

## Madeira 7. - 14.2.2004

Heikki & Sinikka Karhu

13.3.2004 - [heikki@karhut.org](mailto:heikki@karhut.org)

We spent a pleasant Funchal-based package holiday week in Madeira, mainly relaxing ourselves, flower-watching and hiking, but also doing some man- and birdwatching. On four days we used a rent-a-car, and briefly visited some of the key birding areas: Ribeiro Frio (saw **Trocaz Pigeon** at 2<sup>nd</sup> try), Machico (**Common Waxbills**), Porto Moniz (**Little Shearwater**) and Cap Sao Lourenco. Most of the time was spent idling in Funchal. A **Roseate Tern** was the highlight in the Harbour there.

**Weather:** The weather was sunny and warm, in Funchal early morning temperature +15°C, afternoons +20-25°C. In mountains not that warm, but not very cold either. Warm clothing was important up there, anyway. No rain, exceptionally?

**Driving:** Driving was relatively easy and the new motorway along South Coast, the tunnel between Ribeira Brava and Sao Vicente (South and North Coast) and the tunnels between Faial and Machico (NE part of the island) make moving in these areas fast. Between Sao Vicente and Porto Moniz there are new tunnels under construction. Driving took time, but the distances were surprisingly short and we had to fill the tank just once, at Machico 95E Gasoline cost 96 c/l.

**Parking in Funchal center:** Our hotel Do Centro was situated in Funchal center. Ideal base for human-watching, a cheap hypermarket next door, but no parking places for the car. A night in a nearby P-house cost 6-10 euro.

**Maps:** The maps we found, could be better for driving. Marco Polo Holiday Map 1:50.000 is said to be the best. It did lack places signposted at roadsides, anyway, e.g. the Trocaz Pigeon site "Faja de Nogueira". The Europcar Road Map among other things contains a totally imaginative road to "Miradouro de Balcoes", N of Ribeiro Frio. Also signposting in Funchal centre was a bit scant. The locals of course sure know how to head from the center to Ribeiro Frio...

**Website:** A great brand new Birding Madeira website <http://madeira.seawatching.net> appeared just in time, before we left for Madeira, including species lists, invaluable site information, etc. Thank You, Niklas Holmström & co.!

Itinerary

### 7.2. Sat: Funchal

Arrived in the afternoon from Helsinki by Finnair charter flight.

## 8.2. Sun: Funchal

Morning walk (daylight from ca 7.30 to 19 o'clock) to Marina: singing Canaries here and there, Grey Wagtails, on the shore Turnstones and Little Egrets, at sky 30 distant unidentified Swifts and overhead a Plain Swift. In the afternoon a Sandwich Tern fishing in front of the Portuguese Fort (Sao Tiago).

## 9.2. Mon: Funchal - Ribeiro Frio - Faial - Machico - Garajau - Funchal, 73 km

We got our car, a Fiat Punto – a small car has many advantages here – at 9.50, so when we an hour later reached Ribeiro Frio village in the mountains, the best time to see the pigeons was already gone. Madeira Firecrests were easy to see on way to the watch point "Miradouro dos Balcoes", but finding the Pigeons flying or perched somewhere down in the vast valley seemed hopeless. We then hiked three km down the Levada do Furado and back. Sinikka swiftly saw one flying **Trocaz Pigeon** – I missed it. Several Robins and Buzzards were seen, Chaffinches were numerous.

When continuing driving towards North Coast, we saw five Plain Swifts circling low over the buildings at Achada do Pau Bastiao village, and also our first Goldfinch. At Machico 3 Sanderlings running on a concrete ramp on the shore, plus 15 Turnstones.

The evening watch was done at Ponta do Garajau Statue of Christ, a few km east of Funchal. In one hour no visible movement at sea, except some Yellow-legged Gulls. At the cliffs 4 Kestrels and overhead 2 Buzzards. A nice surprise was a group of 1 House Martin, 2 Barn and 1 Red-rumped Swallow at the nearest houses of Garajau village at 18.45. The last mentioned species should be an accidental, according to the "old list" (see Birding Madeira website).

## 10.2. Tue: Funchal - Paul da Serra - Rabacal - Porto Moniz - Funchal, 127 km

Great mountain sceneries en route to the plain of Paul da Serra, but not many birds on the promising-looking plain. Two Berthelot's Pipits at roadside a little east of Rabacal road cross.

A visit to Rabacal requires a two km walk downhill and back – there's a barrier closing the road. Plenty of Madeira Firecrests and Chaffinches. A nice waterfall (with Grey Wagtails) at Risco, still one km onwards from Rabacal.

The road from Paul da Serra to Porto Moniz goes through a very pleasant-looking open mountain area. But birds were scarce also up here.

At Porto Moniz we did some seawatching at a terrace down near the shore, using telescope. Between 16 o'clock and 17.45. ca. 50 Cory's Shearwaters were flying and swimming at 0,5 - 1 km from the shore, most of them near Ilheu Mole island. A **Little Shearwater** passed quite near from W to E at 17.10 and later also 1+2 Manx Shearwaters to E. It was easy to believe that Porto Moniz is the best place on Madeira for seawatching. The eastern half of the Marine

Parade stretch was under construction work as were some new hotels there – perhaps they will be completed by next autumn.

The drive back to Funchal took only an hour despite of road construction work before Seixal. We should have stopped at the mouth of River da Janela: from the bridge we saw a swimming goose (not a tickable-looking one) and also some other unidentified birds.

### **11.2. Wed: Funchal - Ribeiro Frio - Funchal, Botanical Garden, 67 km**

An earlier start today, at 8.15. A nice three quarter morning walk and watch at Ribeiro Frio village and the roadside watchpoint ca 1 km NE from 9.00 o'clock onwards did not produce Pigeons, anyway. A colleague had seen here one from the watchpoint in January, by waiting for three hours, and then another individual perching at a pine, back near the village.

We continued downhill the ER 103 ca. 5 km and at Faja do Cedro Gordo, just before a bridge, turned left to a gravel road signposted "Central Faja da Nogueira 4". After three hundred meters driving the small and silent road we found a **Trocaz Pigeon** perched in a pine and seven others feeding in a slope meadow/vineyard! We reversed the car a couple of hundred meters and had good views on the Pigeons through the telescope. Then a Buzzard landed in the pine, scaring the Pigeons to scatter around and hide themselves in the Laurel wood. We made an hour's walk on the road up to the valley and back and saw 3+4+3 and several single Trocaz Pigeons more.

Back in Funchal two afternoon hours were spent in "Jardim Botanico" Botanical Gardens. A Sparrow Hawk circling at the sky, together with several Buzzards and Kestrels and down in the garden a good many of Blackcaps, Robins and Canaries.

### **12.2. Thu: Funchal, Palheiro Garden - Machico - Ponta de Sao Lourenco - Funchal, 80 km**

Two morning hours spent in the Palheiro (Blandy's) garden in East Funchal: plenty of Blackbirds & Chaffinches, several Buzzards and Kestrels.

At Machico we parked the car at 11.30 for free at an unofficial P-area near the 2<sup>nd</sup> bridge, and walked along the riverside path to the beach and back. A Common Sandpiper and 3 Curlew Sandpiper with 20 Turnstones near the river mouth. On our way back we saw very small birds moving and hiding among the long vegetation in the empty quarter next to the Church: **Common Waxbills**, ca. 10 in all. Then we found a bigger flock foraging in the short hay of the river canal, an amazing 35. This flock flew towards the river mouth, after a while.

At Ponta de Sao Lourenco 14 Berthelot's Pipits at the car park and along the path to 1 km to E and back. Two Rock Sparrows flew from somewhere to the refreshment kiosk for a while.

At Canico we forgot to search for the Spanish Sparrows, but saw a flying flock of 40 Starlings.

The car was returned at Funchal after a total of 349 km's driving during four days.

### 13.2. Fri: Funchal

During the afternoon walk we watched well an adult summer plumaged **Roseate Tern** resting on a buoy near the Marina pier. It also made several fishing flights. Ca. 40 Black-headed Gulls flew and were swimming in front of the Sao Tiago fort. A very likely 2<sup>nd</sup> cal Ring-billed Gull passed us and landed for a while on the beach, but in strong back-light, and had to be left unidentified.

### 14.2. Sat: Funchal

The Roseate Tern was still frequenting the same places as yesterday at 9 o'clock in the morning in front of the shore Parade. Ca. 300 Yellow-legged Gulls were too far from the shore to find the missing Lesser Black-backed Gull among them. In the afternoon flight back to Finland. 34 species observed in all.

#### List of bird species

- *Calonectris diomedea* **Cory's Shearwater**  
ca. 50 off Porto Moniz 10.2. late afternoon
- *Puffinus puffinus* **Manx Shearwater**  
1E+2E Porto Moniz 10.2.
- *P. assimilis baroli* **Little Shearwater**  
1 E Porto Moniz 10.2.
- *Egretta garzetta* **Little Egret**  
3 Funchal Marina 7.2., 2 13.2.; 1 Machico 12.2.
- *Buteo buteo* **Common Buzzard**  
6 Ribeiro Frio area and 2 Ponta do Garajau 9.2., 3 Ribeira Brava, 2 Rabacal 10.2., 4 Ribeiro Frio, 2 Poiso SE, 3 Botanical Garden 11.2., 3 Palheiro Gdn , 1 Ponta de Sao Lourenco 12.2., 1 Hotel Atlantic Oasis, Canico 14.2. = 27
- *Accipiter nisus* **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**  
1 circling N of Funchal Botanical Garden 11.2.
- *Falco tinnunculus* **Common Kestrel**  
4 Ponta do Garajau 9.2., 1 Ribeira Brava 10.2., 4 Botanical Garden 11.2., 2 Ponta de Sao Lourenco 12.2., 1 Hotel Atlantic Oasis, Canico 14.2. = 12

- *Calidris alba* **Sanderling**  
3 Machico 9.2.
- *C. ferruginea* **Curlew Sandpiper**  
3 Machico 12.2.
- *Actitis hypoleucos* **Common Sandpiper**  
1 Machico 12.2.
- *Arenaria interpres* **Ruddy Turnstone**  
8 Funchal beach 8.2., 15 Machico 9.2., 5 Porto Moniz 10.2., 20 Machico 12.2.
- *Larus ridibundus* **Black-headed Gull**  
6 off Funchal beach 8.2., 40 13.2. and 5 14.2., 1 Machico 9.2. and 12.2.
- *L. delawarensis/canus* **Common/Ring-billed Gull**  
1 2<sup>nd</sup> cal passed and landed for a while, but in strong back-light, at Funchal beach 13.2.
- *L. michahellis* **Yellow-legged Gull**  
20+ Airport-Funchal 7.2. and seen daily in coastal areas. 25 Machico 12.2. In and off Funchal Harbour tens daily, max 300 morning 14.2.
- *Sterna sandvicensis* **Sandwich Tern**  
1 fishing in front of the Portuguese Fort (Sao Tiago), Funchal, 8.2. at 12.30.
- *S. dougallii* **Roseate Tern**  
1 summer plumaged ad near the Funchal Marina pier 13.2. in the afternoon and 14.2. morning.
- *Columba livia* **Feral Pigeon**  
40+ on 7.2., seen daily
- *C. trocaz* **Trocaz Pigeon**  
1 flying past at Levada do Furado, Ribeiro Frio 9.2. at 15 o'clock. Ca. 20 in all at Faja da Nogueira road 11.2. morning
- *Apus unicolor* **Plain Swift**  
1 at Funchal +30 *Apus sp.* 8.2., 5 Achada do Pau Bastiao 9.2.
- *Hirundo rustica* **Barn Swallow**  
2 Ponta do Garajau 9.2.
- *H. daurica* **Red-rumped Swallow**  
1 Ponta do Garajau 9.2.
- *Delichon urbicum* **House Martin**  
1 Ponta do Garajau 9.2.

- *Anthus berthelotii* **Berthelot's Pipit**  
2 Paul da Serra, 1 km E of Rabacal road cross 10.2., 14 Ponta de Sao Lourenco at the car park and along the path about 1 km to E 12.2.
- *Motacilla cinerea* **Grey Wagtail**  
3 Funchal Marina 8.2. and 2 on 13.2., 2 Machico 9.2. and 2 12.2., 1 Rabacal 10.2., 3 Faja da Nogueira rd 11.2., and several single birds, not written down, at other sites.
- *Erithacus rubecula* **European Robin**  
observed at Ribeiro Frio, Rabacal, Faja da Nogueira rd, Botanical Garden, Palheiro Garden, among others.
- *Turdus merula* **Blackbird**  
common. Singing every morning at dawn on wires and antennas, in front of our hotel room window. Seen in Funchal parks and gardens, max 39 in Palheiro Garden on 12.2., but also countryside, e.g. 20 in Ribeiro Frio village 11.2. at 9 o'clock in the morning.
- *Sylvia atricapilla* **Blackcap**  
common, e.g. 10 in Ribeiro Frio village 9.2., 6 in Botanical Garden 11.2.
- *Regulus madeirensis* **Madeira Firecrest**  
also common, most seen in forest areas, like 4+3+5+3 in Ribeiro Frio area 9.2. and altogether 14 in Rabacal 10.2.
- *Fringilla coelebs* **Chaffinch**  
common, in Funchal and outside the town, e.g. 8 Ribeiro Frio 9.2., 15 Rabacal 10.2.
- *Sturnus vulgaris* **Common Starling**  
a flock of 40 Canico 12.2.
- *Serinus canarius* **Canary**  
common, e.g. 25 seen during two hour morning walk at Funchal shore "parade" and Santa Catarina Park on 8.2., a flock of 30 on a wire at Achada do Pau Bastiao 9.2., etc.
- *Carduelis carduelis* **Goldfinch**  
1 Achada do Pau Bastiao 9.2., 4 Ribeiro Frio 11.2., 6 Machico 12.2.
- *Petronia petronia* **Rock Sparrow**  
2 at Ponta de Sao Lourenco car park 12.2.
- *Estrilda astrild* **Common Waxbill**  
10+35 at Machico River canal 12.2., see text above

A list of the breeding species can be found in the local Field Guide: "Guia de Campo das Aves do Parque Ecológico do Funchal e do Arquipélago da Madeira", 1997, available e.g. in the Shopping Centre bookshop at Av. Arriaga 75, price 15 euro.