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Tour Report

Portugal - Birds & Whales of Madeira

10 – 14 May 2018

Atlantic canary



Berthelots pipit



Madeira firecrest



Cory shearwater



Compiled by: Catarina Correia-Fagundes & Hugo Romano

Tour Leaders: Catarina Correia-Fagundes and Hugo Romano with 12 participants

Due to the change of position of the Azores' high pressure system, Madeira had been experiencing some unseasonal weather compared with the rest of Europe, and to previous years. Despite this, we enjoyed four very fruitful days with sightings of two species of dolphins, all the endemic bird species of Madeira and Macaronesia, some interesting plant species and quite a few species of butterflies.

Day 1: Fly to Funchal, transfer to Machico, coastal birding

Thursday 10 May 2018

The group landed at Madeira International Airport at 1115, slightly earlier than scheduled. The weather outside was cloudy though not dark and although in UK the day before was 25 degrees, in Madeira the temperature was slightly lower, between 18 and 20 degrees.

After checking in at Amparo hotel and having some time to settle into the rooms, we were collected for our trip to Caniçal, a fishing village, for lunch at a local restaurant. The owner of the restaurant entertained us with his guitar and a Caniçal hymn.

After lunch we were driven towards the east tip of the island to look for Berthelot's pipits and kestrels. We stopped at Ponta do Rosto, a viewpoint where we could see both north and south coasts of Madeira and also admire some endemic flowers such as Madeira sea-stock, Mandon's chrysanthemum, downy sow-thistle and bird-foot trefoil. We also saw yellow-legged gulls and clouded yellow butterflies.

We then headed to Ponta de São Lourenço to look for rock sparrows, which were only seen flying and one in silhouette on the scope very far out. We were treated to bottlenose dolphins jumping and frolicking about two nautical miles south. One of the doves we saw displayed the characteristics of a rock dove.

Next stop was downtown Caniçal, where we observed a male spanish sparrow singing in a tree and later a pair of them below a roof. Collared doves were also seen.

As the day was long and some of the group were quite tired, we headed back to Machico, with a short stop along the coast in search of common waxbills and atlantic canaries. We were rewarded with some excellent views. A few of the clients walked back to the hotel with Catarina while Hugo drove the others who did not feel up to walking. On the walk back we observed a grey wagtail.

Weather: Cloudy, 18 - 20 degrees

Day 2: Whale & dolphin watching, nature walk in laurel forest

Friday 11 May 2018

The morning was cloudy with some openings, a wind up to 12 knots and temperature between 18 degrees and 22 degrees.

The group met Catarina and Hugo at the harbour, which is within ten minutes walk from the hotel. We were given lifejackets and a security briefing before boarding the 11 metre long rib. We sailed towards the eastern tip of the island in search of birds and cetaceans. We watched some Cory's shearwater flying by, a common tern and a few yellow-legged gulls. Near the tip of the island we saw a loggerhead turtle which soon got scared and dived. Later we saw some rafts of Cory's shearwaters and the first Bulwer's petrel was pointed out by John as we were heading to a pod of bottlenose dolphins. This first pod of dolphins were not very playful and after a few minutes we lost sight of them. We continued riding the short in search of more Bulwer's petrels until the the crew received a call saying the dolphins had been seen just outside Caniçal harbour, where we had been an hour before. So we headed back to the harbour and were able to see more playful bottlenose dolphins and also some Atlantic spotted dolphins. After two and a half hours we were back at Machico harbour and walked to the restaurant which was close to the hotel.



This afternoon we headed inland, mostly on the north side of the island. Our first stop was at São Vicente where we observed a group of at least 14 trocaz pigeons in a single tree. Not a common sighting as these pigeons, endemic to Madeira, are usually solitary birds. Then we watched a colony of common and roseate terns already with chicks. It was good to compare and be able to distinguish both species. Clouded yellow butterflies were flying around.

The second stop was at Chão da Ribeira where we had some good butterfly sightings, Madeira brimstone, Madeira specked wood and a red admiral as well as a few birds, the Madeira subspecies of chaffinch and two Madeira firecrests. Here, we also saw three different species of trees belonging to the *Lauraceae* family: bay laurel, *Laurus novocanariensis*, Madeira mahogany, *Persea Indica* and Madeira or fetid laurel, *Ocotea foetens*, which are the namesake of the native forest of Madeira: the Laurisilva or Laurel Forest. Other species of endemic plants observed included the *Salix canariensis*, *Teline maderensis* and *Erica scoparia maderincola*.

On the way back to Machico we stopped at the river mouth of Ribeira Brava to see if there were any vagrant birds around but we had no luck, there were only muscovy ducks, yellow-legged gulls and a couple of grey wagtails calling around. Another stop before getting back to the hotel in Machico was at Cabo Girão, a glass-bottom viewpoint over one of the highest sea cliffs in Europe, with 580 metres of altitude. This was a nice way to overlook Câmara de Lobos and Funchal and also see some amazing terracing for agriculture in some unthinkable places.

Weather: Mostly cloudy, 18 - 22 degrees

Day 3: Full day birdwatching in West Madeira, Zino's petrel night tour **Saturday 12 May 2018**

The day started quite cloudy and again was only 18 degrees. We were picked up at 0900 for our walk in the laurel forest. We began our hike up the mountain, passing through Santo da Serra and before Poiso we had pass through thick cloud where visibility was only a few metres ahead. After Poiso we drove down to Ribeiro Frio which was below the cloud, although there was some light rain. As we started the walk the rain stopped and soon after familiarising ourselves with the 'giant' Madeira blueberry *Vaccinium padifolium* and the heathers (*Erica arborea* and *Erica scoparia maderincola*), we saw the Madeira subspecies of the chaffinch and a short while after, a Madeira firecrest. Continuing on to Balcões, we saw a couple more firecrests, robins and some more endemic plants such as *Cedronella canariensis*, *Geranium palmatum* and two species of Madeira stonecrop, the *Aichrysum dumosum* and the *A. divaricatum*.

At the viewpoint the chaffinches were very obliging as they are used to people feeding them. Soon the viewpoint got overcrowded and we were unable to spend more time in search of the trocaz pigeons which were supposed to be flying down the valley. So we went back, just before the rain hit the viewpoint and took a shortcut to the road where Hugo had repositioned the cars.

Then we drove down to the northeast of Madeira and just as we were passing through São Roque do Faial we spotted some swifts, so parked the cars and went out to get a good view of them. We were able to identify them as plain swifts. Normally, this was a more common species in Madeira but according to our guides, this year has been very poor for swifts and for no apparent reason.

We went for lunch at a scenic restaurant and after the meal we walked around the hotel/restaurant's gardens, where we watched trocaz pigeons, common buzzard, kestrel, canaries, greenfinch and goldfinch. We could also admire different species of proteas which adorned the gardens. Just as we were leaving the area, some of us saw a wire full of linnets.

We then headed up the mountains again, where the cloud seemed to be lower. We arrived at Pico do Arieiro where we were able to see where the night walk for the Zino's petrel was going to be and assess the



difficulty level. Despite the cloud covering part of the path, we could get a good view of the steep path with its many steps up and down!

The last stop of the day was at Garajau where we made a quick stop at the viewpoint to look for spectacled warbler but it was only at a second spot that we were able to see it.

Only five of the group were brave enough to face the not so easy walk up the mountains at night. Just before getting out of the car we were told that temperature was three degrees, so we dressed up warmly, thankfully having taken extra clothing with us. After about a 35 minutes walk, we got to the observation spot where we sat on the ground and stargazed. A few minutes later we were treated to the petrels calling in the distance and some a few of us saw some silhouettes flying by. We heard some closer calls but most were a bit far off, which, according to our guides, is not very common as normally they do call closer to that observation point. After nearly one hour and the temperature dropping, we were served hot tea and some typical biscuits and then we were ready to head back again.

Weather: Cloudy with light rain, 18 degrees

Day 4: Birdwatching north of Funchal, sunset whale watching excursion **Sunday 13 May 2018**

We started our morning by heading back to Ponta de São Lourenço to try to see red-legged partridges and to get better views of the rock sparrows. Sadly, neither were spotted but we did get to see kestrels and some rock doves, while Berthelot's pipit were calling around. We then moved on to a different area, near a marina, where rock sparrows nest on the cliffs and finally managed to get really good views of them. The next stop was closer to Funchal, where the sun was shining. Our aim was to get closer to trocaz pigeons and even though we did get closer than on our previous attempts, we only managed to see a couple of birds. Buzzard and blackcap were also seen. Before going back to the hotel we took a drive through Funchal city to get an idea of what it was like.

We had our lunch at the hotel and then met the guides at the harbour for our second sea trip. As the sea was quite choppy and windy we went downwind all the way to Ribeira Brava, where the wind was light. On the way we saw many bottlenose dolphins, Cory's shearwaters, a few Bulwer's petrels, manx shearwaters and a group of about seven dunlins flying eastwards. We then went out to observe a big group of Atlantic spotted dolphins, together with several different species of birds, Cory's and manx shearwaters, six black terns (which were identified on the trip as whiskered terns, but later in the photos we could see they were bald terns) and later a group of about 15 Arctic terns join them. A great skua also passed by this group but no attacks were seen. On the way back to Funchal we saw three more great skuas and kept watching the Cory's and manx shearwater flying by the rhib. As the sea was quite choppy to go back to Machico we dropped the clients off at Funchal where the cars were already waiting to take them back to the hotel. Catarina and Hugo braved the waves to take the boat back to its port of call.

Weather: Very cloudy morning, cold breeze with some sun later, 18 degrees

Day 5: Birdwatching locally, fly back to the UK **Monday 14 May 2018**

We were collected from the hotel at 0950 and were dropped at the airport at 1000 for our check-in and the midday flight back to Gatwick.

Checklist

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
	BIRDS					
1	Muscovy duck	<i>Cairina moschata</i>		✓		
2	Zino's petrel	<i>Pterodroma madeira</i>			✓	
3	Cory's shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea borealis</i>		✓		✓
4	Manx shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus puffinus</i>				✓
5	Bulwer's petrel	<i>Bulweria bulwerii</i>		✓		✓
6	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓		
7	Common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo harterti</i>			✓	✓
8	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				✓
9	Yellow-legged gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Roseate tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>			✓	
11	Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		✓	✓	✓
12	Arctic tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>				✓
13	Black tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>				✓
14	Great skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>				✓
15	Rock dove	<i>Columba livia atlantis</i>	✓			✓
16	Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia feral</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Trocaz pigeon	<i>Columba trocaz</i>			✓	✓
18	Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓			
19	Plain swift	<i>Apus unicolor</i>			✓	
20	Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus canariensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Spectacled warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata orbitalis</i>			✓	
22	Madeira firecrest	<i>Regulus madeirensis</i>		✓	✓	
23	European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>			✓	
24	Spanish sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	✓			
25	Rock sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia madeirensis</i>	✓			✓

26	Common waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>	✓			
27	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea schmitzi</i>	✓			
28	Berthelot's pipit	<i>Anthus berthelotii madeirensis</i>	✓		✓	✓
29	Common chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs madeirensis</i>		✓	✓	✓
30	European greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris aurantiiventri</i>			✓	
31	Common linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina guentheri</i>			✓	
32	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis parva</i>			✓	
	CETACEANS					
1	Common Bottlenose dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>		✓		✓
2	Atlantic Spotted dolphin	<i>Stenella frontali</i>		✓		✓
	BUTTERFLIES					
1	Small white	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓		✓	✓
2	Clouded yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>	✓		✓	✓
3	Madeira brimstone/Cleopatra	<i>Gonepteryx maderensis</i>			✓	
4	Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>			✓	
5	Madeiran speckled wood	<i>Pararge xiphia</i>			✓	
6	Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>			✓	✓
	REPTILES					
1	Loggerhead turtle	<i>Caretta caretta</i>		✓		
2	Madeira wall lizard	<i>Teira dugesii</i>		✓	✓	✓
	PLANTS					
1	Madeira sea-stock	<i>Matthiola maderensis</i>	✓			
2	Mandon's chrysanthemum	<i>Argyranthemum pinnatifidum</i>	✓			
3	Downy sow-thistle		✓			
4	Bird-foot trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	✓			
5	Bay laurel	<i>Laurus novocanariensis</i>		✓		

6	Madeira mahogany	<i>Persea indica</i>		✓		
7	Madeira or fetid laurel	<i>Ocotea foetens</i>		✓		
8	Willow species	<i>Salix canariensis</i>		✓		
9	Madeira Dyer's greenweed	<i>Teline maderensis</i>		✓		
10	Madeira blueberry	<i>Vaccinium padifolium</i>			✓	
11	Tree heath	<i>Erica arborea</i>			✓	
12	Besom Heath?	<i>Erica scoparia maderincola</i>		✓	✓	
13	"false" Balm of Gilead	<i>Cedronella canariensis</i>			✓	
14	Canary Island geranium	<i>Geranium palmatum</i>			✓	
15	Madeira stonecrop	<i>Aichryson dumosum</i>			✓	
16	Madeira stonecrop	<i>Aichryson divaricatum</i>			✓	