

THE TRAVELLING NATURALIST

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Tour Report

Madeira – Birds, Whales & Dolphins of Madeira

9-13 May 2019

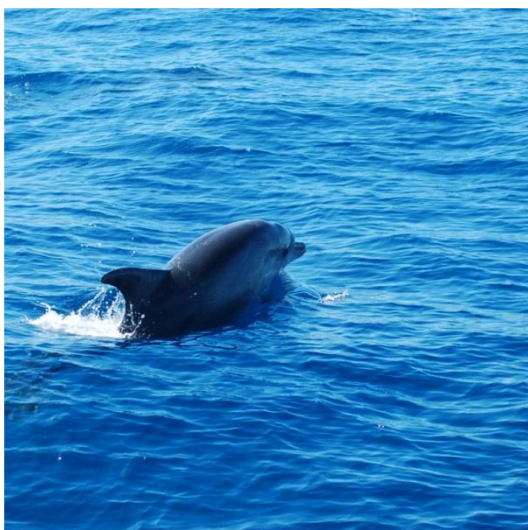
Chaffinch



Dolphins & shearwaters



Bottlenose dolphins



Maderia firecrest



Tour Leaders: Catarina Correia-Fagundes and Hugo Romano

We enjoyed great weather and good sea conditions on our four days in Madeira, although the temperatures were a bit higher than normal for May. We had great views of three different species of cetaceans, observed all the endemic bird species of Madeira and Macaronesia, together with some butterflies.

Day 1

Thursday 9 May 2019

The group's flight was delayed due to the French air controllers' strike, however on arrival in Madeira, the sun was shining and after a late lunch, we were more relaxed.

After lunch we birdwatched around Caniçal downtown, looking for Spanish sparrows which have unfortunately decreased a lot in the last three years - so much that we could not find any. We did, however, see a male blackcap, collared doves and grey wagtail.

We then moved to a viewpoint near the east tip of the island where we could watch Berthelot's pipit, kestrel, two plain swifts and an elusive rock sparrow. We heard red-legged partridge but could not see any. We were also able to admire endemic plant species as Madeira sea stock, downy sow thistle, bird's foot trefoil and Mandon's chrysanthemum. There were also a few clouded yellow butterflies flying around.

We then returned to Machico where we walked from the harbour to the hotel. Walking by the riverside we spotted grey heron, squacco heron, Atlantic canary, a moorhen with two chicks, along with some Muscovy ducks and grey wagtails.

Day 2

Friday 10 May 2019

Cloudy inland but clearer by the coast

After walking from our hotel to the harbour in Machico we started our boat trip shortly after 9:30am. We headed south where we had an encounter with hundreds of bottlenose dolphins, dozens of Cory's shearwaters, some yellow-legged gulls and a couple of Bulwer's petrels. The sea was quite flat with the wind blowing at no more than five knots and the dolphins were spread out in groups which covered an immense area.

On the way back to Machico we checked the back of Caniçal harbour for any vagrant birds and there we watched two dunlins, five ruddy turnstones and a common tern. Back in Machico we walked to a local restaurant for lunch, just next to the hotel, and then went back to our rooms to prepare for our afternoon walk.

Driving from Machico to Faial beach on the northeast side of the island, we admired the pleasant landscape and the interesting geologic formations - prismatic columns of basalt. Although this is normally a good spot for visiting birds, unfortunately there were none present today.

We then continued uphill until Ribeiro Frio where we started our walk through the laurel forest. The first 400 metres were a little uphill until we got to the levada where the path was flat. So we followed the levada until a viewpoint half way up the mountains where lots of very tame chaffinches were around. Just before the viewpoint we had really nice views of the tiny and restless Madeira firecrest. During the walk Catarina pointed out a few endemic species of plants as well, such as Madeira blueberry, lilly-of-the-valley tree, Madeira geranium and two different species of stonecrops.

After the walk we continued uphill, passed the clouds, until the third highest peak of Madeira, Pico do Arieiro, to enjoy the views above the clouds and also to check the path that we were taking the next evening, close to the breeding grounds of the Zino's petrel.

The way back to Machico took us through a different road which passed by Santo da Serra, and we arrived back at Machico shortly before 7:00pm.

Day 3

Saturday 11 May 2019

Sunshine, no clouds, warm temperatures up to 24°C forecast.

We were picked up at 9:00 am and headed west, to a place above Funchal to watch the endemic pigeon: trocraz pigeon. They provided difficult to find, however Hugo, one of the two guides, found a few perching on a tree which permitted very good views through the telescope.

Back to the car we then continued to São Vicente on the north of the island where we observed a colony of common and roseate terns, being able to compare and distinguish between the two species. The next stop was at the laurel forest above Seixal where we were able to watch Madeira firecrests and chanffiches again. Lunch was at Porto Moniz at the northwestern tip of Madeira, known for its natural swimming pools.

The afternoon was spent on a slow birdwatching walk at Ponta do Pargo during which we spotted spectacled warbler, berthelot's pipit, barn swallows, buzzards, several kestrels and a red-legged partridge. The last stop of the day's tour was at Ribeira Brava river mouth where we watched grey wagtail, two dunlins, yellow-legged gull and a lesser black-backed gull.

After dinner there was a night tour to the mountains, close to Zino's petrel breeding colony, to hear and try to see the silhouettes of these threatened seabirds. Due to the type of walk (around 30 minutes walking up and down several steps to the top of the mountain), only two of the group joined the guides on this night adventure. On the way up to Pico do Arieiro, while driving, a woodcock was spotted on the road, but as soon as the car stopped it flew away. After reaching 1,810 metres, there was already one bird calling. We sat on the steps and while stargazing we heard these enigmatic calls, once thought to be the suffering souls of the shepherds who died on the mountains, and we were lucky enough to see some silhouettes too.

Day 4

Sunday 12 May 2019

Blue skies and sunshine

We were picked up at 10:00am for a walk along Funchal city. We were dropped at Parque de Santa Catarina where we heard the blackcaps singing and saw a few monarch butterflies. We then crossed the centre of the city, passing by the theatre, the cathedral, the city hall, court house, farmers market and one of the oldest roads in the city, Rua de Santa Maria, where many doors have been painted by different artists. We also assisted a folklore group with some typical dancing and admired some nice flower tapestry for the flower festival held the weekend before. We were picked up close to the cable car station returned to the hotel for lunch.

In the afternoon we embarked on a rigid-hulled inflatable boat for a pelagic trip. We started by finding bottlenose dolphins which were not as playful as on the other day so we kept riding towards the west and soon we encountered a group of short-finned pilot whales which were also heading west, so we rode with them for quite a while. Then we stopped and drifted for about one and a half hours while we waited for the chum to attract seabirds. Unfortunately the wind was very light which does not help the chum smell to propagate and no new species were attracted aside from the ones we had already watched: Cory's and Manx shearwaters and Bulwer's petrels. We started the journey back to Machico, checking for rafts of Cory's shearwaters, and soon spotted a pod of short-beaked common dolphins - but these were on a hurry to get somewhere towards the west of the island



and so we did not have very good views; however they did lead us to a Desertas petrel who flew by. This was the first bird spotted this year by our guides as they normally arrive by end of May.

We were just entering the bay of Machico, at sunset, where Catarina made a sudden turn to the south, towards a feeding frenzy of Cory's shearwaters and more short-beaked common dolphins. This time we had great views of the dolphins as they were breaching alongside the boat. So a great ending to our four days discovering Madeira's fauna and flora.

Day 5

Monday 13 May 2019

We were picked up by the hotel at 9:50am for the short journey to the airport and flights back to the UK.

so that we could do the check-in and take the flights back to UK.



Checklist

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Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
BIRDS					
Berthelot's pipit	<i>Anthus berthelotii madeirensis</i>	X		X	
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula cabrerae</i>	X	X	X	
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla heineken</i>		X		X
Bulwer's petrel	<i>Bulweria bulwerii</i>		X		X
Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo harterti</i>			X	
Canary	<i>Serinus canaria canaria</i>	X	X	X	X
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs madeirensis</i>		X	X	
Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	X			
Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		X	X	X
Cory's shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea borealis</i>		X		X
Desertas petrel	<i>Pterodroma deserta</i>				X
Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia feral</i>	X	X	X	X
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis parva</i>		X		
Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea schmitzi</i>	X		X	

Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus canariensis</i>	X	X	X	X
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina guentheri</i>			X	
Madeira firecrest	<i>Regulus madeirensis</i>		X	X	
Manx shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus puffinus</i>				X
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	X			
Plain swift	<i>Apus unicolor</i>		X	X	
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		heard		
Rock sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia madeirensis</i>	X			
Roseate tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>			X	
Spectacled warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata orbitalis</i>			X	
Trocaz pigeon	<i>Columba trocaz</i>			X	
Yellow-legged gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	X	X	X	X
Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticana</i>				
Zino's petrel	<i>Pterodroma madeira</i>			X	
Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			X	
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		X	X	
Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	X			X
House martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>			X	
Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			X	

Ruddy turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		X		
Squacco heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	X			X
CETACEANS					
Common bottlenose dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>		X		X
Atlantic spotted dolphin	<i>Stenella frontali</i>				X
Short-finned pilot whale	<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i>				X
BUTTERFLIES					
Small white	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		X	X	
Clouded yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>	X		X	X
Long-tailed blue	<i>Lampides boeticus</i>			X	
Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		X		
Speckled wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		X	X	
Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>			X	X
REPTILES					
Loggerhead turtle	<i>Caretta caretta</i>				X
Madeira wall lizard	<i>Teira dugesii</i>	X	X	X	X