

# Madeira

6–13 July 2009

## Participants

Ivor Angell  
John Bayliss  
Lee Cooper  
Charles and Cynthia Douglas  
Gary Fenimore  
Stephen Graham  
Cynthia Lawes  
Jean Millen  
Glenn Morris  
John Sutherby  
Trevor and Carol Skipper  
Roger Terrell  
Man Nguyen Thi



**Fea's Petrel**

**Leaders** Catarina Fagundes and Hugo Romano

**Day 1:** I arrived at the airport with plenty of time to spare, meeting at least three other members of the tour (identifiable by their yellow Birdfinders luggage labels) at check-in. We embarked for departure at 14:35, but there was then a bizarre delay: Funchal airport is one of the most difficult to land at in the world, with manual only landing, with a minimum of 5000m visibility. The airport is located east of Funchal and the runway was lengthened to 2781m after the year 2000 by placing the extension on 180 70m-high concrete pillars jutting out from the mainland at an angle to the coast. In one respect the whole place now looks like a giant aircraft carrier glued onto the coast, with the main road running beneath the pillars. As such there are weight restriction on aircraft landing and as the usual aircraft for this route was unavailable for this flight, a slightly heavier substitute was being used. This resulted in the Captain having to ask for somebody to volunteer to disembark from the flight to reduce the maximum landing weight by 100kg. Although there was a sweetener on offer of a free night in a hotel and one hundred pounds, the Captain was talking about drawing a name from a hat at random before a women passenger decided to volunteer. One of the cabin crew said that it was the first time he'd know of such a request in over six years of flying with Easyjet. We eventually departed from Stansted and SW across the Bay of Biscay and then out across the Atlantic to Madeira where we arrived at 18:25. Madeira is located 535 west of Portugal, 230 miles north of the Canaries, with the Azores 480 miles to the west and the North African coast just 360 miles to the southeast. The island group is collectively called the Fortunate Islands and shares a common flora and avifauna. The island is atop of an ancient shield volcano rising 6km from the seabed, part of the Tore mountain range. The formation of the island started about 750 million years ago, although volcanic activity ceased about 6500 years ago. Coming in to land the landscape didn't look particularly parched and houses were perched solidly on even the most sharpened rocky ridge across the landscape. Passport control was navigated with no problems, although I was one of the last to depart as I'd tried to use the new optical passport scanners in the foyer to speed up immigration, but my passport picture failed to register and after exhausting your three or four attempts at scanning I had to rejoin the back of the queue. We gathered in the foyer to be met by our guides Catarina and Hugo from Madeira Winds and were then ushered out to the two vans parked opposite the departure lounge. Two swift sp. were seen flying along the seafront, but their identity eluded us. Apart from a couple of feral Rock Doves, nothing else was visible and we booked into the hotel at Machico after 19:40, which barely gave us time for dinner. At least 24 Plain Swift were racing past the hotel windows as we had an impromptu briefing on the trip, although the visit to the mountains for Zino's Petrel would now have to be put back to the following evening. Even at this late hour, the restaurant was

packed, as a busied myself piling my plate high with rice, pasta, vegetable and swordfish stakes. Intriguingly a pair of Barn Owls were later seen after dark along the sea front, which terminated in a small church, although all I recorded was a 3rd summer Yellow-legged Gull and a male Eurasian Blackbird from my ground floor apartment, looking east across the bay.

**Day 2:** The day dawned cool and overcast but a few terns could be seen fishing offshore, a party of Feral Pigeons were on the beach opposite and one or two Plain Swifts flew back and forth. Other guests reported about 40 shearwater sp. offshore plus Common Kestrel and Blackcap. Breakfast was a stately affair, with the tables laid out with bread, cheese, local honey and jams, fruit, yoghurt, fruit juice, tea and coffee. The most interesting feature was the bread, either plain or chocolate flavoured, the later dark brown in colour and with the distinct smell of cocoa to it. Having ventured out the front of the hotel early, I took a quick walk down the sloping road down to the seafront and its miniature fort. Several Eurasian Blackbirds and finches were calling in the trees below the hotel and the thick brambles opposite held at least three Blackcaps, at least two of them males disputing territories. Down by the fort a family party of five Grey Wagtails were gathering on the tiled roof of the local bar restaurant, with Eurasian Blackbirds and a male Blackcap in the abandoned yard of a small factory unit. Walking back to the hotel past the cemetery I thought I heard the calls of a Madeiran Firecrest, but I was told that it was not very likely this far from the laurel forests. Those who had venture further east to the flood channel had seen a Little Egret and five Common Waxbills. We boarded the two minibuses for the drive to Funchal Harbour, a rather twisting route, as the Portuguese government (and no doubt the EU) have lavished huge amounts of money on the local road system which now goes through tunnels. The route goes west right under the huge concrete columns of the airport extension, the area below the runway being a mixture of car parking, some sports facilities and two retired lifeboats mounted as a display. The islands housing is solid and well-built if not precariously built in places, the vegetation green, with many allotments. Madeira has possible the world's largest freshwater reservoirs thanks to the constant mist condensing at high altitudes and piped down to the urban areas along water channels, the famous Levada's, supplemented thick plastic pipes. Hugo had ventured the subject of water conservation with an official of the island's water company, but had been told that reducing consumption would reduce revenues, which would reduce the money available to repair the network of pipes damaged by rock falls and general maintenance! On our way to the harbour our guides told us they had seen up to three whales off shore and it was likely they would still be in the area when we embarked for our trip out into Funchal Bay. The seafront is full of restaurants, one a former yacht moored in its own flooded basin, with small boats alongside with individual tables for diners. The boats for offshore sight seeing are moored in the western basin of the harbour and were access along a floating pontoon. Our vessel was the *Gaviao*, where we distributed ourselves fore and aft. The boat was reversed out of the basin and into the deeper outer harbour, with its long seawall running east west. Two Cory Shearwaters could be seen in the channel immediately outside the harbour mouth and a Common Tern perched at the end of the seawall along with about 30 Yellow-legged Gulls loafing around the empty trawler wharf. As we headed southeast from the harbour mouth in the direction of Deserte Grande, we began to pick up single Cory Shearwaters, although a large raft of about 60 was gathered a bit further offshore. We also picked up one or two Bulwer's Petrels, although these were more distant. At this point we picked up what appeared to have been two pods of dolphins, one of Atlantic Spotted Dolphins and the other Striped Dolphins, although they soon merged into one extended pod riding our bow wave in almost clear turquoise blue water. The large catamaran from another tour company was ahead of us and also had close views of these inquisitive mammals. We began to circle in anticipation of up to three whales reported in the immediate vicinity by another boat. The skippers of the various vessels keep in touch with each other using short wave radios. After some time searching, we spotted a whale to the south off our starboard side. The distinctive notched upper fin, set back on the long black body confirmed it as a Bryde's Whale, which after cruising in parallel with us, dived and cut across our wake before disappearing. The whale didn't seem to have attracted any avian interested and our sighting were restricted to the odd Cory's Shearwater and we didn't see any more Yellow-legged Gulls until we turned west to pass back past the harbour. The second part of the cruise was towards Lido and Ponta da Cruz with its towering cliffs, where a replica Portuguese sailing ship was moored. The cliffs along the Madeiran coast are steep and there is only one sandy beach on the entire island. The seafront hotels have had to build there own concrete seawalls and pools, although there were steps down to the sea for anybody who wanted a swim in the Atlantic proper. A few Common Tern was seen along the coast and perched on a couple of navigation buoys, but little else of note until we returned to the harbour mouth were at least 100 Yellow-legged Gulls were gathered along with six diminutive Common Terns. Having thanked out skipper for the voyage we disembarked and re-boarded the two minibuses for a drive out of Funchal to the botanical gardens of Quinta do Santo da Serra.

The drive to the gardens was twisting as we ascended the interior of the island, the mist thickening as we reached an altitude of around 1300 feet, which is about the point where your ears pop. We parked outside the entrance to the gardens and walked in through the gates along a tree-lined avenue. Madeiran Firecrest, Blackcap and Chaffinch could be heard calling, but we had an initially frustrating time trying to actually locate any birds, our first real sighting being a European Greenfinch. We carried on to the large grassy area in the middle of the park, within sight of the enclosure and birdcages of the local wildlife centre. As we ate our packed-lunch, two Madeiran Firecrests were obviously taking food to a nest located in a tall fir tree beside the picnic tables. Attempts to keep track of the firecrests movements resulted in us finding a solitary Eurasian Siskin, a recent colonist to the island. The birdcages contained a mix of Peafowl, Muscovy Ducks and Mallards, whilst the deer enclosure contained a brood of Peafowl chicks. As we worked our way along the enclosures we located the first of three European Robins, along with two Clouded Yellow Butterflies. Opposite the enclosures, we found another Madeiran Firecrest in the trees. We walked to an observation platform looking down the steep hillside and showing off the landscape to good effect. Completing a circuit of the gardens, we noted more Eurasian Blackbirds and Madeiran Firecrests before arriving back at the birdcages. One of these contained a pair of captive Red-legged Partridge, with three or four Chaffinches of the endemic island race taking advantage of the wide mesh screen to feed on spilt seed. Past the aviary, we found two Madeiran Speckled Wood Butterflies on the grass. Madeira has a number of endemic sub-species of common European butterflies, the rarest being the Madeira Large White, now considered extinct. A female Island Canary was seen perched on overhead wires above overgrown fields opposite the gardens and a couple of Yellow-legged Gulls were perched on the roofs of distant farm sheds.

Our next stop was the main reservoir outside Funchal. The drive took us past one of the island golf course, swathed in thick fog and with visibility down to about 20m in places. At the reservoir the fog had lifted, but there was still damp feel to the air and the top of the radio mast was obscured by low cloud. A large party of at least 55 live and one very dead Yellow legged Gull were loafing about on the concrete shelf above a half empty reservoir, accompanied by the only Lesser Black-backed Gull of the trip and a couple of Grey Wagtails. Hugo recounted that on a visit to see the reservoir manager to discuss conservation, he was told that the reservoir only ever held gulls and a 'Black Duck', which turned out to be a Eurasian Coot! There were no other passerines in the nearby vicinity, but numbers of swifts passed over our heads and away through the trees, but never close enough for use to be certain none of them were Pallid. Although there was a very animated discussion over a party of swifts seen on the far side of the reservoir, which had drifted away. Although Plain, Pallid and Common Swift were all on the trip checklist, it appears Common is only a rare visitor, with almost all the birds at low altitude being Plain and those at altitude being Pallid. The Plain Swift is described as being smaller than Common, but with no direct comparison, the only differences seemed to be the lack of calling and a preference for gliding, with little flapping flight.

We now drove to the viewing point at Portela, accompanied by the cold drizzle and damp atmosphere. The viewpoint looks far down towards the south coast at Porto da Cruz and Eagle or Buzzards Rock (Penha d'Águia). The sites alternative names come from the lack of an adequate noun in the Portuguese language for various raptors. Looking down we could see the neat, modern buildings, twisting pristine roads, concrete tunnel entrances and a scattering of abandoned terraced allotments. The increasing drift to the towns by the younger generations leading to a marked abandonment of outlying villages. A Trocaz Pigeon appeared briefly in a bare tree below us on the slope before disappearing into the tree canopy. The only other birds of note being a Eurasian Blackbird, although we later heard a Madeiran Firecrest and saw a female Island Canary. By this time the weather had deteriorated into rain and we departed back to the hotel for an early dinner, in preparation for our evening visit to the cliffs at Pico do Areeiro to see Zino's Petrels. Arriving back at the hotel a tight knot of swifts could be seen heading east along the cliffs faces above the town, but their hurried departure didn't tempt us to linger before returning to our rooms and going for our evening meal. Returning to the driveway below the hotel after dinner, I discovered that three Alpine Swifts had been racing back and forth below the cliffs seemingly sparring with the local Plain Swifts amongst much screeching, although I only got one brief glimpse of a single bird heading back west.

We left for the interior after 21.00 with a heavy mist and dew forming in what is best described as the cloud belt enveloping the island. Above a certain altitude this evaporates, leaving you to look back down onto the clouds from above, as you would on a high-flying aircraft. The visitor's centre at the top of Pico de Areeiro was deserted, with only a few dim interior lights visible, with Red-legged Partridge calling nearby. The Moon was clearly visible, but that would be to our advantage. The nesting ledges are only accessible along narrow stone tracks, which now worn and cracked due to up to 1000 (non-birding) visitors a day using it on an island trek. There is a low stone wall

either side of the path, but it is precarious in places so it was a good thing it was dark and we couldn't see the drop! The path was illuminated only by the torches distributed amongst the party and it took at least half an hour to make our way to the area overlooking the petrel's nesting burrows, dug into narrow ledges at two or three places in the immediate vicinity. A further nesting ledge is thought to be on the other side of the valley below us, but nobody is in a hurry to undertake the abseiling need to carry out a proper survey. Zino's Petrel is one of Europe's most endangered species and its survival is in no small part due to the efforts of the late Dr Paul Alexander Zino who worked diligently to protect the nesting sites from predation from rats and cats. The population has now reached about 85 pairs and their daytime feeding grounds due north of Madeira have only been tentatively identified just weeks before on an extended pelagic run on behalf of Hadoram Shirihai, the Israeli seabird expert. As it reached 11 o'clock, we began to hear the eerie calls of the petrels returning to the valley, the call actually being made by non-breeders which have come inland with the nesting birds and sounds like a cross between a Tawny Owl and a lamb being strangled. One or two birds could be seen briefly silhouetted against the billowing clouds in the valley below, their seeming scythe-like shape reminiscent of a large swift. What I hadn't realised was the birds could actually be glimpsed directly below us as they landed to go into their burrows. Even so birds were whizzing about, one or two of them directly over our heads. Eventually the calling died away as the returning birds settled into their burrows, having presumably relieved the sitting birds already present and the rest of the birds had headed south out to sea, so avoiding the attentions of predating gulls. The birds work on a 3-day rota of responsibilities at the nest. We made our way back along the narrow path and then drove back to the hotel along deserted roads in an eerie mist.

**Day 3:** The day started with our customary breakfast banquet before boarding the two minibuses for a drive back to Funchal Harbour for our second pelagic, this time to the Desertas Islands, southeast of Funchal. We re-boarded the *Gaviao* for the trip out of the harbour and across Funchal Bay to the research station at the base of the towering sea cliffs. Inside the harbour, a single Little Egret was perched close to some Yellow-legged Gulls, with several presumed Plain Swifts buzzing around the council buildings opposite the yacht basin and a calling Eurasian Goldfinch. It was relatively rough in the lee of the mainland, but once we had entered the main channel the sea did seem to calm down. The Yellow-legged Gulls didn't seem to venture far from the harbour entrance, so aside from three Common Terns in the area, the commonest bird on the trip was almost exclusively Cory's Shearwaters, sometimes in small rafts. None attempted to follow in our wake. We also had a couple of Fea's Petrels, both fortunately quite close, and at least a couple of Bulwer's Petrels, neither of them very close. The highlight of the trip was a small Sperm Whale, which allowed a relatively close approach before diving with the characteristic tail flip as it positioned itself for a deep vertical dive. At a leisurely 5.5 to 6 knots, the trip took around 3.5 hours. Having dropped anchor close to the vertical cliffs of the island, the small zodiac we had been towing was brought alongside and the majority of us then took the short journey to the only landing area on the island. This meant jumping from the boat into the volcanic sand at what appeared to be the optimum point between waves. A small research station in the small cove is permanently manned by a team of three wardens, although they were at pains to keep out of our way, only speaking to Catarina to ask her to keep the party together as we wandered around the general area. The wardens have to be entirely supplied by the Portuguese navy with all their provisions including fresh water. Although a twisting path has been cut from the station to the top of island, it is considered highly dangerous so the high plateau of the island is seldom visited. Goats were introduced to the island to graze when the island was experimentally populated in the distant past, but they caused so much damage to the fragile vegetation, that attempts had been made to exterminate them. Unfortunately, they were never able to kill off every last one and the population has needed to be revisited from time to time to keep it in check. A twisting path wound its way amongst the perfunctory rockery garden, with a series of nicely-illustrated information boards. The two most obvious species of bird being the extended flock of perhaps 30 Island Canaries and a couple of Berthelot's Pipits along with at least two small Madeira Lizards. What we hadn't appreciated was that several hundred pairs of Bulwer's Petrels nest on the island, several of the enterprising birds were actually nesting in crevasses in the crude rock walls and could be spied through gaps in the rocks. The island is also the last refuge for the Mediterranean Monk Seal, although the majority of the 30 or so resident in the area are usually located on the north of the island, which is inaccessible. Having nosed around the island, we re-boarded the Zodiac to return to the yacht, where we were treated to an exquisite cooked fish meal. The scraps from the meal were then thrown to the local fish, seemingly Parrotfish, whilst the sea seemed full of delicate jellyfish. The return trip was made in the face of a stiff wind, but we recorded perhaps 30 Bulwer's and one Fea's Petrel, 30 Cory's and one Sooty Shearwater with Common Terns close to the harbour entrance. On our return to the yacht basin, we were each presented with a certificate to say we had been to the Desertas Islands. We then headed back to the hotel for a short while before driving to Porto da Cruz, west of Funchal, for an evening sea-watching. A Common Kestrel was seen below the

cliffs opposite together with a handful of Plain Swifts. Our vantage-point for the evening was along a narrow section of road, lined with orange street lights, opposite Buzzard (or Eagle!) Rock and directly opposite a towering offshore rock, which around 150 presumed Plain Swift, were swarming. A few Yellow-legged Gulls were loitering on the stack, whilst a steady stream of Cory's Shearwaters were making their way west with one Manx Shearwater amongst them. As the light finally began to fade a Little Egret came past heading east, before a second, slightly bulkier heron or egret passed by and was gone in the dark. My first thoughts were Squacco, but on reflection the bird seemed too large for that. We were unable to identify it although there were suggestions it was a juvenile Black-crowned Night-heron. With the light now gone, we re-boarded the two minibuses for the drive back to our hotel and well-earned night's sleep.

**Day 4:** After breakfast we gathered outside the hotel entrance where we recorded two Common Kestrels along the overhanging cliffs, Eurasian Blackbird, Blackcap and Eurasian Goldfinch amongst the hotel grounds and a fly-over Grey Heron. Our destination for the day was Vereda dos Balcoes for a walk through the laurel forests. The paths paralleled the famous levadas (aqueducts), which take the water down to lower levels for irrigation. The laurel forests of the island group are the last vestiges of a flora which extended over southern Europe and the Mediterranean basin during the Tertiary period, 65 to 2.58 millions of years ago, but was swamped by rising sea levels and now exists only in the Canaries, Azores and Madeira and some re-established areas in Spain and Morocco. During the walk we saw Grey Wagtail and Common Chaffinch, heard a Blackcap and near the fork in the paths, a Madeiran Firecrest. Along the way we passed two stalls selling snacks, drinks and local crafts, including woollen hats and socks, an island specialty. The view-point at the top of the path looks down almost vertically into a narrow valley at the far end of which was the Fajã da Nogueira hydro-electricity plant, one of the island's power stations. A pair of Trocaz Pigeons were seen dropping down into the trees on a narrow razor sharp ridge and we had one or two brief sightings of a Common Buzzard as well as Common Chaffinch and a pair of Island Canaries. The walk back recorded a further Madeiran Firecrest before we re-boarded our minibuses in a lay-by now with tour buses and groups of tourists.

Next we headed off into the interior where we had been for the Zino's Petrels on our previous visit, noting Common Buzzard and Berthelot's Pipit along the way. From car park at Pico do Areeiro, we could now view the steep, rolling hillsides and cliffs we had only seen in darkness during our evening visit to the Zino's colony. At least four Pallid Swifts were present overhead, whilst Berthelot's Pipits were visible, along with calling Common Quail and Eurasian Linnet, although the former was not going to be found easily. The welter of flowering plants and grass held a busy community of insects, bees, moths and butterflies, with Hummingbird Hawk-moth, Monarch and a probable Swallowtail. We then drove back down the road to a picnic spot for our lunch under the trees. A Spectacled Warbler was heard calling, but couldn't be located, nor could a calling Madeiran Firecrest, although we did see a male Island Canary. After lunch, we walked over the road to work an area of tightly-planted fir trees and scrub, which apparently a small breeding colony of Eurasian Woodcocks. A medium-sized bird was flushed distantly, but we never saw enough of it to be certain of its identity. We returned to the hotel in Machico at 15.00 and 15 minutes later a small party of us gathered behind the hotel for the short walk along the sea front to the storm channel running back into the town. A Little Egret was hunting in the shade of the bridge on the beach along with a mixed bag of Feral Pigeons eking out a living on the tide line and amongst the volcanic stones. The wide channel was heavily vegetated lower down but a group of workmen further up were carrying out repairs to the channel walls and had flattened large tracks of ground. Nevertheless, we recorded three Grey Wagtails, male European Greenfinch, Eurasian Goldfinch and a handful of Common Waxbills, whilst the overgrown gardens yielded Island Canaries along with a pair of Blackcaps, the female of which was seen in her nest built in the top of thick cactus leaves. Large numbers of frogs were constantly calling from the wet sections of the channel, indicating that urban runoff and pollution were obviously not a problem. After our evening meal, we re-assembled for a drive to the cliffs at Garajau, east of Funchal for another evening seawatch. A huge statue of Jesus has been erected looking south from an elevated platform with a steep concrete path dropping down to a small platform directly overlooking the sea. A Peregrine Falcon flashed past just after our arrival, but could not be relocated, a pair of Common Kestrels were flying around calling whilst a Eurasian Sparrowhawk soared past. Large numbers of swifts, at least one tentatively identified as Pallid, were present as well as Berthelot's Pipit. Offshore small numbers of Cory's Shearwater were heading east and later a Little Egret went west. Interestingly we also located a pair of Spectacled Warblers in the scrub immediately below the platform. As the light began to fade, we returned to the minibuses for the drive back to the hotel. I was now determined to see the Barn Owls, which were being regularly seen from the hotel each evening. It appeared the birds were flying high over the bay to the east, probably hunting the beach or

sea front for rats and mice. I failed to find any owls, but small numbers of Cory's Shearwater had venture right into the small bay and were calling constantly, some of the birds following the line of street lamps and apparently going up into the cliffs opposite to their nesting burrows.

**Day 5:** We gathered outside the hotel in anticipation of the arrival of the minibuses, a Common Buzzard and a probable Peregrine having been seen prior to my arrival. Our first stop of the day was the visitor's centre at Lugar de Baixo, which appeared to have the only wetland habitat on the island; a concrete pool with thick rushes and some very muddy water, adjacent to a lush green lawn. A mixture of birds inhabits the site including the island's first breeding Eurasian Coots. Four adult and a single juvenile Eurasian Coot were seen together with a family party of four adult and three juvenile Common Moorhens amongst the mixed 'farmyard' ducks. One of the highlights of the trip however, was an eclipse male Green-winged Teal. Two Little Egrets present on our arrival had flown off but pair of Yellow-legged Gull were loitering on a dirty looking island in the middle of the pond and a small party of four Common Waxbills were moving through the reeds. The visitor's centre had display boards showing pictures of the various birds and the receptionist told me that the previous winter there had been an American Wigeon on the pond. Outside, the only other birds present were an Eurasian Sparrowhawk and a couple of Common Kestrels over the cliffs behind us and a Eurasian Blackbird in the nearby shrubs and small trees. On an island in the pond, however, Madeiran Lizards were scurrying about, showing several different variations of camouflage. We then drove to Ponta do Pargo in the extreme west of the island. In the deserted fields and grassland, at least three Grey Herons were standing century and a Common Kestrel was patrolling. Red-legged Partridge could be heard calling and one was eventually seen on a mound of boulders on a small hill. In the long grass along a wire fence we found three Berthelot's Pipits and then a showy Spectacled Warbler. The thicker areas of scrub yielded Eurasian Blackbird and a calling European Greenfinch whilst a Eurasian Sparrowhawk glided over. One of our guides heard a Barn Swallow calling although none of us were able to locate it. From there we went down to an observation platform on the cliffs by a radio transmission site where a Common Kestrel was hunting along the rock face and Plain Swifts were in evidence. Next, we drove high into the interior, negotiating the traffic from the annual cattle market, with many competing stalls selling fresh and cooked meat. Further on, the roads were draped with banners promoting various political parties in the pending Portuguese elections. Much of the roadside was dominated by eucalyptus, but there is no concerted effort to eradicate this tree. Hugo had phoned ahead to a seafront restaurant, where we had an excellent lunch.

After lunch we saw Common Terns fishing close inshore and perched on the nearby rocks. From there, we moved on to the mouth of Ribeira da Janela where there is a water pumping station and hydro-electric power station. Here the island's first Green-winged Teal (now in eclipse) has been in residence since February 2007 along with a Common Teal and a menagerie of dodgy looking 'farmyard' ducks. Even here there was the constant chorus of frogs and ever-present Grey Wagtails. We then made an excursion to an isolated valley, the tall cliffs packed with laurel trees and with a concrete lined rock stream running the length and where water could be seen cascading down the cliff face at several places. The nearby gardens and fishponds of the house opposite held one or two Grey Wagtails, but the only other birds seen were two Trocaz Pigeons. Three huge dogs guarded the house, two certainly Mastiff crosses and which barked ferociously as we passed. Fortunately on the drive back we spotted a solitary Eurasian Turtle Dove perched on overhead telegraph wires amongst the allotments, a hand full of pairs nesting on the island. We carried on to another coastal site presumably at São Vicente, where we spent sometime looking for Roseate Terns offshore. One or two adults and a juvenile were eventually spotted in amongst the Common Terns, but the views were distant as the birds were coming and going rapidly. Having returned to the hotel at the end of the day, I resolved to have another go looking for the Barn Owls along the sea front. I again drew a blank, although the Cory's Shearwater's were again present, calling in the small bay and flying a circuit of the sea front, appearing momentarily in the orange glow of the sodium street lights.

**Day 6:** Two Blackcaps were again in the brambles and trees by the hotel entrance the next morning as we waited for our transport to arrive. The day's destination was the extreme east of the island in the vicinity of the Ponta do Rosto. This part of the island has a more grassland/savannah feel to it, with a small crowd of people harvesting silage on the hillside. The area is one of sedimentary rather than volcanic rock. The day was dawning clear and bright and we were rewarded almost immediately with a party of four juvenile Rock Petronias, although the only other birds of note were a Common Kestrel and a handful of swifts, although as we set off down a winding track through the rocks we did see a single House Martin passing through and later a Common Buzzard or two. The walk took us to a high cliff on the north side of the island, with a shear pond on the other side and no safety barriers, the

sort of thing to give the HSE palpitations. The area was devoid of any birdlife other than one or two Berthelot's Pipits and was declared a 'bird free zone' by one of the tour group. There was little to be seen offshore, other than Yellow-legged Gulls so, we made our way back to the car park and the observation platform at the Baia D'abra, looking down the cliffs to the sea on the north side and into the bay to the south, where a large tanker was being guided into the harbour by a couple of small craft. The main species here were six Island Canaries seen in flight along with a few Berthelot's Pipits and a few lizards, one very squashed on the road. Several of pipits were bearing coloured rings, part of an island study sponsored by Birdlife International.

Driving back towards Machico, we again passed through a large and expensive apartment development, scheduled to open on the 3rd October despite looking far from ready. Our guide told us that the development had been approved despite being located on supposedly protected habitat. On the outskirts of a nearby town, we spotted six Eurasian Collared-doves on a garden wall. One bird had a smaller neck collar so was either a juvenile or perhaps indicating Barbary Dove, the domestic breed with African Collared-dove parentage. The introduction of Spanish Sparrows has already put pressure on the islands remaining Rock Sparrows. A brief visit to the nearby harbour had a large number of loafing Yellow-Legged Gulls and a single Common Tern, but little else in a seemingly deserted dockyard. We then went west to the edge of the town, where we visited the Spanish Sparrow colony in a series of roadside palms, the birds having excavated gaping nest holes in the trunks. The birds were feeding in the nearby derelict allotments and we counted up to 10 birds, a couple of them well-marked males. We had our picnic lunch on the concrete promenade and observation platform overlooking the rocky coast where we saw a Monarch butterfly. Having walked around the block checking out the nearby orchards and vineyards, we returned to the minibuses and drove to the cliffs west of Machico at Pico do Facho. From there we had a spectacular view down onto the town and sea below us, but aside from two more Monarch butterflies and a mixed bag of Madeiran Lizards, we saw little in the way of birds.

Today and the next day were to see a mini heat wave on the island, with radio broadcasts in Funchal telling people to stay out of the streets at midday, when the temperature in the shade reached 25 degrees Celsius. Having returned to the hotel, I made my way back down the seafront to the fresh water channel, where the Little Egret was feeding at the water's edge. The beach at Machico consists of a narrow section of volcanic sand to the west of the channel and an expanse of yellow sand to the east, almost certainly artificially created for the tourist trade. Along the channel I recorded three Grey Wagtails, a flock of 14 Eurasian Goldfinches, singing Blackcaps and a small party of Common Waxbills. The large back garden of one of the houses along the channel was crammed with diminutive banana plants, originally an important island crop. The evening meal was a rushed affair as we needed to be away prompt of 19.00 for a return to Funchal Harbour for an evening pelagic into Funchal Bay. As it was, the restaurant opened half-an-hour late, which meant most of the party turned up at the minibuses 20 minutes late. As it was, we made good time to the harbour and re-boarded the *Gaviao* and proceed from the basin into the outer harbour. The idea of this trip was to dispense 'chum' over the side and see what seabirds were attracted to it. Unfortunately, either there didn't seem to be enough 'chum' or the birds weren't interested as a couple of Cory's went past without even bothering to investigate. Having circled for perhaps 40 minutes, the exercise was judged to have failed and we set course back to Funchal. We did see a distant pod of dolphins on the way out and aside from the ever-present Cory's we saw a Manx Shearwater and a couple of Bulwer's Petrels. The trip back into Funchal Harbour was along a seafront ablaze with coloured lights and a promenade alive with people, but we slipped away in our minibuses back to the hotel and a welcomed night's sleep.

**Day 7:** The storm channel outside Machico held Grey Wagtail, Blackcap, Island Canaries and Common Waxbills first thing but nothing else of note. Today we headed to the north coast for some more seawatching. We parked in a large parking area at the seaward end of a valley, with another storm channel running down the sea. The channel held Grey Wagtail but precious little else. We then walked along a track above the rocky shoreline with cliffs towering overhead. A small hamlet of natural stone building and outhouses with stone walled enclosures was virtually deserted. A Common Kestrel and later Trocaz Pigeons could be seen above us along the cliffs whilst offshore a pod of dolphins and the angled blow of a Sperm Whale could be seen along with a probably Fea's Petrel and Common Tern. Further along the cliffs, a party of Plain Swifts were either prospecting or building nests with one of the birds carrying a feather in its beak. After walking back to the minibuses, we drove back up the road and looked down on an area of overgrown allotments but we had only Blackcap and Madeiran Firecrest. We then drove further along the coast to an expensive-looking hotel which I initially thought was rather too posh for us to be visiting but Hugo had made arrangements with the owners for parking and lunch. There was a sturdy looking fence

to the cliffs but with the sheer drop on the other side it wasn't wise to lean against them too heavily! Offshore we could see the odd Cory's Shearwater, some dolphins and a single Grey Heron perched on a large rocky island immediately below the cliffs. The lush gardens of the hotel held Common Kestrel and Island Canary but the parched adjacent allotments produced only a solitary male European Greenfinch. A large water tank contained several big frogs. As we left the hotel after our meal, a probable European Robin flushed by the entrance. Our next stop was the Queimadas viewpoint at the end of a narrow country road. As we drove along we kept an eye out for any cattle as the island's four long staying Cattle Egrets were in the area but didn't manage to find them. From the car park we proceeded along a series of well-made paths up into the woods. A Madeiran Firecrest was seen taking food to a nest overhanging the path but the only other birds seen were Eurasian Blackbirds and Common Chaffinches. Towards the end of the path, we came to a huge empty concrete pool overlooked by a very well-built hide, which was locked. Hugo explained that the pool and hide had been built with little thought for their location or purpose, other than they kept somebody busy erecting them. There was however, a very informative display, explaining the ecology of the laurel forests and their important role in condensing water for the Levadas. The path ended in an observation point overlooking a valley running down to the sea. We recorded a possible Common Buzzard together with Plain Swift, European Robin, Madeiran Firecrest and Eurasian Goldfinch, with another European Robin back at the car park on our return. So at the end of the last full day we headed back to our hotel. After our evening meal, I ventured out of the hotel and back up the main road towards the west in search of the elusive Barn Owl. Cory's Shearwaters were again circling the bay calling, oblivious to the laser light show underway on the beach. Despite a long search I again draw a blank with the owls but I later found out that with the disturbance on the beach, the birds had been hunting amongst the trees just around the headland from the hotel and well below the level of the main road where I was positioned. I did, however, briefly see a small bat in flight, presumably a Madeira Pipistrelle, a species restricted to Madeira, the Canaries and perhaps the Azores.

**Day 8:** After our final breakfast banquet, we loaded our luggage and left the hotel for the final time. Driving up the winding mountain road, we were soon enveloped in a thick mist, which persisted even after we had reached the lush green grass and heather plateau at Lajeado with its long line of wind turbines and just a couple of Yellow-legged Gulls. The area to the west is called Bica da Cana and is a very popular walking area but today it seemed devoid of human activity in complete contrast to the rest of the island. We walked down a hillside track in the damp, cold air to a small pool containing small trout. Here we found a flighty flock of 12 to 14 Eurasian Linnets and a single juvenile Rock Petronia. A Common Buzzard was calling whilst other birds included Berthelot's Pipit, Eurasian Blackbird and Common Chaffinch. Common Quails could be heard intermittently, but it wasn't until we returned to the main road and made a concerted effort to walk the grass in a line that we flushed at least one bird whilst 2-3 more were still calling. Having completed our visit to the plateau, we drove back down to a small coastal town we had previously visited and had an excellent farewell lunch in the same restaurant. After lunch, we walked back down to the seafront and its shops selling the usual range of seaside paraphernalia from posters and place mats to woollen hats and other holiday trinkets! By this time the weather had changed with into a heavy drizzle and we were rapidly getting soaked. We therefore drove back to Funchal airport expecting an 18:55 departure but things turned out to be far from straight forward. The airport was also enveloped in mist and light drizzle and monitors showing arrivals and departures were indicating flight delays. Visibility was too poor and flights were being forced to divert to Porto Santo or even return to Portugal. A Scandinavian flight had been cancelled and the passengers told to assemble for a transfer to a hotel so we began to fear the worst. Incredibly the visibility cleared after 22.00 allowing the remaining flights to land and we departed around midnight for our flight to Stansted, arriving after 02.00 next morning.

The trip recorded approximately 45 Species excluding Mallard and Rock Dove, of which I missed only Barn Owl, whilst there were two more species seen or heard by our guides only. This is slightly below the average for summer trips, although even winter trips in February usually don't exceed 55.

**Stephen Graham**