

# Madeira & Desertas Islands - A Seabird Extravaganza!

Naturetrek Tour Report

13 - 17 June 2017

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Report compiled by Martin Beaton

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Tour participants: Martin Beaton (leader) and Filipe Silva (local guide) with nine Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

Tuesday 13th June

After an early start from Gatwick and an exciting landing at Funchal Airport, we were met by Martin and Filipe and whisked off to Hotel Residencia Pina. The whole group had opted for the additional afternoon pelagic trip so, after settling in, we were picked up by minibus and taken down to the harbour for a trip aboard the Ventura du Mar.

After leaving the harbour it was not long until we saw a small school of Atlantic Spotted Dolphins along with numbers of Cory Shearwaters and, distantly, small numbers of Bulwer's Petrels. We found a second school of dolphin which were identified as Common Dolphin. Both dolphin species swam in the bow wave of the boat providing a great encounter.

Arriving back in the harbour, we returned to our hotel before heading off to eat at O Jango's in the old port area.

## Day 2

Wednesday 14th June

Today we departed for the marina at 9.30am to set off in Ventura de Mar for the Desertas Islands, specifically Desertas Grande, with Marco the skipper and Alexandra and Venessa as naturalists and crew. We passed Common Terns feeding in the harbour entrance and heading further out we saw a small pod of Bottle-nosed Dolphin, clearly identified by their larger fins in comparison with Spotted and Common Dolphins which are much smaller. We had good views of these magnificent mammals. As we headed further out we saw increasing numbers of Cory's Shearwater and Bulwer's Petrel and the odd distant gadfly (*Prerodroma*) petrels though accurate identification at distance was difficult.

After lunch and as we approached Bugio, the most southerly of the Desertas Islands, we began chumming. Initially we saw Cory's Shearwaters investigating, then Bulwer's Petrels and then good numbers of *Pterodroma* petrels. In all we saw up to 30 birds, of which the majority were undoubtedly Desertas Petrels. Confident separation of Desertas and Zino's Petrels is difficult other than classic specimens as in many birds the features can overlap. Nevertheless, we had great fun observing and photographing them in order to try and find a Zino's.

Towards the end of our chumming we saw heading towards us a very large pod of Atlantic Spotted Dolphins containing several hundred individuals. After a short time observing this fast moving pod, we began our final approach to Desertas Grande. As we anchored in the small bay with cameras and binoculars almost stowed, Filipe suddenly spotted two Monk Seals about 30 metres behind the stern. The seals dived but reappeared some minutes later and continued to feed near the boats for about 20 minutes. This was a fantastic sighting of one of the world's rarest mammals. The seals were the initial reason for the designation of the Desertas Islands as a Natural Park.

Once finally ashore, we explored the 600-metre route laid out through the breeding area with Filipe and Martin, so that everyone could walk the route later, on their own, in the dark. Whilst the Ventura crew set up the camp for the evening and began to prepare dinner, the group rested with time to clearly observe both Canary and

Berthelot's Pipit, which are very tame at this site. Indeed the Berthelot's Pipit will approach to within less than a metre.

At dusk, we gathered in different locations to watch and hear the first Bulwer's Petrels with their strange barking calls. The calls of Cory's Shearwater and Madeiran Storm Petrels were also heard as we began to settle down for the evening.

## Day 3

## Thursday 15th June

After people had started to emerge from tents, joining those who had slept in the open, there were varied stories of night-time walks and noises, including a Bulwer's Petrel landing on a sleeping bag. We were served a continental breakfast and after tidying up the campsite, we returned to Ventra de Mar and set off back to Funchal.

The wind was stronger today, with occasional gusts of 30 knots, so we had a fine sail back and saw numbers of Cory's Shearwaters and Bulwer's Petrels taking full advantage of the wind. A small number of Desertas Petrels were observed in the distance and a number of people saw flying fish. Unfortunately, because of the sea conditions, we saw no species of whale or dolphin.

Arriving back in Funchal early afternoon we had lunch, following which we were driven back to the hotel to rest before our evening expedition to look for Zino's Petrel. We were picked up at 8.30pm and made our way to Pic Ariereo, which rises above the cloud layer providing fine mountain views, which we watched in the setting sun. Before we set off, Filipe explained the historical search for the petrel and its eventual rediscovery in the mountains of Madeira. It was a fine evening but with a brisk wind so we set off carefully. On a section of the mountain path we waited for the first ghostly calls of the petrel and also caught brief glimpses of the birds crossing a starry mountain sky: an evocative experience. After an hour, we returned via the route we had taken and headed back to the hotel in the minibus

## Day 4

## Friday 16th June

Today we explored the western side of the island, principally for its land birds. We were picked up at 9am and set off via Ribero Brava to Sao Vincente, stopping initially at Lameyros at the lower edge of the Laurel forest to look for Trocaz Pigeon. We were rewarded with a number of good views. Departing Lameryos, we stopped at Sao Vincente to cross the Ribero Vincente. Here we saw Perez's Frog and at the mouth of the river, Common and Roseate Terns. From Sao Vincente we headed to Seixal and up to Chao de Riberia. The flat valley, formed from the same lava stream that forms the headland of Seixal, is surrounded by steep valley sides covered by pristine Laurel forest, with Canary Island Laurel and Madeiran Mahogany. Again we had good views of Trocaz Pigeon, Chaffinch and glimpses of Firecrest.

For lunch we descended to a picnic area where we had good views of Madeiran Speckled Wood butterfly.

After lunch we set off for Ribeira da Janela and climbed the road to Paul da Serra, the flat mountain plateau of Madeira, where we stopped to observe magnificent roadside plants of the Pride of Madeira, and walk quietly along an old section of road. We saw numerous Clouded Yellow butterflies and a single Queen of Spain

Fritillary. Our main objective was to find Spectacled Warbler, which appeared briefly, flitting from Gorse bush to Gorse bush. However, with a significant wind, it did not perch in full view.

Having only had glimpses of Firecrest, we headed to Encumeada to walk along the Levada das Rabacas where we found Chaffinch and, after a brief hunt, had excellent views of Firecrest.

From Encumeada we headed back to Ribeira Brava and Funchal, where a number of us had chosen to undertake an additional pelagic tour, while the remaining members of the group returned to the hotel.

The pelagic group set off with Filipe in a zodiac to head some 12 miles out from the coast, observing increasing numbers of Cory's Shearwaters and then Bulwer's Petrels with increasing distance from the land. About 12 miles out the crew off-loaded the frozen chum, which is a mix of fish, squid and oil. It took a little time to release the oil and fish bits, but initially numbers of Bulwer's Petrel came to investigate, and shortly numbers of Madeiran Storm Petrels. Finally, a White-faced Storm Petrel danced over the surface of the sea for some time, offering splendid views.

The group returned at 8.30pm and then we all ate an excellent meal at Restaurante dos Combatentes.

## Day 5

Saturday 17th June

This morning we were to be picked up at 11.30am, so we had some spare time to catch up on the checklist and review the previous day's journey.

Departing, we had some great memories from a short visit to Madeira, covering all of the key species with the additional memories of a night on Desertas Grande with its sea birds and seals, and a night walk under the stars on Pico Arieiro listening to Zino's Petrel.

We drove to the airport and then flew back to the UK, where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

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## Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	June				
			13	14	15	16	17
1	Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	Desertas Petrel	<i>Pterodroma deserta</i>		✓		✓	
3	Zino's Petrel	<i>Pterodroma madeira</i>			✓		
4	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Bulwer's Petrel	<i>Bulweria bulweria</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
6	Madeiran Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma castro</i>				✓	
7	White-faced Storm Petrel	<i>Pelagodroma marina</i>				✓	
8	Northern Gannet	<i>Sula bassana</i>			✓		
9	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓				
10	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>				✓	
11	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>				✓	
13	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>			✓		
14	Western Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis atlantis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓			
16	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>			✓		
17	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
18	Roseate Tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>				✓	
19	Feral Pigeon / Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Trocaz Pigeon	<i>Columba trocaz</i>				✓	
21	Plain Swift	<i>Apus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Berthelot's Pipit	<i>Anthus berthelotii madeirensis</i>		✓		✓	
23	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea schmitzi</i>				✓	
24	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>				✓	
25	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula cabrerae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
26	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla heineken</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
27	Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata orbitalis</i>				✓	
28	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs madeirensis</i>				✓	
29	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓			
30	Atlantic Canary	<i>Serinus canaria</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

## Reptiles

1	Madeiran Wall Lizard (Madeiran sub sp)	<i>Teira dugesii dugesii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Madeiran Wall Lizard (Desertas sub sp)	<i>Teira dugesii maui</i>		✓	✓		

## Amphibians

1	Perez's Frog	<i>Rana perezi</i>				✓	
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## Mammals

1	Mediterranean Monk Seal	<i>Monachus monachus</i>		✓			
2	Bottle-nosed Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>		✓			
3	Common (or Saddleback) Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	✓				
4	Spotted Dolphin	<i>Stenella frontalis</i>	✓	✓			
5	Mouse (Desertas)			✓			

## Fish

1	Atlantic Flying Fish	<i>Cypselurus heterurus</i>				✓	
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## Butterflies

1	Madeiran Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge xiphia</i>				✓	
2	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>				✓	
3	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>				✓	
4	Long-tailed Blue	<i>Lampides boeticus</i>				✓	
5	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>				✓	
6	Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>	✓			✓	
7	Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>				✓	
8	Queen of Spain Fritillary	<i>Issoria lathonia</i>				✓	

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