

Madeira & Desertas Islands - A Seabird Extravaganza

Naturetrek Tour Report

11 - 15 June 2014



Cory's Shearwater



Berthelot's Pipit



Male Canary



Bottle-nose Dolphin

Report compiled by Martin Beaton
Images courtesy of Graham Canny



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Day 1

Wednesday 11th June

The group were met by Martin and Luis at the airport where the minibus was waiting to transport everyone the short 20 minute trip to Funchal and Residential Pina our base for the tour. The trip from the airport to Residential Pina provided an initial view of a Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus canariensis* a subspecies endemic to Macaronesia Ref Note 1 *) and numbers of Pale Swift (*Apus unicolor* a species endemic to Macaronesia *) which was also seen again from the courtyard of the hotel. Martin provided the group with a small map of Madeira and Funchal to provide some orientation and Luis provided an overview of the tours that we would undertake over the next few days, which would include an additional optional boat trip on a ridged inflatable boat that afternoon.

After a light lunch those opting for the additional boat trip walked down to the harbour. During the trip they were lucky to see Atlantic Spotted Dolphin (*Stenella frontalis*), Short Finned Pilot Whale (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*) along with their first views of Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*) and Bulwers Petrel (*Bulweria bulwerii*). In addition Yellow-legged Gulls (*Larus cachinnans*) and Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) were seen around the harbour along with a Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*).

Those who decided to explore Funchal and take a boat trip later during their extended stay, were able to see numbers of Funchal's exotic street trees including The Pride of Bolivia (*Tipuana tipu*), Yellow Trumpet Tree (*Markhamia lutea*), African Tulip Tree (*Spathodea campanulata*), Jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*), Brazilian Kapok (*Chorisia speciosa*), Queensland Kauri (*Agathis brownii*), Flame Tree (*Brachychiton acerifolius*), and Indian Bead Tree (*Melia azedarach*). The commonest bird in these trees were Canaries (*Serinus canaria canaria* a species endemic to Macaronesia*)

This evening we walked into the town to eat at Restaurante Combatentes situated at the edge of the small garden Jarden Municipal for an excellent meal.

Day 2

Thursday 12th June

Today we made an early start with breakfast at 7.30am departing Residential Pina at 8.00am to begin our exploration of several typical Madeiran habitats, searching for the characteristic bird species. Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla heinecken* subspecies endemic to Macaronesia) and Blackbird (*Turdus merula cabreræ* subspecies endemic to Macaronesia) were both heard and seen in Residential Pina before we departed.

We drove initially via Ribero Brava, Sao Vicente and Seixal on the north coast to Chao da Ribeira, where we stopped at the end of the track to begin our short walk. At this point the slopes of this steep valley are clothed with Laurel forest (note 2), the habitat of Trocaz Pigeon (*Columba trocaz* a species endemic to Maderia). Almost as soon as we left the bus a pigeon flew across the valley and as we walked a short distance we saw a number of individual birds moving around. A Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo barterti* a subspecies endemic to the Madeiran archipelago*) briefly crossed the ridge, flushing seven pigeons out of the forest. However it took some time to find a perched bird through the telescope to study.

After about 45 minutes we retraced our steps back along the north coast and then south up into the mountains and Encumeada where we walked along the Levada das Rabacas. Here we found Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs madeirensis* a subspecies endemic to the Macaronesia**) and after much searching and tantalising calls, Firecrest (*Regulus ignicapillus madeirensis* a subspecies endemic to the Madeiran archipelago) and a Robin (*Erithacus rubecula rubecula*). A heavy mist and light rain, typical of these rare Laurel cloud forests, persisted and we were unable to find the Madeiran sub-species of Blackcap. However returning to the start of our walk we saw as a consolation - the rare Madeiran Rock Orchid (*Orchis scopulorum*).

Descending a short distance to our lunch stop we dropped below the cloud to glimpse the mountain landscape of Madeira. After lunch we descended to the south coast and headed east in warm sunny weather to Ponta de Sao Laurengo. Leaving the bus we took a short walk to look at this dry eastern peninsular where the vegetation had already turned brown, though small groups of the spectacular Cardoon (*Cynara cardunculus* subspecies *ferocissima*) were in flower. Whilst stopping to look for the principal bird species we heard a Quail (*Coturnix coturnix confisa* subspecies endemic to Macaronesia*) which we failed to see, but did observe Berthelot's Pipit (*Anthus berthelotii madeirensis* species endemic to Macaronesia*), Rock Sparrow (*Petronia petronia madeirensis* subspecies endemic to Macaronesia*), and Canary. In addition we saw Rock Dove (*Columba livia atlantis* subspecies endemic to Macaronesia*), and a Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*). After our visit to Sao Laurengo we returned to the hotel and again ate at Restaurante Combatentes.

Day 3

Friday 13th June

Today we left the hotel at 10.00 am for the harbour to begin our trip to the Desertas Islands which lie as a mysterious and inaccessible group of islands 12 nautical miles to the south east of Madeira. The three small islets of Chao, Deserta Grand and Bugio are islands of volcanic origin, an extension of the Sao Laurengo peninsular. They are arid and inhospitable and composed predominately of orange and red ash layers, with a coastline that is very rocky, steep and generally inaccessible but which form an important breeding area for a range of rare species. Today as we boarded our boat the Ventura do Mar, we were able to look forward to exploring this normally inaccessible group of islands.

From the harbour we headed initially out into the bay to see Atlantic Spotted Dolphin along with a brief view of Brydes Whale (*Balaenoptera edeni*) before heading east following the coastline of Madeira, to the Sao Lorenzo peninsular and then southeast towards Desertas. Several flying fish were seen leaping and gliding. Outside of the shelter of the bay the Atlantic swell and northerly trade winds provide ideal sailing conditions. Our views of birds included principally Cory's Shearwater, with Bulwers Petrel and our first glimpse of Fea's Petrel (or Zino's - they are virtually indistinguishable on the wing at sea)

On arriving at Desertas Grand the group were ferried ashore to take an initial look at the camp site and path through the bird breeding area so everyone was familiar with the layout before dark. Larger numbers of Canaries were seen and photographed around the camp site along with the occasional Berthelot's Pipit. A number of typical plants of the SE part of Madeira were seen (note 3). Two plants were however of particular interest because of their rarity: Blood-eyed Chrysanthemum (*Argyranthemum haematoma*) an extremely rare endemic known only from wet coastal rocks near Porto do Monze on Madeira and the Desertas, along with a Rock Mustard (*Sinapadendron sempervivifolium*) which is only known from the Desertas.

Around 6.00 pm we returned to Ventura do Mar for a 2 hour trip offshore to the southwest. Whilst waiting for the inflatable to ferry us back to the boat, we saw what initially looked like a turtle floating in the water some distance of shore. However on approaching the boat we saw a Monk Seal and it became obvious that this was what we had previously seen. It was clear that Monk Seals behave very differently at the surface than Grey and Common Seals with which we are more familiar as they hold their heads up above the water when observing. Monk Seals, however lie with their bodies horizontally at the surface and with their only heads slightly raised, more reminiscent of a large otter moving through the water. Moving offshore we quickly came across large numbers of Cory's Shearwater in rafts and flying around. In addition there were occasional sightings of Fea's Petrel. Strong winds prevented us from drifting and attracting birds in with food.

We returned ashore at about 9.00 pm and with the sun setting enjoyed the barbeque prepared by the crew of Ventura do Mar. In the early darkness we began to hear the calls of returning Cory's Shearwater. After listening for some time we became aware of a background, cicada-like chirring, which was the mysterious call of the Madeiran or Band-rumped Storm Petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*) The unusual dog-like barking call of Bulwer's Petrel was also heard. At 11.00 pm we made our way to the Ranger accommodation to observe the work of a current research project and en route we came across a Bulwer's Petrel in open ground, clearly a non-breeding bird, but demonstrating how difficult these entirely pelagic birds have in moving around on the ground. The Bulwer's research project also provided close views on the birds revealing how small fragile yet perfectly adapted they are for life at sea.

Day 4

Saturday 14th June

After a night in tents, on the boat or in the open, we rested whilst waiting for breakfast, enjoying Canary and Berthelot's Pipit. We departed Desertas Grand at 11.00 for our return journey to Madeira. The wind had dropped slightly and our course provided more comfortable to observe large numbers of Cory's Shearwater and Bulwer's Petrel, passing generally as single birds. During our return trip we saw two Loggerhead Turtles but unfortunately no cetaceans. We returned to Funchal Harbour by about 2.30 pm, having lunch in a local restaurant and taking the afternoon to relax before our evening trip.

At 8.15pm we departed for the high peak of Pico do Areeiro to search for Zino's Petrel (*Pterodroma madeira* a species endemic to Madeira). We arrived with a clear still sky, as the sun was setting behind dramatic peaks providing fabulous views of the deeply eroded peaks. The route off Pico Areeiro follows a ridge towards Miradouro Ninho da Manta and then on to Pedra Riga where we stopped to listen for Zino's Petrel to arrive. It is a route only accessible at night with guides. Zino's Petrel breeds only in Madeira's high peaks, returning to its breeding sites after dark where it calls and displays. The night was clear and after a short wait in this spectacular moonlight landscape we heard the birds and had occasional views largely as shadows in moonlight. Its call is eerily ghostly, and locals thought it the souls of old shepherds.

Day 5

Sunday 15th June

The bus arrived at 9.30 am at Residential Pina to take those returning home today to the airport. However several members of the group had previously arranged to stay on.

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The group birding

Species List

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	June				
			11	12	13	14	15
1	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	✓				
2	Zino's Petrel	<i>Pterodroma madeira</i>				✓	
3	Desertas Petrel	<i>Pterodroma deserta</i>			✓	✓	
4	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>			✓		
5	Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris borealis</i>	✓		✓	✓	
6	Bulwer's Petrel	<i>Bulweria bulwerii</i>	✓		✓		
7	Band-rumped Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma castro</i>			✓		
8	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓			
9	Madeiran Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo harterti</i>		✓			
10	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus canariensis</i>	✓	✓			
11	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓				
12	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>				✓	
13	Atlantic Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis atlantis</i>	✓	✓		✓	
14	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
15	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓			
16	Trocaz Pigeon	<i>Columba trocaz</i>		✓			
17	Plain Swift	<i>Apus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla heineken</i>	✓	✓			
19	Madeira Firecrest	<i>Regulus madeirensis</i>		✓			
20	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula cabreræ</i>	✓	✓			
21	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓			
22	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓			
23	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>		✓			
24	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea schmitzi</i>		✓			
25	Berthelot's Pipit	<i>Anthus berthelotii</i>		✓	✓	✓	
26	Madeira Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs maderensis</i>		✓			
27	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓			
28	Atlantic Canary	<i>Serinus canaria</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
29	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>		✓			

Reptiles & Amphibians

1	Loggerhead Turtle	<i>Caretta caretta</i>			✓	✓	
2	Madeiran Wall Lizard	<i>Lacerta (Teira) dugesii</i>	✓	✓			
3	Perez's Frog	<i>Rana perezi</i>		✓			

Mammals

1	Mediterranean Monk Seal	<i>Monachus monachus</i>			✓		
2	Bottle-nosed Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>			✓		
3	Atlantic Spotted Dolphin	<i>Stenella frontalis</i>	✓		✓		
4	Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>			✓		
5	Short-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i>	✓				

Butterflies

1	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		✓			
2	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>		✓			
3	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓	✓			

	Common name	Scientific name	June				
			11	12	13	14	15
4	Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>	✓	✓			

Dragonflies

1	Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>				✓	
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Other invertebrates

Spider Wasp, *Entypus unifasciatus*

Chequered Beetle, *Trichodes octopunctatus*.

Southern Green Shield Bug, *Nezara viridula*

Hairy Shield Bug, *Dolycoris baccarum*

Note 1. Species and sub species and their geographical range

Madeira = the Island of Madeira

Madeiran archipelago = Madeira, Porto Santa, Desertas

Macaronesia = Madeira archipelago + Desertas, Salvage Islands, Canary Islands, Cape Verde Islands and Azores

Note 2. Principle tree species of the Laurel Forest;

Canary Island Laurel (*Laurus azorica*), Til (*Ocotea foetens*), Lily of the Valley Tree (*Clethra arborea*)

Note 3. Principle plant species see at Desertas Grand Camp Site; (P = planted)

Blue Birds Foot Trefoil (*Lotus glaucus*), Downy Sow Thistle (*Andryala glandulosa* spp *glandulosa*), Madeiran Hawkweed (*Tolpis macrorhiza*), Mandon's Chrysanthemum (*Argyranthemum pinnatifidum succulentum*) P, Blood-Eyed Chrysanthemum (*Argyranthemum hematoma*) P, Rock Samphire (*Critbium maritimum*), Broom rape (*Orobranche* spp), A Synapadendron (*Synapadendron sempervivifolium*) P, Madeiran Sea Stock (*Matthiola maderensis*), Globe Flower (*Globularia salicina*), Hare's Tail Grass (*Lagurus ovatus*), Purple vipers bugloss (*Echium plantagineum*), A Phagnalon (*Phagnalon bennettii?*) A Sedum (*Sedum nudum*), Egyptian Fig Marigold (*Mesembryanthemum nodiflorum*), Ice Plant (*Mesembryanthemum crystallinum*), Azoon (*Aizoon canariense*), Black Nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*), Marigold (*Calendula maderensis*), Fish-stunning spurge (*Euphorbia piscatoria*) P



Blood-Eyed Chrysanthemum (*Argyranthemum hematoma*)