

MADEIRA TOUR REPORT 2024

26 - 31 May 2024

by Diedert Koppenol

Our second tour to Madeira was another great visit to this Portuguese island in the Atlantic Ocean. We enjoyed three very successful pelagics, with great views of both *Pterodroma* species, several storm petrels including Band-rumped [Madeiran] Storm Petrels and plenty of Cory's Shearwaters and Bulwer's Petrels! On the island itself it was very easy birding and we had lovely encounters with Madeira Firecrest, Trocaz Pigeon, Spectacled Warbler, Madeira Chaffinch and Rock Sparrow. Combined with the pleasant weather, great scenery and food, it is a very welcome break!

The tour started in the evening at the Funchal Airport. The airport has an impressive runway, where part of it is just built on the ocean! Before the expansion was built, the airport was known as one of the most difficult places to land, in the world! After a very short ride of only five minutes, we arrived at our hotel and went to check-in and straight to dinner, for we already had plans this evening! We were picked up by Catarina, one of the two guides/owners from Wind Bird Tours, by minivan and she drove us to the highest peaks of Madeira. Here we would make a night walk to listen to calling Zino's Petrels, which have their colony all the way up here, at about 1500 metres above sea level! While making our way to the location, we heard a Black-crowned Night Heron calling around us, which was quite unexpected to say the least, at this altitude! After a short walk, we arrived at the listening spot and it turned out to be a wonderful night with a lot of activity. We heard multiple males and females calling as there was almost no wind (which is very unusual for Madeira in general, but especially up these peaks!) and visibility was good. Furthermore, the other owner/guide of Wind Birds, Hugo, had brought a thermal camera to show us the Zino's Petrels flying out and about, which we could see on Catarina's tablet. A Madeiran Barn Owl was calling several times throughout the night and we also heard a few Manx Shearwaters calling from down below, as they breed lower than the Zino's. Our drive back down to the hotel resulted in a very brief Barn Owl on the wire.

Our first morning on the island was dedicated to get good views and photographs of the endemic land birds. We went straight for a visit to Palheira Gardens, where the Trocaz Pigeons are usually easily approachable, Madeira Firecrests show at eye-level and Plain Swifts frequently fly past, as was the case on our visit this morning. Furthermore, you cannot escape the numerous Atlantic Canaries, Common Blackbirds and Eurasian Blackcaps here. After some more birding in the area, which gave us a European Greenfinch, several more Plain Swifts, Madeira Chaffinch, Common Kestrel and Common Buzzard, we headed back to the hotel. Gearing up for the first pelagic this afternoon, we enjoyed a nice lunch and had a bit of rest, before setting off to the harbour of Machico, which was only a five-minute drive from the hotel. Our first pelagic outing was already a great success! The supporting cast of Cory's Shearwaters and Bulwer's Petrels was ever-present, along with the smart Yellow-legged Gulls that know there is chum to be about! Several

Pterodroma's showed quite well, at least two Zino's and one Desertas Petrel were confirmed with photographs, a few Man Shearwaters were present throughout the day and -one Band-rumped (Madeiran) Storm Petrel and two European Storm Petrels visited the chum. These numbers are the minimum of individuals that we saw, as sometimes storm petrels disappear and return to the chum; we assumed they are the same individual. After our return, we went out for a nice Madeiran dinner to finish off the day.

Madeira features an interesting subset of European species and we went out to add several more of them to our list this morning. The eastern peninsula has a small population of Rock Sparrows, which we found on and near the car park this time. Spectacled Warbler was on our target list as well, and they showed marvellously well right next to the foot path. A pair of Kestrels was hunting in the valley as well and there were two Hoopoes flying past as well: a nice Madeiran rarity. Last and definitely not least, this is one of the best places on the island to see the Macaronesian endemic Berthelot's Pipit and we enjoyed point-blank views.

We decided to do some birding in Machico itself, as the river can sometimes hold a rarity or two. We didn't find anything ourselves but the Glossy Ibis was still in the river, along with plenty of Muscovy Ducks. Our first great views of Grey Wagtail were obtained and a large group of Common Waxbill was present here too. Once we had our fill of Muscovy Ducks swimming along, we went to have lunch and prepared ourselves for the next pelagic.

It turned out to be another great day, albeit a bit slower than yesterday. We went southwards of the island today, as this is usually better for storm petrels. Another Band-rumped Storm Petrel was attracted by today's chum, as were plenty of Bulwer's Petrels, at least two European Storm Petrels and new for the list was a Wilson's Storm Petrel that showed really well, performing its typical behaviour or paddling on the ocean. Pterodroma's were a bit too fast and furious today for perfect ID-ing, but at least two Desertas were seen. Returning at sunset, we enjoyed a nice mouthful of sea water before washing this away with some nice Madeiran wine and food.

This morning, we went out into the centre of the island a bit more and visited one of the ribeiro's. Two Grey Wagtails were running around on the road, which had plenty of puddles filled with water, a favourite staging ground for Grey Wagtails, and they were accompanied by a few Madeira Chaffinches. Apart from the ever-common Eurasian Blackcaps and Common Blackbirds, we had great views of showy Madeira Firecrests and they allowed for a nice photography session. A few Trocaz Pigeons flew through the river valley here and also a Common Buzzard was gliding across the mountain sides, with a few European Robins singing along the path. On our way back, we made a short stop to find Eurasian Siskin, which was singing its heart out.

Time for another nice lunch and preparation for our final pelagic of this trip. We went northwards again, this time a bit closer to Porto Santo to increase our chances for Barolo Shearwater. This species and White-faced Storm Petrel have become increasingly rare and difficult to see, but it were the only two species we were missing on our seabird board. Sadly, we did not see them on this outing, but we once again enjoyed nice views of Wilson's Storm Petrels, Band-rumped Storm Petrel, Zino's Petrel, Manx Shearwater, plenty of Bulwer's Petrels and Cory's Shearwater and European Storm Petrels. A surprise for today was a Pomarine Skua that suddenly appeared chasing the Yellow-legged Gulls for their share of the chum! A wonderful sunset guided us back to the harbour and we relished into a festive seafood meal, to celebrate a lack of seasickness and the amazing sightings we enjoyed during our pelagics!

Our final day is a back-up day, as the weather isn't always as good to go out on the planned dates, so planning the tour this way allows for a bit of leeway. We spent this day touring the island, as we had not ventured into the western parts yet. We made a round trip, via the capital Funchal, all the way to the western tip at Ponta do Pargo. A short stop at one of the few 'freshwater' ponds enroute resulted Common Moorhen, Eurasian Coots with chicks and a single Little Egret. At Ponta do Pargo we saw Spectacled Warbler, Berthelot's Pipit and Plain Swifts. We went onwards to the northern coast of the island and visited Porto Moniz. Along Ribeira da Janela the obligatory Muscovy Duck coven was present and several Common Terns were foraging along the coastline. Most of all we enjoyed the Grey Wagtails feeding their youngsters here. One of the best views for lunch was had at São Vicente, after which we went further inland to one of the most spectacular places on the island; Fanal. This is a campsite which usually finds itself right in the upward stream of clouds. Madeira Chaffinches are very common here, feeding on the leftovers from the visiting tourists. Common Blackbirds and European Robins showed nicely too and we had great views of several butterfly species, including Monarch, Small White, Speckled Wood and Canarian Red Admiral. Onwards we went to a great mirador (viewpoint) where we had another round of great views of Spectacled Warbler, European Goldfinch, Eurasian Siskin and Common Buzzard plus a large flock of Plain Swifts was creating a small cloud of its own around the mirador. Unfortunately, the road across the crest of the island was closed so we had to take a bit of a detour to end up in the northwest corner. A few stops along the way were made, but apart from Atlantic Canaries, Blackcaps, Madeira Chaffinches and a few more Trocaz Pigeons, nothing new was seen. After this nice and wonderfully scenic trip around the island we went to have our final dinner and night on the island at the hotel.

Our final day was spent enjoying a nice breakfast and packing, as some of us were gearing up for their flight to the next tour in the Azores! A nice clear sky allowed for an on-time departure and just like that we said goodbye to this Portuguese rock.

Many thanks also the Madeira Wind Birds for organising the great pelagics and the wonderful evening walk to enjoy the Zino's Petrels in a very unique way! All in all, it was a very successful and enjoyable visit to this beautiful island and we are definitely looking forward to our next visit to Madeira!

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g., it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

The species names and taxonomy used in the bird list follows Gill, F., Donsker, D., & Rasmussen, P. (Eds). **2024. IOC World Bird List (v14.1)**.

Where the subspecies seen is/are known, these are often given in parentheses at the end of the species comment.

BIRDS

Plain Swift ♦ *Apus unicolor* A virtual Macaronesian endemics, also occurring on the Canary Islands but recently also found in mainland Portugal!

Rock Dove (introduced) (Feral Pigeon) *Columba [livia] domestica*

Trocaz Pigeon ♦ *Columba trocaz* The endemic pigeon of Madeira, quite numerous in the gardens of Funchal, but more shy in the mountainous interior.

Eurasian Collared Dove (introduced) *Streptopelia decaocto* Eurasian Collared Doves have well and truly made the most of their introduction to the island and are almost everywhere.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* One in with the Eurasian Coots at the pond and one in Machico along the river.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* Only found in one small, very dirty pond along the road to Ponta de Pargo. It seems the population will be stuck here forever, as there are no other large freshwater pools on the island.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Quite common along the coastal areas of the island and out at sea.

Atlantic Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis atlantis* Yellow-legged Gulls are of the atlantis race here, which has been 'suspect' of a split for years now...

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* One or two in-between the Yellow-legged Gulls on the chum.

Pomarine Jaeger ♦ *Stercorarius pomarinus* A nice surprise by one who started chasing the Yellow-legged Gulls for their fastfood

Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* Several individuals enjoying the slik left by the chum on our pelagics.

European Storm Petrel ♦ *Hydrobates pelagicus* At least four individuals on our three pelagics attending the chum/slik.

Band-rumped Storm Petrel ♦ *Hydrobates castro* We had multiple sightings but they never like to linger long at the chum.

Zino's Petrel ♦ *Pterodroma madeira* Quite a lot of sightings throughout the trip; most Pterodroma's we saw concerned this species.

Desertas Petrel ♦ *Pterodroma deserta* Several sightings, but only a few long enough to clinch the ID (with photos).

Cory's Shearwater ♦ *Calonectris borealis* The most common seabird in the waters surrounding Madeira.

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* Quite a few on our last pelagic day and a handful on the first.

Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* After Cory's Shearwater, you soon start to hope for something else to show up rather than another Bulwer's, which is a luxurious problem.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Heard only, at about 1500 metres altitude!

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo buteo*

Western Barn Owl ♦ (Madeiran B O) *Tyto [alba] schmitzi* Heard several times at night, one short sighting on a drive. Nobody was that interested to put more effort into it after this.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus canariensis*

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla heineken*

Spectacled Warbler *Curruca conspicillata orbitais*

Madeira Firecrest ♦ *Regulus madeirensis*

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula cabrerae*

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula rubecula*

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia petronia*

Common Waxbill (introduced) *Estrilda astrild*

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea schmitzi*

Berthelot's Pipit ♦ *Anthus berthelotii* Another Macaronesian endemic which is fairly common on the rocky edges of the island.

Madeira Chaffinch ♦ *Fringilla maderensis* Now split from Common Chaffinch, which surprisingly took until now! Most striking is the difference in call and song, apart from the plumage that is more resembling of African Chaffinch.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis parva*

European Serin *Serinus serinus*

Atlantic Canary ♦ *Serinus canaria* Present in all the habitats of the island.

MAMMALS

Atlantic Spotted Dolphin *Stenella frontalis* Only a single individual during our second pelagic trip. A notable lack of cetaceans in the ocean around Madeira, sadly. Perhaps the feeding grounds have shifted or we were just unlucky.

Common Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus* Only a single individual during our first pelagic trip.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Iberian Green Frog (introduced) *Rana iberica* Introduced to the island, but fairly common in any sort of freshwater.

Loggerhead Turtle *Caretta caretta* One seen during one of the pelagics, coming up for a short breath.

Madeiran Wall Lizard ♦ *Teira dugesii* The only native reptile of the island and very numerous. Some of them will even steal food from you!

BUTTERFLIES

Small White *Artogeia rapae*

Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea*

Monarch *Danaus plexippus*

Canarian Red Admiral ♦ *Vanessa indica*

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*