



ORIOLE BIRDING



**TOUR REPORT
MADEIRA
5TH – 9TH JULY 2021**

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ORIOLE BIRDING TOUR TO MADEIRA ENDEMICS AND SEABIRDS, 5-9 JULY 2021

Report for Oriole Birding by Bob Flood

Participants Martin Culshaw, Bob Dawson, Keith Hoey, Chris McInerny, Bridget Lowe, Richard Lowe, John Nadin, and Kirk Zufelt

Madeira Wind Birds Catarina Fagundes and Hugo Romano

Leader's View

Oriole Birding's short tour to Madeira for endemics and seabirds has become a highlight of my year. The trip comprises land birding - the main targets being Trocaz Pigeon and Madeiran Firecrest, a mountain night walk to a colony of the Critically Endangered Zino's Petrels - to hear their songs and see their ghostly silhouettes, and three pelagic trips run by Madeira Wind Birds - in search of Zino's Petrel, Desertas Petrel, Madeiran Storm-petrel, and many other special oceanic birds and creatures. The trip marked my 9th year to Madeira and increased the number of times to sea with Madeira Wind Birds well into the 30s.

The 2021 tour hung in the balance until the 11th hour due to the COVID-19 UK international travel restrictions. Travel to Madeira reopened with less than 2 weeks to the departure date and I was delighted to hear that all of the tour participants were keen for the tour to go ahead. At the time I was in the Azores on a seabird research trip and I hastily changed my flights, filled in my travel locator form, had my COVID-19 PCR test, and shortly afterwards arrived in Madeira.

Monday 5 July

The participants 'made it' by mid afternoon on 5 July and the tour commenced. Catarina and Hugo picked us up at the Hotel Solar do Bom Jesus, in the heat of Santa Cruz, or at the Airport, and we headed to the higher and cooler altitude of Quinta do Santo. The park is quite popular with Madeiran folk but is spacious enough to permit a relaxing hour or so birding in search of the endemic species Madeiran Firecrest, with its golden neck patch, large black 'shoulder patch', and short white supercilium. The firecrest proved easy to locate by call and all enjoyed pleasing views. The main course, however, was a family of firecrests with three or four fledglings

demanding their parents to feed them, immediately. The entire family moved around fearless of our presence and moved into low-level vegetation by our feet. They were too close to watch through binoculars and permitted unbelievable photo opportunities for those with cameras. The park also yielded the distinctive Madeiran subspecies of Common Buzzard, Common Chaffinch (check the photos) and Eurasian Blackbird (so small and a juvenile so dark), plus European Blackcap, European Robin, European Goldfinch and European Greenfinch, among other species.

Next stop was Ponta de São Lourenço in search of Rock Sparrow and the Madeiran subspecies of Berthelot's Pipit. Things worked out back to front, with the normally tricky sparrow showing frequently and well by the tourist facilities, while it took some time to dig out good views of the pipit. A family of the darker plumaged Madeiran/Canarian subspecies of Common Kestrel put on a great show, several of the distinctive Madeiran subspecies of Spectacled Warbler eventually were enticed out of the scrub and gave fine views, and a Red-legged Partridge popped up on a rock and onto the trip list.



Madeiran Firecrest *Regulus madeirensis*, adult,
Quinta do Santo (Keith Hoey).



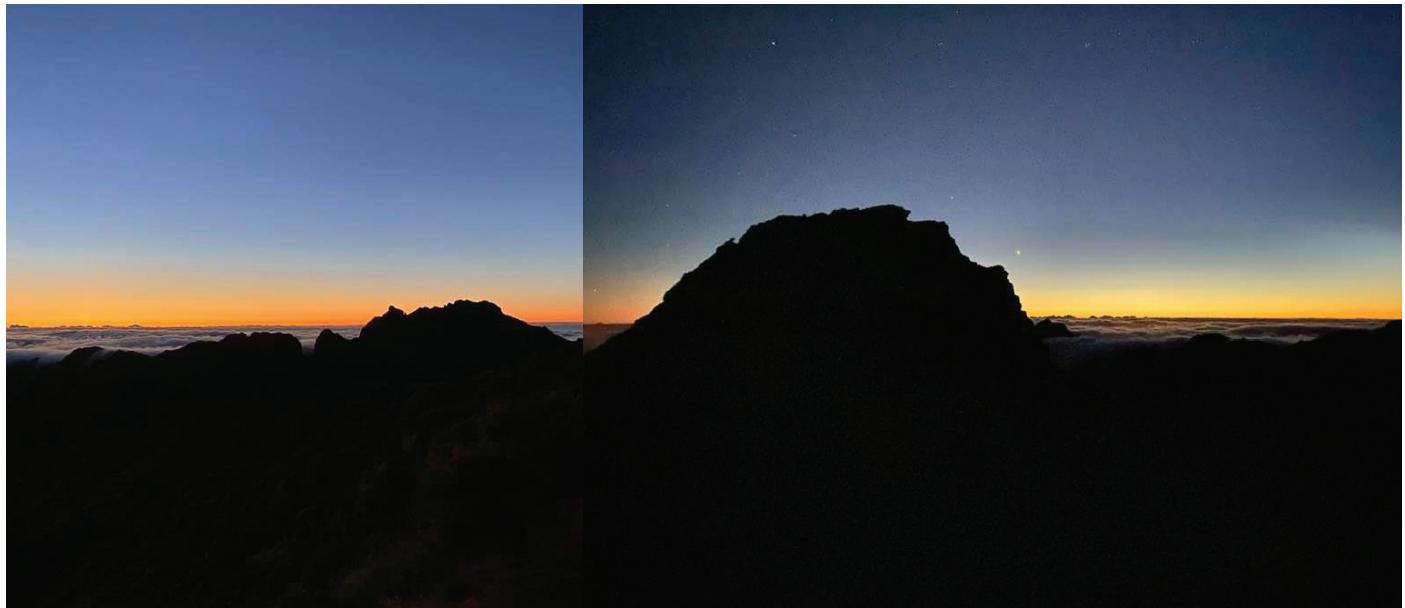
Madeiran Firecrests *Regulus madeirensis*, fledgling left (Keith Hoey), adult right (Martin Culshaw), Quinta do Santo.



Common Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs madeirensis*, Quinta do Santo (left John Nadin, right Martin Culshaw).



Berthelot's Pipit *Anthus berthelotii madeirensis*, Ponta de São Lourenço (Keith Hoey).



Pico do Arieiro, July 2021 (*Kate Sutherland*).

We returned to our hotel for dinner prior to pick up at 21:00 for the mountain night walk to the Zino's Petrel colony at Pico do Arieiro. The conditions for the trek were excellent with little wind, no cloud cover and, unusually, a mild temperature. All participants successfully made the 30 minute curving and twisting trek, along a narrow path, up and down steps, occasionally head dipping under over-hanging rocks. We were in situ for the dying embers of dusk and chit-chatted quietly, awaiting the Zino's return to the nearby colony from the ocean, a dizzy 1,800 metres below. The setting was mystical with fading mountain tops and brightening night sky, countless blinking stars, a planet or two, a satellite crossing the sky, and several supersonic shooting stars.

The first Zino's arrived shortly thereafter giving its melancholy 'song'. To my mind, the sound is like a species lamenting its own demise, with a total population numbering perhaps just 350 birds from a much larger population before human colonisation of Madeira. To start, we heard two types of call, the high-type, thought to be males, and the low-type, thought to be females. We heard several birds whoosh by and I ear-wigged my neighbour whisper loudly, 'There's one', as we glimpsed the bird in silhouette. As time passed we picked up on high-pitched 'whimpering' and 'whip' calls. Calls were near continuous during our time at the colony, unlike any of my previous eight experiences. There is no doubt that we were treated to a sound show that could not be bettered. I passed on this message to the group and I'm sure several of them assumed that I say this to all groups, but I don't. After a welcome cup of tea, handed out by Hugo, we began the return trek to the vans and were delivered back to the hotel in the early hours of the morning.

Tuesday 6 July

A not too early start at 9:30 to search for island specialities, including the endemic Trocaz Pigeon with its greyish neck side and broad grey subterminal tail band. The trip began at Ribeira do Faial. The Trocaz Pigeon showed after a brief wait, in flight and sat in trees and rocks in the higher regions of the valley. As time passed, we began to realise that the valley was full of the pigeon and we gained some decent views. Common Kestrel was indeed common and several Atlantic Canary, European Blackcap and European Robin frequented the lower-lying vegetation. We walked to Faial beach along the flowing stream where we found a Little Egret and several of the endemic subspecies of Grey Wagtail. There were plenty of Plain Swift over coastal cliffs, though we failed to sift out any Pallid Swift. Mid morning, we moved to Machico to look for the naturalised Common Waxbill. We found the waxbill in good numbers along the watercourse and had sensational views of Atlantic Canary. Muscovy Duck of various ugly themes were common along the stream, accompanied by a few Moorhen and more Grey Wagtail. We then headed back to the hotel for lunch with time to prepare for the first of the eagerly awaited three pelagic trips.



Trocaz Pigeons *Columba trocaz*, Ribeira do Faial (Keith Hoey).

There was quite some anticipation at lunch as three of the group prepared to witness a *Pterodroma* at sea for the very first time. Pick-up was 15:00 and we headed to Caniçal at the southeast end of Madeira where Madeira Wind Birds dock their top-of-the-range rib *Oceanodroma*. The conditions were calm to the north of Madeira, too calm for petrels, but some wind was predicted to the southeast, east of the Desertas islands, and so we headed off in that direction. Yellow-legged Gull, Common Tern, and a smart Loggerhead Turtle were seen on departing the harbour. The trip took off - quite literally - with the first of several freaked Flying Fish that were seen over the three pelagic trips. We soon encountered rafts of Cory's Shearwater and, with a stroke of good fortune, we found a Desertas Petrel sat alongside a raft. Desertas Petrel normally is rather shy and is the first bird to take to the wing when the rib gently approaches, but this bird sat firm permitting rare close views of a *Pterodroma* sat on the sea. We continued southeast and came across our first of hundreds of Bulwer's Petrel and had sight of several more *Pterodroma*. We also encountered a pod of Bottlenose Dolphin, a Portuguese Man o' War, and had perhaps our best views of Atlantic Spotted Dolphin over the three pelagic trips.



Atlantic Spotted Dolphins *Stenella frontalis*, off Madeira (Martin Culshaw).



Loggerhead Turtle *Caretta caretta*, off Madeira (Martin Culshaw).



Short-finned Mako Shark *Isurus oxyrinchus*, estimated at 8-foot long, attacking chum bucket, off Madeira (Kirk Zufelt).

Having reached our drift point, Catarina and Hugo set the chum in a floating bucket riddled with holes and we waited for the first results. Soon several Bulwer's Petrel foraged over the resulting oily slick. A single Manx zipped by. We continued to stack up *Pterodroma* sightings over the course of the evening with excellent views of both Desertas and Zino's Petrels. The final *Pterodroma* tally was 1 Zino's Petrel, 6 Desertas Petrel, 3 probable Desertas Petrel, and 2 distant Desertas/Zino's Petrel. A 12-*Pterodroma* contact evening!

Seabirds aside, the highlight of the evening was a half-hour encounter with an eight-foot Short-finned Mako Shark. At first sight, it reminded me of Porbeagle Shark that we see off the Isles of Scilly and they are closely related. Details of the fins, however, clinched Mako. The Mako was attracted by the chum bucket and returned time and again, eventually tipping over the bucket and devouring the content. Sadly, this is an increasingly rare animal and it was a privilege to encounter a magnificent specimen in such a fashion. Reluctantly, we set off for home at about 21:00.



Desertas Petrels *Pterodroma desertae*, a ‘classic’ underwing pattern found in about one-half of the population, showing a narrow white crescent across the bases of the under greater primary coverts; and the rare sighting of a *Pterodroma* petrel sat on the sea at close range. Both identified by an overall robust structure. Off Madeira (Kirk Zufelt).



Zino's Petrels *Pterodroma madeira*, an all-dark underwing is found in about one-quarter of the population. Both identified by the slight build of the bill, head, and body. Off Madeira (*Kirk Zufelt*).

Wednesday 7 July

No morning activities were planned, after a busy few days travelling to Madeira and continuous activities since arrival. Even so, most of the participants decided to utilise the time birding and headed off to do their own thing. One option was to explore the area north of the hotel, a valley with easy walking alongside the watercourse. The birding is very good: The skies hold many Plain Swift and Common Kestrel with a few Common Buzzard. The watercourse is home to numerous breeding Grey Wagtail. Far up the valley, the trees hold Trocaz Pigeon.

After lunch, at about 15:00, Catarina and Hugo picked us up at the hotel and drove us to Caniçal for the second pelagic trip. The conditions were again calm, but nevertheless the decision was to go north to a Zino's hotspot. A few distant *Pterodroma* were observed on the way out. As we approached the chumming spot one of the sharp-eyed group spotted a largish cetacean. We had several tantalising views of three animals, enough to see that they were beaked whales. The smallest of the trio drifted by the rib keeping subsurface and evidently it had a pale head. We thought Cuvier's Beaked Whale and Catarina agreed with this.

With little wind, the evening was quiet for seabirds, with smallish numbers of Cory's Shearwater and Bulwer's Petrel. A couple of Manx Shearwater flew by in haste. Manx was unexpected because in Madeira they complete breeding by the end of June. The evening passed by and Catarina announced departure in 10 minutes and so cameras were packed away. It was perhaps to be expected that at this point an absolute stunner of a Zino's would brush past the rib. No photos but unbeatable views. And we nailed another Zino's on the ride back in.



Thursday 8 July

Another free morning, lunch, and pick-up slightly earlier at 14:30 as the plan was to go far southwest in search of Madeiran Storm-petrel. A wonderful moment on the way out was eye-bulging views of at least a dozen Short-finned Pilot Whale. We continued on our way and eventually found a good breeze beyond the lee of the island. Bulwer's Petrel turned up almost immediately and the numbers grew and grew. Fifteen to 20 Bulwer's side by side over the oily slick was a sight to witness and what an opportunity for the photographers. A true Bulwer's fest.

Time passed by and no sighting of Madeiran Storm-petrel. However, I remained confident because prime time is later in the evening when the stormies return to the colony. They will not go to the burrows until it is fully dark to avoid being prey of Yellow-legged Gull. Sure enough, at about 19:15, Catarina spotted a celebrated first Madeiran and this was eventually followed by four more.

Zino's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira*, identified by near diagnostic extent of white in underwing, and slight build of bill, head and body. Off Madeira (Kirk Zufelt).

The evening did not pass without a good number of *Pterodroma* contacts, in fact, yet another 12 in total. Somewhat frustrating, six birds zipped by at range and eluded ID, though a couple of Desertas and Zino's Petrels were nailed, completing a three-day hatrick of Zino's. The last 10 minutes was announced by Catarina and cameras were hastily packed away as we expected a wet run back to the harbour given a brisk headwind. Of course, this cued the arrival of an extremely close Desertas Petrel and we relished the views. All on board agreed that this was a fitting end to a fantastic three trips on the ocean. But, wait a minute, a Zino's Petrel then made a carbon copy close pass. Wow! Now, that truly was a fitting finale.



Bulwer's Petrels *Bulweria bulwerii*, perhaps 1,000 birds were seen over the three pelagic trips off Madeira, with many foraging at point-blank range in the chum slick (left Keith Hoey, right Kirk Zufelt).



Madeiran Storm-petrel *Thalobata castro castro*, seen during the late evening return to colony, off Madeira (Kirk Zufelt).



End note The Scottish contingent of four had arrived on 2 July and, among numerous other things, had found a reliable site for the Madeiran subspecies of Barn Owl. The site is very close to the hotel and the best times are prior to first light at 04:30 and after dark at 22:30. Exit the hotel entrance and turn right. Follow the watercourse up the valley to the nearby school and start spotlighting. If no luck, then search a little farther up the valley. During our visit, one or two owls were reliable with sightings on most attempts prior to dawn and just after dusk. I am particularly grateful to the Scots as I had failed on multiple occasions to see the Barn Owl on previous visits to Madeira.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba schmitzi*, just north of the hotel, Santa Cruz (Keith Hoey).

Species List

Thanks to Bob Dawson and Chris McInerny for their contributions.

Birds

Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i> - several Ponta de São Lourenço
Muscovy Duck	<i>Cairina moschata</i> - common in watercourses
Plain Swift	<i>Apus unicolor</i> - common at many locations
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i> - common at many locations
Trocaz Pigeon	<i>Columba trocaz</i> - endemic, common Ribeira do Faial, several valley from hotel
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> - common and widespread
Eurasian Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i> - a few along watercourses
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis atlantis/michahellis</i> - common mainly at coastal locations
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i> - one during a pelagic trip
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i> - quite common along southern coast
Madeiran Storm-petrel	<i>Thalobata castro castro</i> - five during pelagic trip 3
Zino's Petrel	<i>Pterodroma madeira</i> - endemic, seen on each pelagic trip, total 6
Desertas Petrel	<i>Pterodroma desertae</i> - endemic, seen on two pelagic trips, total 9
Desertas/Zino's Petrel	<i>Pterodroma desertae/madeira</i> - 13 in total
Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris borealis</i> - common at sea, the weird singing at night near the hotel
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i> - seen on two pelagic trips, total 3
Bulwer's Petrel	<i>Bulweria bulwerii</i> - common at sea, perhaps 1,000 birds in total
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i> - one Ribeira do Faial
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo harterti</i> - endemic, small numbers at various sites
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus granti</i> - endemic, a few in valley above hotel
Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba schmitzi</i> - endemic, two nearby to the north of the hotel
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus caneriensis</i> - very common and widespread
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> - quite common and widespread
Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata orbitalis</i> - endemic, seen Caniçal and Ponta de São Lourenço

Madeiran Firecrest	<i>Regulus madeirensis</i> - endemic, seen at Quinta do Santo and Ribeiro Frio
Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula cabrerae</i> - endemic, common and widespread
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i> - quite common and widespread
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i> - several at Ponta de São Lourenço
Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i> - common along watercourse at Machico, several elsewhere
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea schmitzi</i> - endemic, common along watercourses
Berthelot's Pipit	<i>Anthus berthelotii madeirensis</i> - endemic, several at Ponta de São Lourenço
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs madeirensis</i> - endemic, widespread in wooded areas
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i> - several at Quinta do Santo
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i> - a few at Quinta do Santo
Atlantic Canary	<i>Serinus canaria</i> - widespread and common

Cetaceans

Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i> - seen from land
Short-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i> - 12+ during pelagic trip 3
Atlantic Spotted Dolphin	<i>Stenella frontalis</i> - pods seen on all three pelagic trips
Common Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i> - small pod during pelagic trip 1
Cuvier's Beaked Whale	<i>Ziphius cavirostris</i> - three during pelagic trip 2

Fish etc

European eel	<i>Anguilla anguilla</i> - numerous Ribeira Brava (best at night per Chris McInerny)
Shortfin Mako Shark	<i>Isurus oxyrinchus</i> - an 8 foot animal during pelagic trip 1
Flying fish	<i>Exocoetidae sp.</i> - several
Ocean Sunfish	<i>Mola mola</i> - several
Portuguese Man o' War	<i>Physalia physalus</i> - several
Atlantic Rock Crab	<i>Grapsus adscensionis</i> - several

Herps

Loggerhead Turtle	<i>Caretta caretta</i> - several small young and larger adult animals
Perez's Frog	<i>Pelophylax perezi</i> - introduced, common and widespread
Madeiran Wall Lizard	<i>Teira dugesii</i> - endemic, common and widespread

Land mammals

Madeiran Lesser Noctule	<i>Nyctalus leisleri verrucosus</i> - endemic, Pico do Arieiro
Atlantic Islands Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus maderensis</i> - Pico do Arieiro
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i> - common in valley above hotel
Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i> - two dead in Ribeira Brava

Lepidoptera

Butterflies

Small White	<i>Piers rapae</i> - common
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i> - common
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i> - frequent
Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i> - Ribeira do Faial, park Santa Cruz, and Funchal harbour
Long-tailed Blue	<i>Lampides boeticus</i> - Ribeira do Faial
Madeiran Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas phlaeoides</i> - endemic, Ribeiro Frio
Macaronesian Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa vulcania</i> - one probable in flight Ribeira do Faial
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria aegeria</i> - one Quinta do Santo

Madeiran Speckled Wood *Pararge xiphia* - endemic, one in valley above hotel
Monarch *Danaus plexippus* - common and widespread

Moths

Striped Hawkmoth *Hyles livornica* - two spotted in valley above hotel
Beet Webworm *Spolodea recurvalis* - small park at Santa Cruz
Echium Leaf-miner *Dialectica scalariella* - 10+ at Ribeiro Frio
Blastobasis sp 22 of 26 species in Madeira are endemic; 1 at Pico do Arieiro lights
Many attracted to lights at Pico do Arieiro with photos still under study (15+ species).

Odonata

Blue Emperor *Anax imperator* - two males and egg-laying female lower reaches Ribeira Brava
Island Darter *Sympetrum nigrefemur* - male mid-way up Ribeira Brava

Orthoptera

Southern Wartbiter *Decticus albifrons* - many Ponta de Sao Lourenco and Caniçal
Other grasshoppers and bush-crickets still under study.

Hemiptera

Southern Green Shieldbug *Nezara viridula* - Machico

Hymenoptera

German Wasp *Vespula germanica* - a few sightings, one confirmed germanic
European Paper Wasp *Polistes dominulus* - nest on water pumping station, Ribeira do Faial
Yellow-legged Mud-dauber Wasp *Sceliphron caementarium* - spectacular mud nest in the hotel foyer
Madeiran Banded Bee *Amegilla maderae*
Buff-tailed Bumblebee *Bombus terrestris lusitaniscus*, formerly *Bombus maderensis*
Large Garden Bumblebee *Bombus ruderatus*

Arachnida

Banded Garden Spider *Argiope trifasciata* - Machico
Tropical Tentweb Spider *Cyrtophora citricola* - Frequent Ribeira do Faial, just a couple of adult females

Plants

Downy Sow-thistle *Andryala glandulosa* - endemic, Pico do Arieiro
Madeiran Orchid *Dactylorhiza foliosa* - endemic, Ribeiro Frio trout farm



Short-finned Pilot Whale *Globicephala macrorhynchus*, off Madeira (John Nadin).