

## Madeira 2024 Friday 5<sup>th</sup> to Friday 12<sup>th</sup> July



**The View from the Mirador Balcoes: photo Tania Chapman**

Although the bird list of Madeira is not large we decided to pay a summer visit try and see a few species; in particular to get good photos of Trocaz Pigeon which had eluded me on a previous visit seven years ago. Tania had never been to any of the Atlantic islands so a visit was timely to give her the experience and the visit also gave us both the opportunity to do a little whale watching.

Research gave us at least one site to visit for the Pigeons and three whale watches were arranged. Once again on a foreign trip the 'Here we go' app was used for finding our way around the island. It proved invaluable.

### **5<sup>th</sup> July Friday**

An early flight from Stanstead demanded an overnight stay in the Novatel close to the airport. This was coupled with the car being parked in their car park for the duration of our time abroad (total cost £164.09) An early bus was caught to the terminal at 3:30am (£4 per person each way) for the flight at 6am giving us a little more than the required 2 hours check in time before flying.

Landing at Cristiano Ronaldo International Airport is considered difficult. Cross winds or heavy mist means flights can frequently be abandoned with return to the UK not being unheard of. Our return flights were arranged via jet2.com at a total cost of £1009.22 including reserved seats, 22kg of checked in luggage each, 10kg of guaranteed cabin luggage each and meals both ways. Jet2.com are apparently less likely to abandon landings than Easy Jet, the alternative airline, as Jet2.com offer accommodation packages and have more to lose if they do abandon landings.

A hire car was arranged via Sixt at a cost of £485.54 with Collision Damage Waiver at £64.35 additional cover taken at the time of booking for €541 which included any damage to paintwork and a €300 refundable deposit. The car was an Audi A3 Limosine but we found out later it had a much smaller draught than was required for some of the roads we were using. I didn't enjoy driving it at all and was pleased we had taken additional insurance as the front valance of the vehicle frequently scraped on curbs and rough ground. We originally booked a Golf but got upgraded after spending nearly an hour picking up the car due to computer problems.

Accommodation was arranged at Moradia Bela House, Rua Quinta Rosarion in Santa Cruz at a cost of £783.56 organised via booking.com. The house was difficult to find but eventually we met the owner and received the keys. The property sleeps 6 and was very comfortable. The fact it was on the flight path of the runway did not discourage us as flights were infrequent and not that noisy. The drive was difficult to park on due to the steepness of the step from the road into the drive itself but that was more about our vehicle than the house.

Roads on Madeira are either racetracks or bobbly, rough, steep switchbacks and a great deal of care has to be taken when driving them. Tailgating at speed seems to be a national sport.

We then went out and did a shop at a relatively well stocked but quite small supermarket 32.66895638, -16.80437776 some 10 minutes drive from Moradia Bela House. We then ate and sat on the balcony watching birds and looking for cetaceans.

## **6<sup>th</sup> July Saturday**

The weather was overcast but got sunnier the longer the day went on. An early start got us to the Palheiro Gardens (32.66300373, -16.86838127) just after they opened at 9am. We parked outside the gates but there is a car park at the end of the approach drive. The cost of entry was €11 per person and was well worth it. A map was provided. We saw a number of Trocaz Pigeons which showed extremely well at the lower part of the gardens just north east of the Tea House where the gardens abutted the golf course. Trocaz Pigeons were feeding in the fruiting Laurel trees here. We also had distant sightings walking the approach road down to the car park and two birds feeding in a wildflower meadow the opposite side of the track to the picnic area. Plain Swifts were overhead

and at the Tea House when having a drink we had Madeiran Chaffinch coming to the tables.



**One of the Trocaz Pigeon seen at Palheiro Gardens**



**Madeiran Wall Lizard – yet another endemic of the island**



**Perez's Frogs were all over in Palheiro Gardens. An introduced species native to Iberia also known as also known as Iberian waterfrog, Iberian green frog or Coruna frog**



**Lang's Short tailed Blue Butterfly at Palheiro Gardens**

Also, in the gardens we had heaps of Perez's frogs as well as good numbers of Speckled Wood Butterflies – none of which were the Madeiran form. Plenty of Monarchs, a few Lang's short-tailed Blues and two Long-tailed Blues. As the day warmed there were also plenty of Clouded Yellows.

Two Emperor Dragonflies patrolling the pools near the Tea House were the only Odonata we saw. Several Grasshoppers were tentatively identified as Slender Green Winged Grasshoppers.

A couple of moth species were pushed up from the lawns of which one remains unidentified the other was a Vestal.

Three Bugs seen were identified as *Spilostethus pandurus pandurus* a Madeiran sub species of Fire Bug.

We had lunch at the picnic site before seeking out more butterflies in the grassland opposite.

More Plain Swifts back at the house plus 7 Cory's offshore and several Yellow legged gull and a Greater Black Backed Gull over.

### **7<sup>th</sup> July Sunday**

A trip with Wind Birds was prearranged at a cost of £76.33 for the two of us. It was calm and sunny but the wind got up for the later part of the two hours we were out on the water. We met at the quay in Machico at 9:50am prior to the sailing at 10:00am having parked at the free car park at the top of the town (32.71474275, -16.76647903) and approached the sea front via the cemetery steps. I had used Hugo and Catarina previously and they were very professional as always.

Plenty of Lightfoot and Runner Crabs on the quay.

When on the boat (the *Oceanodroma*) we initially searched the old quay for vagrant birds but there were fishermen who would have disturbed any present. Many Cory's Shearwaters and Common Terns seen. Several *Pterodroma* Petrels of which two to three were identifiable as Desert Petrel by their heavier bills. A single Bulwer's Petrel was seen at some distance.

We also followed a small school of Bottlenose Dolphins and later Short Finned Pilot Whales that had a few Bottlenose Dolphins with them. Two flying fish were seen on the return journey.

After lunch we drove the short distance to the large supermarket in town (32.721003, -16.769089) and then walked the waterway that runs up from the sea. We had no time to visit the two other places we had planned during the afternoon. Plenty of Muscovy Duck and a couple of Rats, plenty of Blackcaps and a single Canary. On the river channel was

also a presumed escaped Ringed Teal (later investigation revealed this had apparently been present since last July and scrutiny of photos suggest it may be sporting a leg ring.

Butterfly wise, we saw many Monarchs, a single unidentified Blue, a Clouded Yellow and a single Small White. A small Odonata species disappeared as quickly as it appeared.

Back to the house for a cup of tea and a short nap before dinner.



**Desertas Petrel off the East of the Island from the Oceanodroma distinguished from the other Pterodroma Petrels in the area by the thicker bill**

### **8<sup>th</sup> July Monday**

Sunny and bright with a little wind and white horses pm. A 40 minute drive initially to Ponto do Sol (32.67948095, -17.10451939) but we couldn't get a parking space so we went through the tunnel at the West end of the village and parked immediately on exiting, under the cliffs. Walking over the steep pack bridge here I spent the morning on the cliff face path photographing the Plain Swifts that were obviously nesting on the cliff face. Tania walked further on to view a waterfall that cascaded over the road. She found a dead female adult Kestrel on the path.

After a snack we went to Calheta and parked in the underground car park (32.71714665, -17.16922798) which cost €2.90 for the three to four hours we were parked.



**Plain Swift (with feather) at Ponto do Sol**



**Rough-toothed Dolphins out of Calheta**



**Short finned Pilot Whales including a male with a dorsal fin damage.**

Walking around the Marina there were myriads of colourful fish of various species. A bug on the quay was later identified as an American Cockroach.

We had a pre-arranged whale watching trip booked with Lobosonda on their rib 'Stenella' at a cost of €120.51 for the two of us. The naturalist 'Pete' was informative, was English and spoke German too. The skipper was a bit gung-ho but I expected this having been with him before. After a short safety briefing from Pete, we set off and immediately passed a Cory's and got into a pod of Rough-toothed Dolphins which we stayed with for quite some time ... thankfully, as this was a new species for us both and I wanted to get to know them.

Rough toothed Dolphins are animals that are not terribly well studied. It has quite a sickle shaped dorsal fin and the pectoral fins are set well back. The patterning seems quite variable, but a constant feature is white around the lips especially in older animals. Animals do synchronised surfacing much more so than any other species I've observed. They also have a unique head shape with no crease at the bottle as shown by Bottlenose Dolphin giving them a cone shaped head.

We then moved on seeing occasional Bulwer's Petrels and what was claimed as a Madeiran Storm Petrel but I later discovered from my photos it showed the wing moult, protruding toes and pale webs of a Wilson's Petrel; although it came so close it almost came in the boat I was concentrating on getting a photo of it and made the classic mistake of not actually looking at the bird!



**Wilson's Petrel, almost came in the boat!**

A pod of Short finned Pilot Whales was the only other cetacean species we saw and again we stopped with them for quite some time.

Pete pulled out some Sargassum Weed which apparently over the last couple of years is starting to be a problem. It was full of small crabs which I suggested may be Columbus Crabs; which we later confirmed to be correct from photos taken.

We drove home very happy people.

### **9<sup>th</sup> July Tuesday**

We set off after breakfast and arrived at Ponta de Sao Lourenco well before 9am (32.74317, -16.70111). This is at the very East of the island and is predominantly covered in low scrubby vegetation. The place was HEAVING with tourists ... and it got busier. We just managed to get a parking space. Most people were going off on the footpath North-East. We went downhill below the turning circle of the car park which was quieter and saw Berthelot's Pipits, Canary, Madeiran Kestrel and a single distant Spectacled Warbler.

As the area got very busy we left and drove to the nearby town centre of Canical (32.7385, -16.7366) to search for Spanish Sparrow; but it appears they no longer occur here. We did however watch Common Terns feeding offshore and one coming to rest close-by on the stone quay.



**Berthalot's Pipit at Ponta de Sao Lourenco – not difficult to see in the area**



**Common Tern on the quay at Canical**

We then travelled up to Mirador Balcoes (32.7352, -16.8861) where it was extremely busy with traffic. We eventually parked, had a quick lunch and then walked out to the viewpoint. Despite a constant stream of people, we had no issues finding Madeiran Firecrest, Madeiran Chaffinch and several Robins and Blackcaps. From the viewpoint itself we had at least a dozen Trocaz Pigeons – all distant flying or perched in the valley below. We also had a few Madeiran Speckled Woods – smaller and darker than the Speckled Woods that were more familiar. Madeiran or Leafy Orchids were flowering sparsely in at least one place on the walk.



**Madeiran Firecrest on the path to the Mirador Balcoes**

On our drive back home we stopped at the campground at Terreiros (32.7188, -16.8678) which was basically an alpine meadow area which we had more or less to ourselves. Plenty of Clouded Yellows, an indeterminate Red Admiral, several Long tailed Blues and a possible Grayling sp. Siskin were abundant and there were several Goldfinch flying around. The local dialect of Chaffinch sounds very Crossbill like. The road back down was quite steep and narrow in places and caused a possible issue with the braking system of the car – typical Audi - Vorsprung durch Technik!

### **10<sup>th</sup> July Wednesday**

The car warning lights continued today with another variety, that's now four different warnings!

An early start to Calheta at 7am. Parking in the same underground car park at around 8am very early for our 10am tour which commenced with a briefing at 9:30am. Car Parking was €3.10 for around 5 hours. The ticket machine wouldn't take either notes or our cards so a kind couple of Portuguese chaps gave us coins and paid for our parking. An incredibly generous race of people. Tania found a supermarket at the West end of the sea front to top up our supplies. Public toilets are available on the seafront close to the West end as well as toilets in the supermarket.

We again went out with Lobosonda on the rib Stenella with Carlos as pilot and Sarah as the naturalist. She was German but spoke excellent English and we were the only Brits among a group of Germans but she made sure we were good throughout the tour. Although this was her first season in Madeira she had experience elsewhere in several places. Carlos was very respectful of both us and the cetaceans. He was a good pilot and had been spotting for Lobosonda for many years.



**Bulwer's Petrel off Calheta**

Conditions were ideal with little wind. We had an unprecedented number of Bulwer's Petrels (called the Black Soul in Portuguese 'Alma Negra') probably into the low thirties which led me to believe large cetaceans may be in the area. Maybe the same number of Cory's and a few Yellow legged Gulls. We first saw a couple of Bottlenose Dolphins followed later by a pod of around half a dozen Atlantic Spotted Dolphin. The small pod had at least two calves which came very close to the rib. There may also have been a distant Pterodroma Petrel I picked up that flew past at some speed.

We then sped some distance out to sea and managed first one Sperm Whale and then another. Both were bulls. Sperm Whales are not resident in Madeira as they are in the Azores so any animals are on passage. We had excellent views of both animals. We thought both Carlos and Sarah were excellent and tipped them both €10 each.



**A big bull Sperm Whale as it fluked up to dive out of Calheta**

We had a picnic lunch on the seafront and then made our way to the Lighthouse at Ponta Do Pargo (32.8141, -17.2627) which took around 30 minutes. The place had changed dramatically since I was there 7 years ago and was under development with a lot of dust from earth moving machinery. All the good scrub habitat had been removed, few if any flowers remained. We did see several Monarchs, a single Small White and a Clouded Yellow, we managed to flush a Quail, a Red legged Partridge with a chick and we also saw our first Buzzard of the trip being mobbed by a Madeiran Kestrel.

We made our way home elated at the trip to sea but disappointed with the habitat destruction on the cliffs.

A possible Bryde's Whale from the balcony this evening surfaced twice.

England v Netherlands tonight in the semi's of the Euro's. Come on England – Success!!

### **11<sup>th</sup> July Thursday**

We had a lie in. No issues with the car today thank goodness. Out on the road by about 10am we visited the campground again at Terreiros. We thought it warranted better investigation but we found nothing new other than goats, goats and more goats. We then went on to another picnic and campground about 1km further uphill with the same result. It wasn't until we parked even further up the mountain above the treeline that we started to see different things.



**Long tailed Blue Butterfly at Terreiros**



**Madeiran Grayling at the Parque Ecologico do Funchal**



**Male Spectacled Warbler at the Parque Ecologico do Funchal**

We parked in a gate entrance (32.7200, -16.9090) and went for a short walk in what was signposted the Parque Ecologico do Funchal. The gate was locked but could easily be circumnavigated. We had some success here with both Madeiran Grayling and

Spectacled Warbler as well as a very small and dark Speckled Wood that was probably the Madeiran race but curiously did not show the distinctive white underwing mark. We also had another Buzzard here. After a little lunch we descended to Machio where we again walked the watercourse to get better views of Common Waxbill which we indeed did. We then filled with fuel and returned for dinner and to pack.



**Waxbill (juv) one of several amid the watercourse vegetation in Machio**

### **12<sup>th</sup> July Friday**

We got up early to make our way to the airport for 8am before our 10:30am flight which we caught without a problem. The flight back to the UK was without incident and we arrived home in North Norfolk at around 18:45.

Photos for the trip can be found at Wildcatch Photography

<https://wildcatchphotography.zenfolio.com>

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