

MADEIRA

11th to 15th July 2009

Mike Cram & Neville Davies

This was a short break aimed at exploring the archipelago and trying to see as many of the endemic species and races as possible. I was keen to continue my recent exploration of the Macaronesian islands. Next stop, the Azores!



Mike at Sao Lourenco peninsula

Summary / Itinerary

Sat 11Jul09:

We flew with **Easy Jet** from **Bristol** at 14:30h and landed at **Santa Cruz** 17:45h. We picked up our Renault Clio (**AVIS**) and drove to **Hotel Dom Pedro de Garajau (4*)**. The first birds we saw were **Plain Swift** along the motorway and then over the cliffs at **Ponta de Garajau**. Also noted were the first of many **Cory's Shearwater**, **Common Kestrel**, **Yellow-legged Gull**, **Common Tern**, **Feral/Rock Doves**, **Common Blackbird**, **Blackcap**, **Canary** and **Monarch** butterflies. The evening meal in the hotel was adequate, if not a little disappointing for 15 Euros, but at least the buffet breakfast was ample with a lot of choice and we took some of it out with us for snacks and lunch to maximise birding time.

Sun 12Jul09:

A pre-breakfast seawatch at **Ponta de Garajau** produced **20+ Cory's Shearwater** and the same common species as the previous evening. We then took the hour's drive up to **Ribeiro Frio** and stopped at the entrance to the **Balcoes** levada and immediately enjoyed fine views of several **Madeiran Firecrest** including a nice male and some juveniles, **3 Common Buzzard**, **2 Grey Wagtail**, a **Robin** and **4 Madeiran Chaffinch**. Moving north, we then took the minor road west to **Faja de Nogueira**. Stopping at regular intervals we had fine flight views of **6 Trocaz Pigeon** within the first km. Later on when we reached the water works at the end of the track, we discovered **3 Trocaz Pigeon** feeding in the flora and shrubbery that partially adorned the steep valley sides. Superb scope views! Also noted in the valley were **Clouded Yellow**, **Madeiran Speckled Wood**, **Cleopatra** and **Monarch** butterflies.

In the afternoon, we headed for **Machico** on the east coast. We did see a **Little Egret** and numerous **Canary** and **Goldfinch**, but despite an extensive search upstream we did not encounter any **Common Waxbill**. It was evident that there had been some work along the river and a lot of the reeds and vegetation had been cleared. The resort was also rammed with tourists, which does not help!

We moved further east to the **Sao Lourenco Peninsula** and enjoyed some of the stunning coastal scenery from its miradors. After a couple of random stops, we soon found **4 Berthelot's Pipit** and then headed back to the hotel to chill for an hour or so. We took a meal at the excellent Italian Restaurant, **Figo's**, across the road from the hotel. As we ate, we noticed **2 Collared Dove** in the hotel grounds.

At 21:15h we were picked up by Catarina and Hugo from Windbirds for our pre-arranged excursion 2,000m up to **Pico do Arieiro** to encounter **Zino's Petrel**. We arrived at the car park to begin the walk along the thin paths of the precipitous ridge leading up to the Pico. Not one for the faint hearted! Within half an hour we reached the nesting cliffs. At 10.30pm we started hearing the eerie cries of the **Zino's Petrels** as they started arriving. At first only silhouette views were had, but you could detect the white plumage tones as some of the birds flew over our heads, literally a few feet away!! It was an exhilarating experience, as the wafting of wing feathers were so close, something never to be forgotten.

Mon 13Jul09:

Having been dropped off at 01:00h from the previous night's excursion, we had a bit of a lie in. After breakfast we headed straight for [Funchal marina](#) for our pre-booked cruise at 09:30h to the [Desertas Islands](#) aboard the yacht 'Gaviao'.

We met our skipper Luis and his mate Phillipe and were soon motoring out of the harbour in lovely sunshine and gentle winds along the coast before heading south-east to the [Desertas Islands](#). The main birds we saw in the first hour were hundreds of **Cory's Shearwater**. Soon we were watching large pods of **Striped** and **Spotted Dolphins** as well as what was probably a **Bryde's Whale** according to one of our fellow travellers who knew more about the subject than us - it looked too small for Fin Whale.

The second hour of the cruise was enlivened as we started encountering the first of about a dozen **Bulwer's Petrel**, some flew in very close to the yacht. Then, one of the highlights of the cruise, **3 Fea's Petrel** flew in very close to us. The views were excellent and amongst other features we could see long pointed wings, a prominent 'M' shape across the upper wing and mantle and a stout looking bill. **Fea's** or **Desertas Petrel**, as they are also known, breed on [Bugio](#) in the Desertas chain (some authorities consider this race of Fea's to be a separate species from those that breed on Cape Verde).

At 12:30h we took to a dinghy and then waded ashore to [Deserta Grande](#). We were welcomed by the warden who took us on a guided tour. The highlights were a **Bulwer's Petrel** in the hand, **2 Common Kestrel**, **2 Berthelot's Pipit**, **25+ Canary** and a **Long-tailed Blue** butterfly. A short dinghy excursion in to a cave that Monk Seal prefer was followed by a delicious lunch on board 'Gaviao' consisting of bread, cheese, salad, white Scabbard fish and a wide choice of drinks.



[Ponto do Rosto](#)

[Bulwer's Petrel](#)

['Gaviao' at Deserta Grande](#)

The return leg of the trip was choppiest and took 4 hours as the NE wind had picked up considerably. Despite this we saw **50 Bulwer's Petrel** and another **Fea's Petrel**.

We docked at 18:20h returned to the hotel and ate out at [Figo's](#) again. The red wine was again excellent and afterwards we walked it all off down at [Ponta de Garajau](#). At dusk by 21:10h we could hear the **Cory's Shearwater** calling as they returned to their nests in the cliffs below. Not long after we managed to enjoy brief views of a **Barn Owl** hunting along the track from the monument to Christ.

Tues 14Jul09:

We took a clockwise drive around the western half of the island trying to see some of the species we had not yet encountered. Our first port of call was [Lugar de Baixo](#), a small pool with a large reed bed just inland from the rocky beach. There were **3 Little Egret** present and we quickly added **2 Mallard**, the eclipse plumaged, long-staying **Green-winged Teal**, **4 Common Moorhen** and **4 Common Coot** to the trip list. This proved to be a good site for **Common Waxbill** and we were soon rewarded with excellent views of 10+ birds, including both adults and juveniles.

A short stop at [Prazeres](#) failed to produce any Spectacled Warbler at the recommended site, but we did see **2 Greenfinch**. We headed for the western tip of the island and stopped briefly at [Ribeira dos Marinheiro](#) for a **Madeiran Firecrest**. The scenery at [Ponta de Pargo](#) was stunning. We looked out over the sheer cliffs as they plunged hundreds of metres down to the Atlantic. There were numerous **Kestrel**, **Plain Swift** and **Berthelot's Pipit** at the point. We stopped for lunch at a nearby café '[Casada Che 'O Fio'](#)' (recommended) and in a nearby ravine we located **2 Pallid Swift**. Later, as we birded the grassland and scrub on the point, we flushed **3 Red-legged Partridge** and saw **12 Plain Swift**. Later, **2 Common Swift** flew over as we watched several **Clouded Yellow** and **Long-tailed Blue** butterflies.

We called in to [Porto Moniz](#) for an afternoon seawatch. All we saw were **4 Cory's** and numerous **Common Tern** in a variable offshore breeze. A **Berthelot's Pipit** fed in the car park at [Sao Vicente](#) where we stopped for a cool drink, alongside a French family who appeared to be celebrating "Le Quatorze Juillet" in grand style by ordering practically everything on the menu! After the hour's drive back through what seemed endless tunnels, we again dined at [Figo's](#).



Nev at Ponta de Pargo

Green-winged Teal

Rock Sparrow

Wed 15Jul09:

Our final day was most chilled out. We headed for [Pico de Facho](#) near [Canical](#). There were **2 Kestrel** and **10 Canary** around the pico, which had wonderful views of the surrounding area including the airport; which was essentially looked like a huge concrete slab on stilts over the sea! On our way back down we chanced across **2 Spectacled Warbler**, just north of the large rock pinnacle.

We then headed for [Canical vineyards](#), which were south of the football field, taking a view point from a closed gateway, just inside the large lay-by, just north of the entrance to the café/yacht club. This proved a most productive little area with **4 Plain Swift**, **1 Common Waxbill**, **2 Goldfinch**, **6 Canary**, **10+ Spanish Sparrow** and approx. **100 Rock Sparrow**.

[Porto da Cruz](#) proved quiet, but a nice place to take lunch, with just a **Grey Wagtail** of note. We moved on towards [Faial](#) and the [Guindaste](#) viewpoint where we saw **2 Common Tern**, **1 Pallid Swift**, **1 Plain Swift**, **2 Berthelot's Pipit** and **2 Grey Wagtail**. We finished off where we started with a few **Plain Swift** at the [airport](#) where we dropped off the hire car and checked in early for our 18:40h flight to Bristol. A smooth flight got us in early at Bristol at about 21:45. Once again it was swift passage through Easy Jet and Baggage reclaim. We picked up the car and were on our way home by 22:15h.

The whole trip cost about **£475 each**: Flights £139 (EasyJet), Hotel B&B £72 (Windbirds), Extra Driver £13 (AVIS), Car Hire £0 (Airmiles), Zino's Petrel trip £55 & Desertas Island trip £72 (Windbirds), meals, etc about £75, Petrol Madeira £15, Purple Parking £25, Petrol and Bridge toll £10.

Species Summary (35 species recorded)

Zino's Petrel (*Pterodroma madeira*)

Several on Pico do Arieiro on 12th. Mainly heard with silhouette views, but also able to detect white tones of plumage when birds flew past us at very close quarters.

Fea's Petrel (*Pterodroma feae*)

3 mid-way between Madeira and Desertas islands on 13th.

Bulwer's Petrel (*Bulweria bulwerii*)

At least 50 were seen on the 4 hour return crossing between Madeira and Desertas islands on 13th.

Atlantic Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea borealis*)

Common and widespread. Noted offshore, pretty much everywhere we took the time to look. We encountered rafts of up to 100 birds between Madeira and the Desertas islands on 13th.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzeta*)

1 at Machico on 12th and 3 at Lugar de Baixo on 14th.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

2 at Lugar de Baixo on 14th.

Green-winged Teal (*Anas carolinensis*)

The long staying drake was in eclipse plumage at Lugar de Baixo on 14th.

Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo harterti*)

3 at Balcoes, 1 Faja de Nogueira and 1 Sao Lourenco peninsula on 12th. 1 Ponta de Pargo on 14th.

Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus canariensis*)

Common and widespread. Several seen every day, in a variety of locations.

Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*)

3 were flushed at Ponta de Pargo on 14th.

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

4 including a juvenile at Lugar de Baixo on 14th

Common Coot (*Fulica atra*)

4 at Lugar de Baixo on 14th

Azorean Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus micahellis atlantis*)

Common and widespread around the coast.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

Fairly common and widespread around the coast.

Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

Common and widespread.

Trocaz Pigeon (*Columba trocaz*)

At least 9 were noted in Faja de Nogueira on 12th.

Eurasian Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

At least 2 birds were noted in the grounds of the Hotel Dom Pedro de Garajau on 12th.

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba schmitzi*)

1 at Ponta de Garajau on 13th, along track below monument to Christ.

Plain Swift (*Apus unicolor*)

Common and widespread.

Common Swift (*Apus apus*)

2 at Ponta de Pargo on 14th.

Pallid Swift (*Apus pallidus*)

2 at Ponta de Pargo on 13th and 1 at Guindaste miradors near Faial on 15th.

Berthelot's Pipit (*Anthus berthelotii madeirensis*)

4 at Sao Lourenco peninsula on 12th. 2 on Deserta Grande on 13th. 3 at Ponta de Pargo and 1 at Sao Vicente on 14th. 2 at Canical near the vineyards on 15th.

Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea schmitzi*)

Fairly common and widespread.

European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)

1 near Ribeiro Frio on 12th.

Common Blackbird (*Turdus merula cabreræ*)

Fairly common and widespread.

Spectacled Warbler (*Sylvia conspicillata bella*)

2 at Pico de Facho on 15th.

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla heineken*)

Common and widespread

Madeiran Firecrest (*Regulus madeirensis*)

Fairly common. Seen at Balcoes, Faja de Nogueira and the forested part of the west of the island.

Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*)

10+ at Canical vineyards on 15th.

Rock Sparrow (*Petronia petronia madeirensis*)

100 at Canical vineyards on 15th.

Madeiran Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs madeirensis*)

Several were noted of this distinctive race in the forests of Ribeira Frio and Faja de Nogueira on 12th.

Atlantic Canary (*Serinus canaria*)

Common and widespread.

European Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)

3 at Hotel Jardin de Atlantico near Prazeres on 14th.

European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis parva*)

Numerous along the river in Machico on 12th and 2 at Canical vineyards on 15th.

Common Waxbill (*Estrilda astrild*)

10+ at Lugar de Baixo on 14th and 1 at Canical on 15th.

Butterflies (6 species were noted)

Small White, Clouded Yellow, Cleopatra, Monarch, Madeiran Speckled Wood and Long-tailed Blue.

Bibliography

[Discovery Walking Guide to Madeira / Tours & Trails](#) (1cm=400m, 1:40,000) – adequate for our needs, though not if you are driving in Funchal!

[Birds of the Atlantic Islands](#) (Tony Clarke) (Helm) a nice publication. Recommended, especially for the various races.

[Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe](#) (Various) (Collins) Useful.

Internet

<http://madeira.seawatching.net/general.html> is an excellent source of information for all races and species of birds likely to be encountered, plus an account of all the main birding sites on the archipelago. The website is run by Swedish birder Niklas Holmstrom.

<http://www.madeirawindbirds.com/>

The web site of Wind Birds who organised our accommodation and excursions to Desertas Island and Pico do Arieiro. This gives details of the cost of all trips as well as other useful information like trip reports and recent sightings. Our thanks to Hugo and Catarina for helping us make it a great trip!

http://www.glamorganbirds.org.uk/gb_tripreports/gb_alexbevan_madeira2005.pdf

This trip report compiled by Alex and the Cardiff lads from their 2005 trip was very useful.

Mike had **6 lifers** (Zino's, Fea's and Bulwer's Petrels, Trocaz Pigeon, Madeiran Firecrest and Common Waxbill). Neville had **10 lifers** (Zino's, Fea's and Bulwer's Petrels, Green-winged Teal, Trocaz Pigeon, Plain Swift, Berthelot's Pipit, Madeiran Firecrest, Canary and Common Waxbill). Some authorities consider Madeiran Chaffinch as a separate species, so perhaps one day an armchair tick will come our way!

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