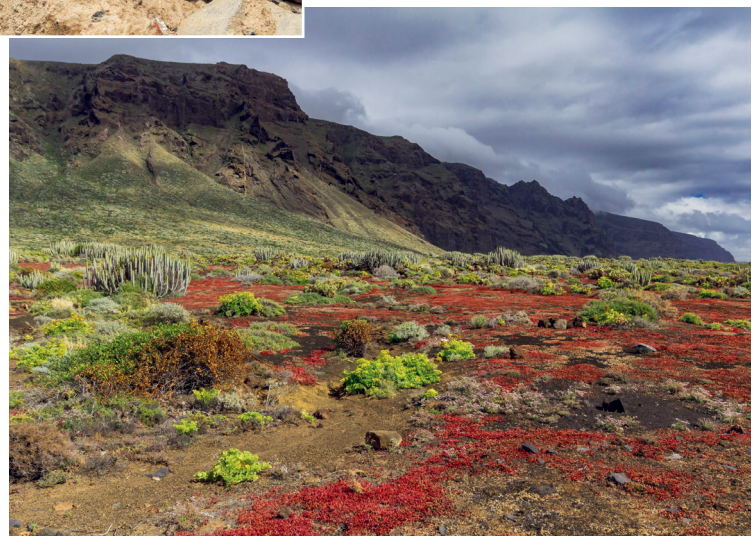
The terraced farmlands, now abandoned, are attractive for bird species like Buzzard, Raven, Corn Bunting and Barbary Partridge.

4 The walk along the road is a good opportunity to spot some characteristic birds like Rock Sparrow, Berthelot's Pipit, Corn Bunting and in winter also the Spectacled Warbler. Notice on your left the beautiful, colourful slope dominated by Canary and Dark-red Spurge and salt tolerating species that are typical for the coastal dry scrubland: Sea heath, Canary Sea Fennel, Small-leaved Sea Lavender and Schyzogyne.

5 On the small car park you can take a rest and enjoy the Tenerife Lizard which are abundant throughout the year. From here you have impressive views of the cliffs (acantilados) and in the distance the village of Los Gigantes. It is in the inaccessible crevices of these cliffs that the Tenerife Speckled (or Giant) Lizard lives, a species that is recently rediscovered (see page 103-104). End your tour by walking the beautiful boardwalk towards the ocean which gives you the opportunity to see the shearwaters and may be the Osprey that breeds here. When you are lucky you see some dolphins jumping out of the water.

Return the same way back.

In spring, the males of the Tenerife Giant Lizard have spectacular colours.



The coastal plain of Punta de Teno is covered in a beautiful, pristine succulent scrub.

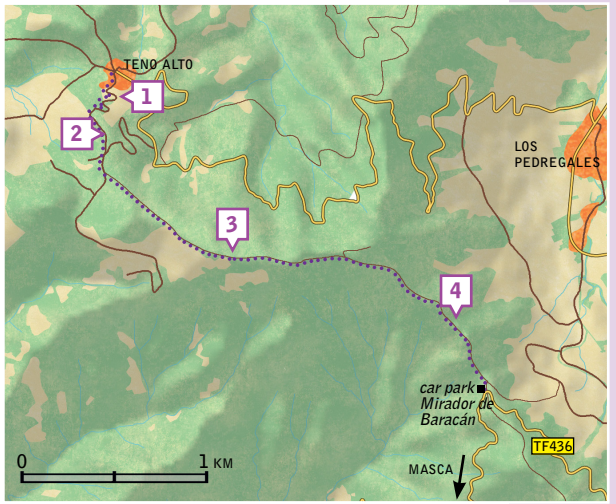
Route 6: Cumbre de Baracán

4 HOURS
EASY

Pleasant walk with breath-taking views.
Dramatic difference between north and south slopes.
Rich flora and birdlife.

Habitat:s Tree heath forest, thermophilous scrub, fields
Selected species: Hedgehog Pericallis, *Greenovia dodrentale*, Haworth's Houseleek, Canary Squill, Three-fingered Orchid, Two-leaved Gennaria, Canary, Buzzard, Tenerife lizard

Best season
February -April
Of interest
Year-round



This dramatic crest walk leads from the Teno Alto to the TF-436 (Masca) road. Along the way you get a good taste of the great differences between the north and south-facing slope of the mountain.
Although wide vistas into the deep barrancos are the main theme, this walk is quite diverse. You traverse dry scrubland, cross old tree heath forest, visit remnant patches of laurel forests and enjoy a rich undergrowth of endemic plants. The rich flora is accompanied by a good range of reptiles, butterflies and birds.
You can also do this route the other way around starting at the parking facility at Mirador de Baracán.

Starting point Teno Alto (GPS: 28.3435169, -16.8767762)