



A superb white-winged Zino's Petrel zipping by our boat (Pete Morris)

MADEIRA

11 – 16 JUNE 2021

LEADER: PETE MORRIS

This was our first attempt at a heavily pelagic-orientated trip to Madeira, and I am quite sure it will not be our last! If you want to see the rare *Pterodroma* petrels that breed around Madeira, this is the way to do it! We enjoyed spectacular views of both Desertas and Zino's Petrel at sea, and were even able to appreciate their subtle differences! The supporting cast of seabirds included numerous Bulwer's Petrels and a lone Band-rumped (or Madeiran) Storm Petrel, whilst on land we enjoyed fantastic views of the endemic Trocaz Pigeon and stunning Madeiran Firecrest, and enjoyed spectacular scenery, great flowers and some gorgeous butterflies. All in all, it was a very pleasant short break!



The delightful Madeira Firecrest gave many stunning views (Pete Morris)

Having arrived in Funchal, landing on the spectacular runway that literally rises from the ocean, we quickly safely negotiated the rather straightforward covid protocols, which the Madeiran authorities had organized very well. For most of us, this was our first time away since the dreadful pandemic changed our world, and it was a pleasant relief to feel a sense of freedom as we headed to our hotel. We arrived in time to settle into our pleasant hotel in Machico, grab some dinner and a beer and chat about the few days that lay ahead of us.

Our first day we stayed on terra firme, exploring several areas of interest. We began at some gardens in Funchal where we very quickly encountered the two land bird endemics. Several impressively-sized Trocaz Pigeons loafed around, gorging themselves on fruit whilst showing off their pink-hued breasts, zebra-striped necks and vivid tail bands. Nearby, tiny Madeiran Firecrests gave away their presence by their high-pitched calls, and soon we were marvelling at a pair of these little crackers! Well to be fair, finding these two endemics was not the greatest challenge I'd ever faced, but it was great to see them both so well in the first ten minutes!

As we had the full day to explore, we decided to head to the north, and explored a delightful valley. Before we'd even entered the valley, we stopped to watch a flock of obliging Plain Swifts, and at the same point noted our first Atlantic Canaries. Looking offshore, we noticed hundreds of Cory's Shearwaters distantly, and amongst them were a few distant dolphins and some larger baleen whales that were most likely Bryde's Whales. Heading into the valley, we found more of the endemic birds as well as flowering bushes covered in butterflies which included some fantastic Monarchs, Canary Red Admirals and Painted Ladies. Also here were Madeira Speckled Woods and, after some searching, a Madeira Cleopatra (or Brimstone). After our pleasant stroll, we retired to an equally pleasant restaurant and enjoyed a fine lunch whilst watching Common Terns and Atlantic Yellow-legged Gulls offshore.

We explored a few areas on our way back to Machico, but other than some great scenery, some interesting botany, and a close in Manx Shearwater at Funchal Harbour, we found little else new. After dinner we ventured out again in an attempt to find the local form of Barn Owl. This ultimately proved to be unsuccessful, though we did hear one a few times, and also saw a Leisler's Noctule.



Monarch (above) and Canary Red Admiral (Pete Morris)



The following morning we had some covid planning logistics to sort after breakfast, and having completed that, we decided to explore the arid eastern end of the island around Ponta do Sao Laurengo. This proved to be a good plan, although we were not alone in having the idea, as the trail rapidly became a human motorway! Nevertheless, we found a confiding family party of Spectacled Warblers, several showy Berthelot's Pipits and some superb Pallid Swifts, screaming around with the Plain Swifts. Add to that, some stunning coastal scenery



Amazing scenery at Sao Laurengo where Plain (left) and Pallid Swifts and Spectacled Warblers entertained us (Pete Morris)





Another view at Sao Laurengo and one of the Berthelot's Pipits seen then (Pete Morris)





A superb Trocaz Pigeon (Pete Morris)

and some botanical interest, and it made for an extremely pleasant excursion. We returned to base for lunch, and the tension, nerves and excitement were building...

A couple of hours later we were gliding (until the easternmost point of Madeira) and then bumping northwest out into the Atlantic. With a slight chop, it was difficult to watch as we moved, but we were essentially heading out to our chumming spot. We did however encounter a number of goodies as we went. Initially, numbers of Cory's Shearwaters built, and as we got further from land, the first Bulwer's Petrels appeared. An immature Northern Gannet was a great surprise, whilst an immature Loggerhead Turtle, playful Atlantic Spotted Dolphins and a couple of huge Sperm Whales were great distractions. We also began seeing our first Pterodroma petrels, including a nice 'white-winged' and easy to identify Zino's Petrel and a chunky, heavy-billed Desertas Petrel! Our account was up and running, and nerves had turned to smiles. We spent the rest of the afternoon



A huge Sperm Whale (Pete Morris)



Three of the stunning Zino's Petrels seen on our first pelagic. The upper one is a darker-winged bird, the lower two classic 'white-winged' birds. All three show the friendly face, slim and gentle structure and small bill typical of this rare species. (Pete Morris)





A couple of elegant Bulwer's Petrels, and the view as we headed back into Machico (Pete Morris)



chumming, bobbing around watching a succession of seabirds including many smart Bulwer's Petrels, 100s of lazy Cory's Shearwaters, several speedy Manx Shearwaters and, best of all, several more Zino's Petrels, including some very distinctive individuals. Speeding back with the swell behind us was a little more pleasant, with the sunset and dramatic coasts to keep us company, and we arrived back a little tired but content!

The following morning a PCR test was top priority, but we then spent the rest of the morning taking a more leisurely stroll around some gardens in Funchal. Once again the Trocaz pigeons put on a spectacular performance, Madeiran Firecrests delighted, the endemic race of Common Chaffinch showed very well, and we enjoyed the spectacular flowers, a few butterflies and numerous Iberian Frogs.



The attractive local form of Common Chaffinch, and a fine Atlantic Canary (Pete Morris)



We were back out on the ocean in the afternoon, this time speeding south to the Desertas islands. Here our target was to get more and better views of Desertas Petrels, and this we comfortably achieved. Atlantic Spotted Dolphins were once again regular companions, and we also encountered a fantastic pod of Short-finned Pilot Whales. We then embarked upon another long chumming session, in the hope of attracting in an elusive Madeiran (Band-rumped) Storm Petrel. Many Yellow-legged Gulls and a couple of Lesser Black-backed Gulls were attracted to the chum, along with a succession of commoner seabirds and a few more Desertas Petrels. At one stage all the gulls took flight for no apparent reason, only for three Great Skuas to arrive a few minutes later and wreak havoc chasing the gulls all around us! A Sabine's Gull was a brief but welcome surprise at the chum but storm petrels were thin on the ground! We waited and waited... and waited. Just before we were about to give up a small petrel appeared and spirits lifted, but alas it was an early Wilson's Storm Petrel in heavy moult, and although good to see, it was not what we were hoping for! The journey back was a little bumpy as we made our way back into the chop, but the spectacular sky-scapes were a pleasant distraction.



Great Skua (or Bonxie), our 2cy Sabine's Gull and a tatty Wilson's Storm Petrel. Opposite, a couple of chunky Desertas Petrels (Pete Morris)







A damp looking Red-legged Partridge, Madeira Saxifrage (left) and Madeira Stonecrop, all from Pico do Arieiro (Pete Morris)



On our final full day on Madeira, we headed up to the highest parts of the island, visiting the Pico do Arieiro area. Two Alpine Swifts feeding above the road on the drive up were a complete surprise – a vagrant on the island! Sadly the cloud base was low, and although we could still enjoy the impressive endemic flora, including the stunning Pride of Madeira flowers, and a couple of Red-legged Partridges, the scenery was sadly hidden. Several Spectacled Warblers were heard, and Atlantic Canaries were common. Lower down, the fog lifted, and carpets of Madeiran Marsh Orchids lined the road. Here, more firecrests impressed, and we enjoyed an hour or so in the verdant forest, before heading back to base for lunch.



The amazing endemic Pride of Madeira (above), Madeira Marsh Orchid (left) and Madeira Early Purple Orchid (Pete Morris)



Our final trip out on to the ocean once again focussed on our prime target now, the elusive storm petrels, and as a result we again headed south and positioned ourselves a good way off Funchal. Once again we spent a long time creating and observing a chum slick, and for hours, all that arrived was what were by now, our regular visitors. Time was really running out, and we were literally about to pick up the chum bucket when our target appeared! A fine Band-rumped Storm Petrel danced across the slick, delighting us all, and providing a fitting finale for our time at sea.

It had been an superbly successful first pelagic-based tour, a trip that I am sure will become a regular fixture in our calendar. It was also a breath of fresh air for all of us to escape and travel again, making the trip even more special. Although we had to do a few things slightly differently compared to pre-covid times, and take a few extra precautions, it was all very straightforward, and a small price to pay for the rewards!



Short-finned Pilot Whales (above and Atlantic Spotted Dolphins were both much appreciated (Pete Morris)





The excellent endemic Trocaz Pigeon in Funchal (Pete Morris)

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).

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Conservation threat categories and are taken from the BirdLife website: <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/search>

(EW) = Extinct in the wild, **(CR)** = Critically Endangered, **(EN)** = Endangered, **(VU)** = Vulnerable, **(NT)** = Near Threatened, **(DD)** = Data Deficient.

For polytypic species, the subspecies seen on the tour, where known, is placed in parentheses at the end of the species comment. Generally, species listed with trinomials are not currently split by the IOC.

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). **2021. IOC World Bird List (v 11.1)**. This list is updated twice annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>. Please note, this was the current version when the report checklist was created. Some alternative names are given in parentheses.

All of our checklists are powered by our partner iGoTerra (www.igoterra.com) who provide web and mobile applications for bird and wildlife enthusiasts and businesses. Their suite of services cover observations, rankings, lists, photos and trip management tools.

BIRDS

Red-legged Partridge (introduced) *Alectoris rufa* (NT) A very confiding pair along the trail at Pico do Arieiro.

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* Two feeding with Plain Swifts near to Machico were a surprise [nominate].

Plain Swift ♦ *Apus unicolor* Common and seen daily, with many excellent views.

Pallid Swift ♦ *Apus unicolor* Some great looks with Plain Swifts at Ponta do Sao Laurenco [brehmorum].

Rock Dove (introduced) *Columba [livia] domestica* Too many!

Trocaz Pigeon ♦ *Columba trocaz* Brilliant views on a few occasions, especially in the gardens in Funchal.

Collared Dove (introduced) *Streptopelia decaocto* (NL) A couple seen.

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* One seen in flight off the north coast.

Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini* A single 2cy bird came to the chum on our second pelagic trip.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* Common around the coast and during the pelagics [atlantis].

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* A few, most likely western *graellsii*, were seen on each of our pelagics.



An adult 'Atlantic' Yellow-legged Gull (Pete Morris)

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Small numbers seen around the coasts and during the pelagics [nominate].

Great Skua *Stercorarius skua* Three individuals came and terrorized the gulls on our second pelagic.

Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* One seen well at the chum on our second pelagic.

Band-rumped Storm Petrel ♦ *Oceanodroma castro* After much effort we had good views of one late on our final pelagic.

Zino's Petrel ♦ *Pterodroma madeira* (EN) Stunning views of on our first pelagic, including several 'white-winged' birds.

Desertas Petrel ♦ *Pterodroma deserta* (VU) Several of these bulky birds seen well during the pelagics.

Cory's Shearwater ♦ *Calonectris borealis* The commonest seabird with 100s seen every day. A graceful species.

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* Small numbers seen most days; many great looks. The first off Funchal Harbour [nominate].



Seabirds! Cory's Shearwaters (above), Bulwer's Petrel, Manx Shearwater and the elusive Madeiran (Band-rumped) Storm Petrel (Pete Morris)



Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* Excellent views of good numbers on all three pelagics.

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* An 2cy on our first pelagic was assumed to be this species rather than a vagrant Cape!

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* Small numbers seen in the interior of the island [*hartertii*].

Western (Slender-billed) Barn Owl ◊ *Tyto [alba] schmitzi* (H) Despite a concerted effort, we only heard this elusive form.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Common around the island, especially so in the arid east [*canariensis*].

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* A couple seen at Ponta do Sao Laurengo. An uncommon species here [nominate].

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* Widespread and common. All were normal looking (rather than melanic) [*heineken*].

Spectacled Warbler *Curruca conspicillata* Some great looks at Ponta do Sao Laurengo, and heard in the highlands [*orbitalis*].

Madeira Firecrest ◊ *Regulus madeirensis* Many brilliant view of these little stunners.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* Common and widespread [*cabrerae*].

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* Several seen well [nominate].

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* Several showy individuals seen well [*schmitzi*].

Berthelot's Pipit ◊ *Anthus berthelotii* Great views of several at Ponta do Sao Laurengo. Smart birds.

Common Chaffinch ◊ *Fringilla [coelebs] maderensis* A few of the smart *maderensis* form were seen well.

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* (NL) One seen.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* A few seen [*parva*].

Atlantic Canary ◊ *Serinus canaria* Common and widespread with many seen well.



Another view of a Berthelot's Pipit, the endemic form of Grey Wagtail and the surprise Alpine Swifts (Pete Morris)





A fantastic pod of Atlantic Spotted Dolphins (Pete Morris)

MAMMALS

Leisler's Noctule *Nyctalus leisleri* One bat-detected and seen flying around during our Barn Owl attempts.

Short-finned Pilot Whale *Globicephala macrorhynchus* Great views of a pod on one of our pelagics.

Atlantic Spotted Dolphin *Stenella frontalis* Seen brilliantly on all three pelagics.

Bryde's Whale *Balaenoptera edeni* A couple of baleen whales scoped off the north coast were most likely this species.

Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus* Great views during our first pelagic.

APPENDIX OF OTHER WILDLIFE NOTED

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Iberian Frog *Rana iberica*

Loggerhead Turtle *Caretta caretta*

Madeiran Wall Lizard *Teira dugesii*

BUTTERFLIES

Small White *Artogeia rapae*

Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea*

Madeiran Cleopatra *Gonepteryx [cleopatra] maderensis*

Long-tailed Blue *Lampides boeticus*

Monarch *Danaus plexippus*

Canarian Red Admiral *Vanessa indica*

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Madeiran Speckled Wood *Pararge xiphia*



Iberian Frog and Loggerhead Turtle (Pete Morris)

APPENDIX 1

TOP WILDLIFE OF THE TOUR

- 1st ZINO'S PETREL**
- 2nd BAND-RUMPED (MADEIRAN) STORM PETREL**
- 3rd ATLANTIC SPOTTED DOLPHIN**
- 4th Madeira Firecrest**
- 5th Trocaz Pigeon**
- 6th Sperm Whale**



The two special endemics... (Pete Morris)

