

# Madeira 2<sup>nd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> June 2017

This was a self-catering short break to Madeira principally to see Bryde's Whales. However there were no Bryde's Whales seen around Madeira at the time of our visit or in the few weeks after. This is normally a reliable period to see this species in Madeiran waters but this year they were later to appear than usual.

We did however see several key bird species and the undoubted highlight came in the form of a sighting of Blainville's Beak Whales.

Flights were with Jet2 from Stanstead to Funchal Airport. The flight was direct but landing is a little hairy as even in good conditions the single runway built on tall stilts gives little room for error. Car and sat nav hire was also arranged via Jet2 with Sixt Car Rental. Their car park office was a little difficult to find but we eventually located them under the approach road to departures and arrivals. We stayed in a pleasant 2 bedroom apartment in Machico to the east of the airport. The apartment was obtained via booking.com and paid for in cash upon arrival. Apartment Alameda was a little difficult to find and the caretaker/owner is remote but contactable by phone/email. At the time of our arrival there was a three day festival in progress which made parking impossible. We ended up leaving the car in a free car park 600m away up a hill by the Dom Pedro Hotel. Driving was easy as Madeira has a good network of roads that are extensively tunnelled avoiding old narrow roads with switchbacks.

Three whale watching trips to sea were booked with 'Wind Birds' from Machico harbour and four trips were booked with 'Lobosonda' from Calheta at the other end of the island one hours drive away. In addition a trip was booked with Wind Birds to see/hear the Zino's Petrels at night in the mountain peaks. Each trip to sea was up to three hours long.

2<sup>nd</sup> June – Time was spend locating the apartment. The drive to the street where the apartment was situated took nearly 2 hours with festival traffic despite only being 7 minutes from the airport. We ate that evening in a busy roadside bar of which there were many.

3<sup>rd</sup> June – We spent the time walking around Machico and shopping. Very little to see although distant cetaceans could be seen out at sea as well as distant shearwaters. Yellow legged Gulls the occasional Kestrel, Canaries and Plain Swifts were the only birds of note.

4<sup>th</sup> June – First day out at sea with two trips am and pm from Machico. The afternoon trip was much more productive. Lots of Cory's with a single Bulwer's Petrel and Several Fea's Petrels; our only ones of the trip. Spotted, Bottlenose and Common Dolphins were present. Spotted being the more prolific. The area around the landward end of the quay was good for Waxbills and Monarch Butterflies.



Several Fea's gave us close approach – no chumming was carried out on any whale watching trips





Bulwer's Petrel



Clouds of Cory's gathered around bait balls during the evening trip out to sea. Wind Birds are THE professional bird watchers on Madeira and are worth booking with for sea trips – all land birds are easily found and an accompanied bird watching trip on land is hardly worthwhile – other than the night time trip – see below.



Great Shearwater – just a single bird seen at one of the melees around a fish bait ball.



5<sup>th</sup> June - The drive to Calheta is pleasant. Parking on the waterfront is best done in an underground car park just after the first roundabout on entering the village from the east. Lobosonda are on the marina edge. Sailings from here are by rib or sailboat. Rib being preferable for distance covered. Common Dolphin and Striped Dolphin were seen. The skipper was good at approaching the Striped Dolphins as this is a species that can be quite skittish if approach is not carefully undertaken.

After the boat tour a trip we called at Verdoso dos Balcoes at the village of Ribeirão Frio which after a short walk along one of the small irrigation waterways offers views over the valley of Ribeira da Faial (see first photo). Madeiran Firecrest, Plain Swift, Madeiran Chaffinch and Trocaz Pigeon were all easy to find here. The Pigeon was however always distant over the laurel forests below.



Common Dolphins



*Striped Dolphin - a very wary species not easy to get close*



*Madeiran Chaffinch - very tame at the view point and easily found.*





Madeiran Firecrest – a shorter white supercilium is the most distinctive feature to separate from Firecrest but there are other id features.



One of the rarest breeding birds in Europe the distinctive Trocaz Pigeon wasn't too difficult to find – photographing however, is a different matter.



The evening trip with Wind Birds is not for the feint hearted. We met at the Dom Pedro hotel and were driven for 40 minutes or so in a mini bus to a high and exposed peak at Pico de Areeiro ; Madeira's third highest peak at 1818m (circa 6000ft). There is a communications system here with a good road all the way to the peak. A walk along a three quarters of a mile long arête with steep loose steps and slopes and sheer drops at either side could be a little mind boggling and tiring at times. However we did hear and see (in the dark) several Zino's Petrels. No photographs allowed using flash of this very rare breeding bird.

6<sup>th</sup> June - Another trip down the island to Calheta and another rib trip out to sea. The operator uses a vagia (a spotter) high in the mountains to radio sightings of cetaceans to the boat. He had apparently spotted some beaked whales. They didn't take long to find and it wasn't long before we were watching four Blainville's Beaked Whales. A new species for me. Leaving them a little too soon (for me) we sought out some Common Dolphins for the others on board.

On the way back to Machico the afternoon was spent in the botanical gardens at Funchal searching for butterflies.

The gardens are extremely busy but enjoyable, Parking was difficult but we soon found a small car park quite close to the gardens but it's worth pointing out anywhere you go on Madeira it involves a steep climb.

During our drive to the gardens we were stopped so the basket sledges could pass - this is a touristy thing where a sledge with people on board is guided down the steep side roads by two sledge drivers or carreiros wearing white uniforms and straw hats! - you have been warned!



Blainville's Beaked Whales surprisingly close to land.



Lang's Short Tailed Blue Butterfly one of the specialities of the botanical gardens and quite difficult to find. Several were found at the western end of the gardens on Lavender.





Perez's Frog – another speciality of the botanical gardens



Madeiran Wall Lizards were plentiful, colourful and varied in the gardens



7<sup>th</sup> June -A very productive trip out to sea from Calheta seeing four Sperm Whales. A single animal and three together. Probably two females and a young animal between them being protected from all comers.

There were also big numbers of Spotted Dolphin some of which were very playful.

The lighthouse at Ponto do Pargo was visited in the afternoon where I walked along the cliff top. Several bird species were seen here including Berthalot's Pipits and Spectacled Warbler.



A young Sperm whale flanked on both sides by protective females



Adult Spotted Dolphin spy-hopping





Juvenile Spotted Dolphin breaching – they were without doubt the most entertaining dolphins I've ever come across.



Spotted Dolphin bow-riding the rib





Berthelot's Pipit some of which were quite tame





*Lighthouse at Ponto do Fango on the west of the island*

8<sup>th</sup> June – A trip out with Wind birds from Machico. Very little to see except Spotted Dolphin. However we came across a Loggerhead Turtle close to the boat. After the boat trip a walk around Machico itself now the festival had finished was productive with good views of the Waxbills in the reedbeds within the channelled water course running through the town. Later a run up to Verdos Dos Balcoes at Riberio Frio was enjoyable.



*Loggerhead Turtle which stayed around the boat for some time*



*waxbills were in good numbers within the watercourse at Machico*

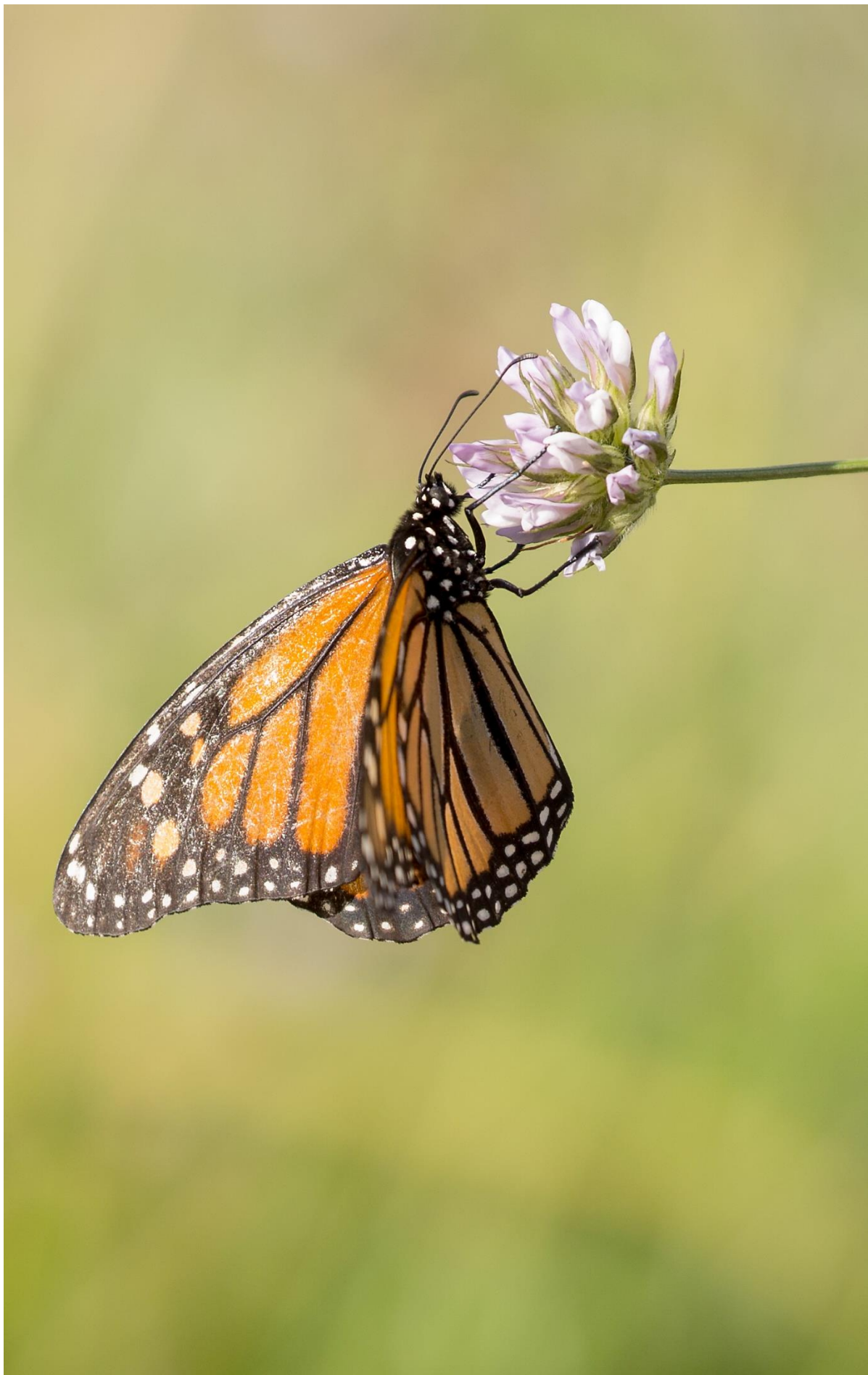




Plain Swift



Canaries could be heard all over Machico



*Monarch butterfly – the commonest butterfly seen on Madeira*



9<sup>th</sup> June - A final trip out to sea at Calheta gave us another good look at some Spotted Dolphins and a walk around the marina looking at fish was followed by lunch at a bar with a return journey to the airport and a flight back to the UK.



Spotted Dolphin



A Canary Damsel sporting its neon stripes

Carl Chapman

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