

BIRD RINGING IN THE CANARY ISLANDS

By Stanley and Elise Dickerson

The authors arrived at Bajamar, Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain, on October 7, 1960 for the purpose of banding birds on Tenerife under the auspices of the Canary Islands Ornithological Expedition directed by Dr. Carnes Weeks, M.D., and remained until November 2.

The Canary Archipelago consists of a group of thirteen islands, seven of which are inhabited. They lie off the northwest coast of Africa about 80 miles west of Rio de Oro (south of Morocco) and 3400 miles south-east of New York City. The island of Tenerife is one of the largest of the group, 52+ miles long and 31 miles wide, covering an area of 790 square miles. The general terrain is mountainous and of volcanic origin.

Bajamar is a small village located at the north end of the island on the west coast. The shore line is rocky and forms cliffs 50 to 60 feet high. Immediately to the rear of the village the ground rises continually until ridges of rock attain a height of about 2300 feet. At the edge of the inhabited area proceeding upwards and southeastward are fields of bananas, sugar cane and cotton, most of the fields being enclosed with tree-concrete water-troughs which are terraced and irrigated by means of tanks where the rain water is stored during the rainy season. Uncultivated areas are covered with cactus, *Euphorbia* spp. with scattered fig trees, palms, castor bean and a few unidentified shrubs. Except for the cultivated and irrigated areas the entire growth at Bajamar from the shore line eastward to the mountain ridges may be considered semi-desert.

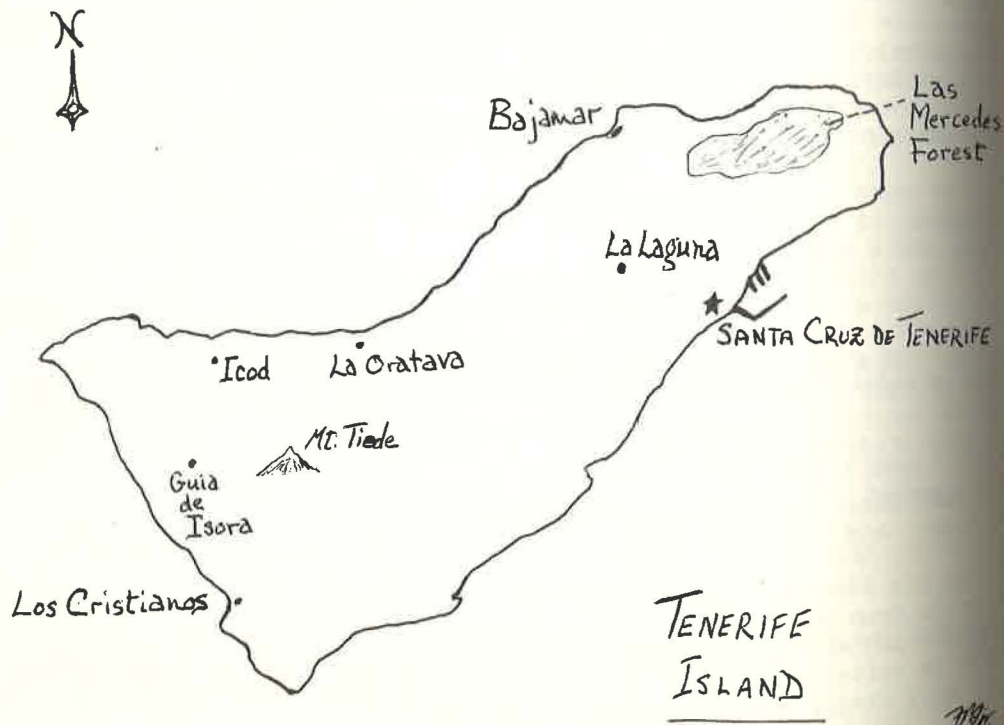
We began banding October 9th on the side of the mountain ridge east of Bajamar at an elevation of about 1000 feet in an area surrounding a spring and a water tank. Nearby was an old abandoned dwelling of one room with attached cow and goat sheds. Contrary to the general barrenness of the mountainside, in the area surrounding the spring for a distance of about 300 feet we found scattered palms, fig trees, many geraniums, cactus, and a pomegranate tree; also a large stand of bamboo and a small field of very large squash. All of this made excellent cover for birds and the constant dripping of the water at the spring must have attracted the many birds banded at this spot.

Nets were also placed in the garden of Casa Canariensis, home of Dr. Weeks, and in a small field about 50 feet to the rear of the house.

On one occasion two nets were placed near an empty water-tank about 500 yards from Bajamar across the Bajamar - La Laguna road where Dr. W. Tydzewski did most of his netting earlier this year, but no birds were caught in spite of the fact that the nets were in position all of one day. Many birds, mostly Serins and Sparrows with an occasional wagtail



Stanley Dickerson climbing to the banding site on Tenerife. (Photograph by Elise Dickerson.)



were seen and heard here but they used no particular flight lane and in fact flew about in large flocks very erratically.

The only other netting location used was at the Salinas (tanks where salt is acquired on a large scale by evaporation of sea water) near Los Cristianos at the southern tip of Tenerife where one bird was captured. The nets here numbered three and were placed at the edge of one of the water evaporation tanks where waders were seen to be flying. However, there was no cover to shield the nets from the sun or wind and the birds either flew over or under the nets.

During the entire period 178 birds of 10 species were banded, which sounds like very sparse banding to an "Island Beacher". On the other hand, in view of the fact that Dr. Ryzewski banded over 400 in 4½ months the figures are comparable. It would seem that there are just no large concentrations of birds on the island. Most of the birds banded were weighed, fat-classed, and beak, tail and wing measurements made which were noted on separate cards for each bird banded.

No effort was made to age any of the birds captured because all of the species were new to the authors and we had not had an opportunity to study skins of those species nor were we familiar with the moults or specific data requisite for such determination at this time of year. For the same reason we did not distinguish subspecies of any of the captured birds and only noted the sex in those cases where it was obvious. It was clearly apparent, however, that with one exception (the Kentish Plover) the banded birds were local rather than migrants. For example, the Blue Tit on the continent has a clear yellow breast while the Blue Tit on Tenerife (*Parus caeruleus teneriffae*) has a black streak running down the center of the breast.

The net location at the spring was the most promising until October 17th when only eight birds were captured even though the climb was made before sunrise and nets were set up all day. On October 9th 43 birds were banded in five hours using three nets; On October 12th, 31 in the same length of time; on October 14th, 52 in eight hours. But on October 20th only three were captured and on October 29th only 2. It is interesting to note that according to local information there had been no rain at Bajamar for several months until the afternoon of October 14th and only two birds were captured after the rain began on that day. There was a light shower on October 22nd and a hard shower of some hours duration on October 19th and on the 27th. It may be surmised that the rains, once they began, left no need for the birds to go to the spring for water or food. Certainly the diminution in the number of birds at that location needs some explanation. At no other location or area at any time did we capture or observe birds in the numbers we had here.

On October 8th, the first day after our arrival, we walked over the countryside in an endeavor to find flight lanes that might prove to be good netting places. At that time we did not know precisely where Dr. Rydzewski had set his nets. During the whole day we were not able to find the spot where it would be possible to set nets nor were we able to find any definite flight patterns at all, although we did observe several Grey Wagtails, Swifts, Serins, Kestrels, and many Spanish Sparrows. In the garden of Casa Canariensis there were frequently to be seen 2 or 3 Hoopoes and an occasional Chiffchaff and Sardinian Warbler. Finally late in the afternoon a climb was made to the spring on the side of the mountain for the purposes of observing and taking the poles necessary for erecting the nets. There, many Blue Tits, Serins and a Robin were seen using the spring so that early the next morning we left for that spot taking nets, scales and lunch, since the climb requires one and a half hours each way. On both the 8th and the 9th, two Little Egrets were observed flying in the vicinity of a water tank and one was seen and photographed feeding on the rocks below the house at low tide on October 15th. Another Little Egret was seen at Los Cristianos but only one Heron was observed during our stay, which was seen flying near one of the water tanks at Bajamar on October 8th.

On October 10th a Spectacled Warbler was seen in the garden and later in the day two were captured in the nets there. On the days when the nets at the spring were operated, the nets were furled at about 6 pm., as the goat-trail down the mountain was not negotiable after dark. On the way each evening, large numbers of Serins were observed flying up the mountain in flocks of 150 to 200. On October 14th an Eleanor's Falcon was seen at the top of the mountain ridge as were also two unidentified Buteos. Many Kestrels were frequently observed and heard calling, on the trips up and down the mountain. Warblers (Black-caps, Sardinian and Chiffchaff) were seen and heard at about 500 feet and Pipits and Sparrows at about 750 feet.

On a trip to La Laguna and Oratava on October 18th, many Kestrels were seen but at the Botanical Gardens four Blackbirds seemed to be the sole inhabitants. The next day, it rained quite hard in the morning, clearing in the afternoon when we took a taxi to Las Mercedes Forest. The trip was very interesting with many beautiful views photographed but was uneventful as far as birds were concerned as only a few Falcons were seen the entire trip.

On October 23rd, having had a letter and map from Dr. Rydzewski, nets were set up at his location. We observed during the entire day: 75+ Serins, 1 Chiffchaff, 3 Kestrels, 1 Grey Wagtail, 15 Spanish Sparrows, and 1 Chaffinch, but did not capture a single bird.

The trip to Mt. Tiede (highest point in Spain: 12,262 feet) did not produce many birds although we did see on that day (October 24th) our

first Raven. Later on the Los Cristianos trip we saw several Ravens and were able to observe eight at one time on a ridge near Icod. At an overlook south of La Laguna we heard a Chiffchaff and at the end of the road at the base of the peak we saw 20+ Pipits while we were eating our picnic lunch. Many Kestrels were again observed on this trip.

At about one o'clock on the 25th we arrived at Los Cristianos and immediately set up 3 nets in an effort to band shore birds at the Salinas. While watching the nets until dark, we saw 6 Turnstones, 12 Pipits, 10 Grey Plover, 2 Dunlin, 4 Ringed Plover, 1 Kentish Plover, 2 Herring Gulls and one Little Egret. We obtained permission to leave the nets up overnight and we netted, banded and photographed one Kentish Plover the next morning. There were many Pipits around and a fourth net was set up and an effort made to drive the pipits into the net, which was unsuccessful. The BIG bird for that day was a wonderful close view of an Egyptian Vulture observed for many minutes near Guia de Isora on the way home.

During our entire stay Robins were never seen except at the spring where several were banded. On the 29th one was seen singing there and for the first time we were able to learn its song.

The Spanish bands are very similar to ours except that they come already opened on plastic holders which contain 50 bands each. A typical number and one that we used is "J 4048". The "J" indicates the size. The schedules are filed by band size instead of species and the information included on them is much like ours except that ONLY the scientific names are used.

While in England we stopped at the Monk's House Bird Observatory at Seahouses, Northumberland for several days, helping to mist net and clap-net birds, and where we added 41 new birds to our life list. The director at Monk's House is Dr. E.A.R. Ennion who became very interested in the Canary Islands Ornithological Expedition and it gives us great pleasure to know that he and Mrs. Ennion are following us up at the Bajamar station and will be there banding birds from the middle of December through February.

Spotswood, New Jersey

I heard a bird sing
In the dark of December
A magical thing
And sweet to remember.
"We are nearer to Spring
Than we were in September"
I heard a bird sing
In the dark of December.
-- Oliver Herford.