LAYMAN REPORT

LIFE+ PINZÓN LIFE14 NAT/ES/000077

Project to increase range and population size of the priority species

Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch
Fringilla polatzeki
2015 / 2020

endangered

www.lifepinzon.org
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**Project data sheet**

**NAME**
LIFE+PINZÓN
LIFE14 NAT/ES/000077

**COORDINATING BENEFICIARY**
TRAGSA

**ASSOCIATED BENEFICIARIES**
Consejería de Medio Ambiente del Cabildo de Gran Canaria.
Viceconsejería de Lucha contra el Cambio Climático del Gobierno de Canarias.

**TITLE**
Project to increase range and population size of the priority species *Fringilla polatzeki* (Gran Canaria blue chaffinch).

**DURATION**
16-09-2015/15-02-2020

**Budget**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>60% FUNDING</th>
<th>40% FINANCING</th>
<th>TOTAL BUDGET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![LIFE logo]</td>
<td>![Tragsa logo]</td>
<td>![Natural 2000 logo]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What are Natura 2000 Network and a LIFE programme?**

**Natura 2000 Network**

Natura 2000 is a European ecological network of biodiversity conservation areas. It is the main tool for nature conservation in the European Union. It consists of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) established according to the Habitats Directive and also Special Protection Areas (SPA) designated by the Birds Directive. Its objective is to ensure the long term survival of species and types of habitats in Europe, helping to stop the loss of biodiversity.

**LIFE Programme**

The LIFE programme is the main European Union environmental conservation project funding tool and is also used to develop community environmental legislation and policy. Life+Pinzón: Project to increase range and population size of the priority species *Fringilla polatzeki* was launched in 2015, with 60% of its budget provided by the LIFE Programme. This project is developed as a part of the Natura 2000 Network. The main goal of the project was to promote the habitat of the Gran Canaria blue chaffinch and increase its population size.
Summary, objectives, expected and obtained results

**Summary**

The project’s target species, the Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch (*Fringilla polatzeki*), colloquially known as “pinzul” and “pinero”, is considered in the Annex I of the Birds Directive as a “priority species”. At the beginning of the project, its population was estimated to be about 300 individuals distributed between the Inagua pine forest (source population; 279 individuals, CI 95%; 195 - 430) and the Central Summit pine forests (24 individuals minimum), and by the end of the project, the population is now around 430 individuals spread out across Inagua (362 CI 95%; 257 – 489) and the Central Summit (68 CI 95%; 43 – 109), according to 2019 census.

The project took place in the central part of the island of Gran Canaria, where the action area is completely located within the Natura 2000 Network. The actions have been focused around the creation of a viable population of blue chaffinch in the Gran Canaria Summit, through the release of 107 individuals that come from captive breeding and the wild population of Inagua, as well as the creation of ecological corridors to reduce habitat fragmentation. These corridors aim to connect the Inagua pine forest with the Summit, and the summit pine forest with Cruz de Tejeda, by the planting of 62000 canarian pines (*Pinus canariensis*) and 3000 lucerne trees (*Chamaecytisus proliferus*). Furthermore, there has been monitoring of the wild population and released individuals of blue chaffinch and a control of introduced predators, capturing 166 feral cats. Outreach actions have also taken place to let people know about the blue chaffinch in Gran Canaria, and the LIFE+Pinzón project.

**Objectives**

*Creation of a sustainable blue chaffinch population in the Summit’s pine forests.*

Release of blue chaffiches bred in captivity and translocated from Inagua pine forest to the pine forests in the Central Summit.

*Increase population size of the Gran Canaria blue chaffinch.*

An increase in the number of individuals is expected through the translocation and release of individuals in the Summit.

*Environmental restoration for the commissioning of ecological corridors.*

Reforestation with canarian pines and lucerne trees to create ecological corridors between the pine forests of Inagua and the central Summit.
**Expected/Obtained results**

**Expected / Obtained**

**120 / 107**

Individuals released in the central summit from those bred in captivity and translocated from Inagua

**160 / 68**

Established population size in the summit (24 individuals in 2015)

**450 / 430**

Individuals total population estimated (250-300 individuals in 2015)

**80,000 / 65,000**

Canarian pines and lucerne trees planted in ecological corridors

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**Historical timeline**

**1856**

Initial news of the presence of the Blue Chaffinch

**1905**

Spotted in Inagua by Johan Polatzeck, described as a new subspecies differentiated by Ernst Hartert

**1991**

Start of the specific conservation programme

**1995 / 1996**

LIFE94/E/A212/001154/E/A2012/001159 actions for the conservation of the Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch and the Laurisilva pigeons

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**2005**

Approval of the first official recovery plan for Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch

**2013**

Review and approval of a new recovery plan for Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch
**Expected/Observed results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>Obtained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>65,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PLANTED IN ECOLOGICAL CORPORATIONS**

**Canarian Pines and Lucerne Trees**

**Established Population Size in the Summit**

(24 individuals in 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Released</th>
<th>120 / 107</th>
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</thead>
</table>

**Total Population Estimated**

(250–300 individuals in 2015)

**Historical timeline**

- **1991**: Start of the specific conservation programme
  - **1999 / 2002**: LIFE98 NAT/E/005354
- **2007**: Inagua Forest Fire reduces the population of the Blue Chaffinch to approximately 50%
- **2008 / 2012**: LIFE INAGUA: Restoration of pine forests affected by the fire
- **2013**: Review and approval of a new recovery plan for Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch
- **2015 / 2020**: LIFE+Pinzón Azul Project
- **2016**: The IUCN recognises Fringilla polatzeki (GC) as a species, differentiated from Fringilla teydea (TF)
- **2020**: Summit SPA Declaration

**Project area map**

- **1957**: Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch spotted in Tamadaba
- **2005**: Approval of the first official recovery plan for Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch
- **2007**: Inagua Forest Fire reduces the population of the Blue Chaffinch to approximately 50%
- **2008 / 2012**: LIFE INAGUA: Restoration of pine forests affected by the fire
- **2013**: Review and approval of a new recovery plan for Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch
- **2015 / 2020**: LIFE+Pinzón Azul Project
- **2016**: The IUCN recognises Fringilla polatzeki (GC) as a species, differentiated from Fringilla teydea (TF)
- **2020**: Summit SPA Declaration
**Description of the blue chaffinch**

**a Legal protection**

The Gran Canaria blue chaffinch is catalogued as an endangered species according to the Spanish Catalogue of Endangered Species, the Canarian Catalogue of Protected Species and the List of Wild Species with a Special Protection Regime.

In the first annex of the Bird Directive (Directive2009/147/CE) it is considered “priority species” for the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Since 2016, it is classified as "endangered" species on the Red List of Threatened Species of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

**b Biology**

The Gran Canaria blue chaffinch is an endemic bird linked to the forest of the Canarian pine tree. It is territorial and socially monogamous with a breeding season from April to July.

Nests are placed in the branches of pine trees, preferably 15 to 20 metres above the ground, in pine forests that are not too dense (25-50% cover of the tree crown). They lay just two eggs, but one third of the reproductive females can lay a second breed. The average number of hatchlings per successful nest is estimated to be 1.45, where the average annual productivity is 1.37 hatchlings per breeding pair (ranging from 1.10 to 1.64).

Reproductive success is estimated to be between 54% and 65%. Preliminary analyses based on the catching and re-catching of individuals have estimated the survival rate to be 67% for adults and 55% for young birds.

Food is based on Canarian pine seeds and invertebrates, the latter being particularly important during the breeding season.

The Gran Canaria blue chaffinch is slightly smaller than its close relative, the Tenerife blue chaffinch *Fringilla teydea*. Furthermore, it has two well-defined white wing bands and the blue colour of the plumage is less intense. Recent studies have also shown genetic and morphological differences, as well as in the song and calls of both species, so they are currently considered to be two completely different species. They are both larger than the common chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, a common bird in medium-altitude areas.

**DIFFERENCES FROM OTHER CHAFFINCH SPECIES**

- **Blue plumage is less intense**
- **well defined wing band**

Male common chaffinch from Gran Canaria *Fringilla coelebs bakeri*

Male blue chaffinch from Gran Canaria *Fringilla polatzeki*

Male blue chaffinch from Tenerife *Fringilla teydea*
The blue chaffinch’s quintessential habitat is the Canarian pine forests which are located at an altitude of 1100-1700 metres. The Canarian pine forest is a natural habitat of Community interest- 42.9 "Macaronesian pine forests (endemic)"- included in the Annex I of the Directive 92/43/CEE and the Canarian pine tree (Pinus canariensis) is endemic to the western Canary Islands and can be found in Gran Canaria, Tenerife, La Gomera, La Palma and El Hierro.

Shrub species like the lucerne trees (Chamaecytisus proliferus), the Canary Island flatpod (Adenocarpus foliolosus) and the yellow broom (Teline microphylla) among many others, also inhabit in the Canarian pine forests together with different species and subspecies of fauna, some of which are endemic.

The main population of Gran Canaria blue chaffinch is found in the Inagua pine forest (36 km²), one of the best preserved native pine forests in Gran Canaria, located in the western area of the island. Some blue chaffinches have been released in the pine forests of the central Summit (21 km²), which are afforestations less than a hundred years old, in order to facilitate the establishment of a new population.

Traditional use of the pine forest since ancient times has created a rural economy linked to sustainable use of the ecosystem. However, since the Castilian conquest in the 15th century, overuse and uncontrolled logging of the pine forest reduced and fragmented the area of the island’s pine forests. Reforestations in the mid twentieth century on the Gran Canaria summit have achieved a partial recovery of the forest’s original extent.
### Population trend

#### In Inagua

Population density in the central area of the Inagua Integral Reserve, where the species is most abundant, has been increasing since the demographical crisis linked to the great forest fire of July 2007.

During the development of the LIFE+Pinzón project, the density has varied between 8.3 and 17.7 chaffinches /km².

#### In the central Summit

Initial observations date back to 1998 when two individuals were found, and 2008 when two breeding pairs were observed.

From 2016 onwards, an intensive census programme has been established over a 15.5 km network of fixed transects, combined with an exhaustive search for breeding pairs across an area of 21 km². Density has increased from 1.12 in 2016 to 3.3 chaffinches per km² in 2019.
Project motivation

The low population number of the blue chaffinch plus the fact that their habitat has become reduced and fragmented makes these actions essential for their conservation within the frame of the Blue Chaffinch Recovery Plan in Gran Canaria, with the objective of improving the state of this endemic Gran Canaria species. Moreover, making this species known to the citizens of Gran Canaria is important to help to help bird conservation.

Project Actions and results

The project consists of a series of actions divided into four main blocks: Preliminary, conservation, monitoring and dissemination actions. Conservation actions include the creation of ecological corridors, blue chaffinch releases and control of introduced predators.

a  Preliminary actions

Before initiating observation actions, a translocation plan was created to better define the optimal capture and release methodology. Furthermore, the habitat was studied to better define the optimal translocation areas in the Central Summit.

b  Ecological corridors

With the goal of connecting existing pine forests in the Gran Canaria Central Summit, four different ecological corridors have been created through the LIFE+Pinzón project, and Inagua pine forest has been extended:

- CENTRAL SUMMIT CORRIDOR
  To connect the Inagua pine forests with the Summit pine forest.
- PILANCONES CORRIDOR
  Between the Inagua and Pilancones pine forests.
- CRUZ DE TEJEDA CORRIDOR
  Between the Summit and the northern pine forests.
- MARTELES CORRIDOR
  Between the Summit and the Marteles pine forests.

62,000 CANARIAN PINE TREES
Pinus canariensis

3,000 LEGUMINOUS NATIVE SHRUB
Chamaecytisus proliferus

89 ha
PRIVATE LANDS
THE LIFE+PINZÓN PROJECT THANKS THE PRIVATE OWNERS WHO HAVE LENT US THEIR PROPERTIES FOR THE REFORESTATION EFFORTS WITHOUT RECEIVING ANY SORT OF ECONOMIC COMPENSATION.

It is worth mentioning that the Gran Canaria Summit is divided into a multitude of small holdings which make the conservation efforts more difficult. 89% of the reforested area belongs to private owners.
During the project, a total of 210 ha have been planted along the four corridors. The following table shows the amount of trees planted in each of the corridors, as well as the reforested surface area.

### Reforested Ecological Corridors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SURFACE (ha)</td>
<td>PLANTED TREES</td>
<td>SURFACE (ha)</td>
<td>PLANTED TREES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENTRAL SUMMIT</td>
<td>14.68</td>
<td>7,033</td>
<td>14.68</td>
<td>5,748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PILANCONES</td>
<td>13.88</td>
<td>3,498</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRUZ DE TEJEDA</td>
<td>14.94</td>
<td>2,160</td>
<td>22.77</td>
<td>4,683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARTELES</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INAGUA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>43.50</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,691</strong></td>
<td><strong>45.63</strong></td>
<td><strong>11,676</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following map shows the reforested areas in each ecological corridor within the projects area.
Two methodologies have been used for bird release, depending on the individuals origin.

**Delayed/Assisted release** for captive-bred specimens: they spend six days and six nights in acclimation cages (3x2x2 m), placed 1 m above the ground with 24hr surveillance. These cages were modified in order to reduce contact and therefore stress in the birds while they were being transferred between cages.

**Immediate release** for individuals that were captured in Inagua and translocated to the Central Summit: Individuals are moved in 80x21x35 cm transport cages, where they remain for a single night after being captured, and they are released at the Central Summit without an acclimation period. A weighing system was installed inside the cages to control weight loss.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>CAPTIVE BRED INDIVIDUALS RELEASED</th>
<th>INDIVIDUALS TRANSLOCATED FROM INAGUA</th>
<th>TOTAL NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS RELEASED IN THE CENTRAL SUMMIT</th>
<th>RADIO-TRACKING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Monitoring of the blue chaffinch population in Gran Canaria

From 2015 to 2019 continuous monitoring of blue chaffinch in its natural habitat has taken place, with four periods labelled throughout the year:

a) April-August: Breeding period, re-sighting of individuals and census.
b) August-September: Ringing and collecting biometric measurements of juveniles.
c) September-November: Radio-tracking of individuals with a transmitter.
d) September-March: Post-release monitoring at the Central Summit

After 2018 breeding pairs and nests were monitored only in the Central Summit.

The results obtained by the LIFE+Pinzón show a total of 107 specimens released at the Central Summit, of which 8 have been seen in Inagua over the following years, which proves their movement between the Inagua pine forests and the Central Summit.

MONITORING RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INAGUA</td>
<td>CENTRAL SUMMIT</td>
<td>INAGUA</td>
<td>CENTRAL SUMMIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESTIMATED POPULATION INDIVIDUALS</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIVIDUALS/ Km²</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REPRODUCTIVE BREEDING PAIRS MONITORED</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAILED NESTS</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRODUCTIVITY (CHICKS/PAIR)</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUCCESSFUL BREEDING</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>72.73%</td>
<td>49.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BREEDING PERIOD</td>
<td>APR / AUG</td>
<td>MAY / AUG</td>
<td>APR / AUG</td>
<td>APR / AUG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RINGED INDIVIDUALS</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Through the placement of 2,000 tomahawk traps, a total of 166 cats were captured following legally established procedure over a period of 3.5 years. The sex ratio was ca. 50%:50%, with more captured adults than young individuals (60%:40%). Location of the traps and feral cats captured are shown below.

**CAT CAPTURES WITH TOMAHAWK TRAPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2016 (6 meses)</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Location of the traps and feral cats captured are shown below.
With the aim of advertising the Gran Canaria blue chaffinch and the LIFE+Pinzón project, different dissemination activities were implemented throughout all of the island's municipalities in order to involve the Canarian population, reaching around 12000 people from 2016 to 2019.

- **100 Puppet Shows** for children in kindergarten and primary school
  - 4,000 children

- **100 Outreach Workshops** for highschools and adults (social groups, associations, environmental organisations)
  - 3,000 people

- **27 Reforestation and Watering Activities with Volunteers**
  - 1,000 people
  - 3,500 trees

- **11 Informative Stands** at environmental events
  - 3,500 people

- **5 Working Tables** to know more about the impact of the project groups involved
  - 100 people

- **1 International Conference** with 23 speakers from 8 different countries
  - 300 attendees
Furthermore, specific outreach materials were designed. A website was created (25000 page views) where all the information and actions that the project entails was published. The “Natura Network 2000 day” event was held and there was participation in international lectures, radio interviews and television shows.

**Dissemination Activities**

- **6 Presentations and Information Exchanges with Other Conservation Projects Networking**
- **3 Events of Natura Network 2000 Day and the 25th Anniversary Celebration of the LIFE Programme**
- **5 Informative Panels Installed in the Project Area**
- **3 Roll-Ups**
- **20,000 Leaflets and Triptychs + 8,000 Units of Outreach Material Such as T-Shirts, Caps, Notebooks, Pens, USB Drives and Tote Bags.**
- **20 Media Appearances and Interviews**
- **1:1 Scale Model of Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch (Male and Female)**

The project has had a positive economic impact on the island due to the investment involved. It contributed to the creation, directly or indirectly, of 8 jobs during 4 years. The percentage distribution of expenses incurred throughout the project in the different municipalities of the island, in other islands and outside the Canary Islands is shown in the following graph:

Environmental benefits and socioeconomic impact

- INCREASES LANDSCAPE VALUE
- MAINTAINS ATMOSPHERIC HUMIDITY
- ACTS AS A CO₂ SINK
- PREVENTS EROSION AND RECOVERS SPRINGS
- PROVIDES LEISURE AND RECREATION SPACES

Conservation and management of the pine forest aims to create a relationship of coexistence, which allows us to take advantage of the natural resources by respecting and conserving the forest’s natural processes and all its inhabitants, including the Gran Canaria blue chaffinch. The conservation activities implemented had a positive impact on the environment.

The LIFE project is a funding instrument that has been used to implement part of the actions foreseen in the Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch Recovery Plan. During five years after the end of the LIFE+Pinzón project, within the After-LIFE phase the following actions will be undertaken:

a) Maintenance and monitoring of the reforestations
b) Expanding ecological corridors
c) Monitoring blue chaffinch wild and released population
d) Introduced predator control
e) Dissemination activities

The creation of a sustainable population nucleus of blue chaffinch on the Central Summit made it necessary to establish a protection for the species in that area. Through an action of the project, the Special Protection Area (SPA) “Cumbre de Gran Canaria” extends the SPA “Ojeda, Inagua and Pajonales.”
The project has had a positive economic impact on the island due to the investment involved. It contributed to the creation, directly or indirectly, of 8 jobs during 4 years. The percentage distribution of expenses incurred throughout the project in the different municipalities of the island, in other islands and outside the Canary Islands is shown in the following graph:

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### After LIFE

The LIFE project is a funding instrument that has been used to implement part of the actions foreseen in the Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch Recovery Plan. During five years after the end of the LIFE+Pinzón project, within the After-LIFE phase the following actions will be undertaken:

a) Maintenance and monitoring of the reforestations
b) Expanding ecological corridors
c) Monitoring blue chaffinch wild and released population
d) Introduced predator control
e) Dissemination activities
Two week old fledglings

Radio-tracking

Chaffinch with transmitter in a feeder

Release of captive-bred specimens

Reforestation maintenance

Reforested area

Watering

Two week old fledglings

Blue Chaffinch Puppet Workshop for Children

Volunteering activities

LIFE+Pinzón Volunteers

www.lifepinzon.org