

TRIP REPORT - AZORES 2007

October 13th - 20th

This tour was organised by Birdwatching Breaks for and on behalf of John Boulcott and Raymond Moyle. A final total of 69 species was well above average for a visit to only 4 of the islands in Azores (Sao Miguel, Faial, Flores and Terceira). Several highlights during the tour included 19 American bird species (a total of 88 individuals); American Wood Duck, American Black Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, American Golden Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Laughing Gull, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Belted Kingfisher, Blackpoll Warbler, Bobolink, and also the American subspecies of the Great White Egret. In addition to these, most of the regions specialities were observed, including the endemic Azorean Bullfinch (Priolo in the local language), Roseate Tern, and Macaronesian Shearwater. The local subspecies of Buzzard, Blackcap, Blackbird, Goldcrest, Chaffinch, and Woodpigeon, were also seen and also deserve to be mentioned here.

The following diary and birdlist bring back many happy memories of an excellent tour. I am grateful to Mark and Jo at Birdwatching Breaks for arranging the logistics for both this trip and my inspection trip to the islands; everything went smoothly all along.

To see some photos from the tour, you can visit the following web: [Birds and Landscapes from Azores](#)

October 13th: London - Lisbon - Sao Miguel (Azores)

I met John and Ray at Ponta Delgada Airport. They arrived in the evening and were tired after a day of travelling. We checked in to the hotel that was to be our base for the next three nights, and after a few minutes of relaxation we went to a very nice local restaurant to taste the local cuisine. Having arrived the day before, I had already checked out the island and located the birds so we could just set out for the best areas the following day.

October 14th: Sierra Tronqueira and Laguna das Furnas (Sao Miguel island)

Weather: Sunny with some clouds in the mountains. 10-25°C

Our first day birding started shortly after breakfast. We headed towards the western part of the island, where the last 150 pairs of Azorean Bullfinches now exist. The Priolo, or Azorean Bullfinch, is one of the most endangered birds in Europe, confined to just a few square kilometres in the mountains of this island. Shortly after our arrival to the site we heard our first Bullfinches, but we had no luck seeing them, so we kept on walking north hoping to spot one. We heard the Bullfinch several times and saw Goldcrests (of the endemic subspecies *Regulus r. azorensis*) and very dark Common Buzzards (of the endemic subspecies *Buteo b. rothschildi*). We heard and saw the differences between the continental Blackbirds and the local subspecies (*Turdus merula azorensis*) of which the females are extremely dark in comparison; we encountered the beautiful Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs moreletti*) which is more similar to the African race than to the European; and we heard the little odd song from the Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla gularis*). We

also saw the Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus azorica*) with the wine-coloured breast, the Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea patriciae*) which is very similar to other Macaronesian Grey Wagtails, and the small and nervous Canary (*Serinus canaria*) endemic of the Macaronesian islands were continuously feeding around the Himalayan Cedars (*Cryptomeria japonica*). This conifer was introduced on the Azores from Asia a little more than 100 years ago, and since then it has been planted in large areas on several of the islands, profoundly changing the landscape. Only few of the plants of the original Laurel forest survive in the dense shadow of these large Cedars.

As we kept going, by now driving slowly along in the car, we stopped several times to listen for birds in the forest. Just when we thought we would have to leave without seeing the Bullfinch, as we were on our way back through the forest, one bird took off from a tree near the car. We listened for the call, and YES! - it was calling very close by this time. We located a young bird first, and later on an adult. We were all very happy with the great views, and specially Ray since it was a lifer for him; a lifer that took us 6 hours to find!!! On our way back to the hotel we checked the harbour where we saw Cory's Shearwater, Little Egret, and Common and Roseate Terns. We also saw the Madeiran Lizzard (*Teira dugesii*); an introduced species in the Azores.

We also stopped at the Terra Nostre Park to see a Wood Duck that appears to be a wild bird. At Furnas Lake we found our first American waders: a Spotted and a White-rumped Sandpiper. We also enjoyed some Grey Herons and Common Coots. We saw the fumerols and the "Hot pots" where the locals prepare food with steam from the underlying volcanos; this really fascinated Ray. When we reached our hotel, Ray touched the ground with his hand and realised that was actually hot!!! In the last light of the day, we went to our hotel and later on to our restaurant.

October 15th: Ponta Delgada Harbour, Lagoa Verde and Azul and Mosteiros (East of Sao Miguel)

Weather: Sunny with light winds and 15 to 25°C.

Today we had planned to check the eastern part of the island, but before we headed towards the beautiful lagoons of Lagoa Azul and Lagoa Verde, we checked the harbour in Ponta Delgada. Here we saw the Atlantic (Yellow-legged) Gull very well, and also several Cory's Shearwater, Macaronesian Shearwater, and some Manx Shearwater. One Curlew caught our eyes, but unfortunately it was of the nominal subspecies even though it had quite a dark rump. After the stop by the harbour we stopped in a supermarket to buy some glue so we could repair Ray's glasses that had broken the day before. Once that was done, we went to the breathtaking landscapes of the Green Lagoon. At this green vulcano lake we saw a female Blue-winged Teal, a female Great Scaup, two Ring-necked Ducks, a Spotted Sandpiper, and several Grey Herons among some of the more common local birds.

We went to check the other lagoon and met some birders who told us that they had found a Blackpoll Warbler nearby!!! So we decided to look for this warbler at lunch time, and in the mean time we went to check Lagoa Azul where we saw a Western Sandpiper together with a Semi-palmated Sandpiper. Further inspection also revealed a Lesser Yellowlegs in the same place!!! Non-stop Americans!!! We went to have our picnic and wait for the little warbler to appear. We surrounded the little pond while enjoying our sandwiches, fruits, yogurts, juices, and small biscuits. We saw Common Moorhen and Common Waxbill as new species for the trip, but nothing else. Then Ray shouted: WARBLER!!!, and John and I went as fast as possible to the spot where Ray stood, but the little nervous animal had flown

somewhere out of sight :(We waited and waited, but nothing moved. Time was running, and the bird activity was very low, so we decided to check the rest of the Blue Lake where we saw a female Teal which was very possibly a Green-Winged Teal. Among the insects we there were Clouded Yellow and Brimstone Butterflies, Blue Emperor Dragonflies, Red-veined Darters, and some damselfly which were probably Small Bluetails. We saw a few Marsh Frogs and we even caught one to have a closer look. Once we had seen the lakes, we went to the west coast, only stopping on the way for a coffee in a local bar. By the coast we saw two Semi-palmated Plovers and a Semi-palmated and a Spotted Sandpiper. We also saw some Eurasian Whimbrels, Turnstones, and lots of Cory's Shearwaters. In the lovely colours of the sunset we headed back to the hotel, and later on to our local restaurant where we had a taste of the local "agua-ardiente" to celebrate all the Megabirds that we had seen in the course of just one day.

October 16th: Sao Miguel to Faial

Weather: Cloudy and windy, with winds up to 100 km/h. 10°C.

We woke up to a dark day with strong winds blowing, and we went to check the harbour where we saw the usual Cory's Shearwater, Atlantic Gull, Black-headed Gull, White-rumped Sandpiper, and some Manx Shearwaters. After the Harbour we did a walk around the gardens of José Do Canto where we saw all the local birds including some Woodpigeons on the ground. The flight that was supposed to take us to Flores was delayed due to the weather, and when we finally took off we landed in Faial instead of Flores. We had to spend the night there, and once the hotel was sorted out we headed for the harbour to birdwatch. The weather was very bad, but we managed to see a big group of terns. Most of them were Common Tern, but mixed in were some Roseate Terns, one of them still in its beautiful summer plumage.

October 17th: Faial - Flores

Weather: Cloudy and a little windy. 10°C.

This morning we travelled to the island of Flores, but before flying out we had time to check the terns in the harbour, where we also saw four Semi-palmated Plovers. We went to the airport, and in the airstrip we spotted a Semi-palmated Sandpiper and another Semi-palmated Plover!!! We arrived in Flores without any problems and had a few hours before dark to visit the central part of the island and check the high lakes. At the first lake we saw 1 or 2 Black Ducks as well as 5 or 6 hybrids (Black Duck x Mallard), 2 American Wigeons, and two teals. Another lake held a solitary Spoonbill and a Common Coot. The day was coming to an end, and it was getting misty, so we went back to the coast. In Lajes harbour we met Staffan Rodebrand, and after chatting for a while we split up, and Staffan and his wife went to check the bay next to the harbour. However, he soon started waving his arms up and down towards us, and we promptly went to see what he had found. To our big surprise it was a Belted Kingfisher!!! Cracking!!! We saw the bird well several times, and I managed to take some photos of it. After a while we said goodbye and went to the hotel and out for dinner to celebrate a memorable day.

October 18th: Flores

Weather: Cloudy and misty. 13-15°C.

After breakfast we headed to the most western point of Europe, a village called Faja Grande. Here we met Staffan again, this time looking at 2 White-rumped

Sandpipers, 1 Semi-palmated Sandpiper, 3 Red Knots, 9 Semi-palmated Plovers, 1 American Golden Plover and an American Great Egret. The day before Staffan had found a Yellow-rumped Warbler, and we decided to check the place out. We were all checking the bushes when a big heron was spotted by Ray, and unfortunately John and I had very bad views of what might have been a Great Blue Heron. Ray didn't get excellent views either, so he wouldn't claim the species for sure. We decided to go and check the areas where the heron seemed to have gone to, and we met a group of Dutch birders with whom we exchanged phone numbers in case of anyone finding anything in the area. On our way to Ponta Delgada the first message already arrived: Yellow-Billed Cuckoo! We turned around instantly, but when we arrived to the spot the bird had not been seen for a few minutes. To our relief, John spotted the bird after a little while sitting in the top of a distant cane. When the bird took off, almost everyone got to see it flying, and we stayed around for half an hour before moving on, without further signs of the cuckoo, which was John's favourite bird of the trip and a mega lifer for him.

Once again we moved towards the northwest of the island, stopping on our way at the harbour in Santa Cruz to look for a Snowy Egret that had been seen the previous day, but without luck. In Ponta Delgada we found 2 Semi-palmated Plovers, 1 Semi-palmated Sandpiper, and a Pectoral Sandpiper. The Dutch showed up when we were watching the Pectoral Sandpiper, and they told us of another Yellow-billed Cuckoo just 1 km from where we were. We found the spot, but instead of a cuckoo we found a BOBOLINK!!! The Dutch also came to see it, and together we all had very good views of this bird. Excellent end to a mega-day in the field!!!

October 19th: Flores - Terceira

Weather: Sunny. 15-25°C.

Today we had a flight to Terceira, but before take-off we had time to check some areas near the airport. That visit resulted in 3 White-rumped Sandpipers, 2 Semi-palmated Plovers, and a young Spoonbill.

Once in Terceira, we went to "The Quarry". These few ponds are situated next to an industrial area and are not very pretty, but they are the best place in the Western Palearctic for seeing American waders. The place was full of Sanderlings, Kentish Plovers, and Turnstones, and among them were 2 Little Stints, 2 Curlew Sandpipers and 2 Ringed Plovers. Nothing special if we hadn't also seen 1 Least Sandpiper, 6 Semi-palmated Plovers, 8 White-rumped Sandpipers, 8 Semi-palmated Sandpipers, 2 Pectoral Sandpipers, 1 Lesser Yellowlegs, 1 juv Long-billed Dowitcher, 3 American Golden Plovers, and an adult Laughing Gull.

We stayed there, passing lunch time, studying all the various plumages of the different species. We were delighted watching the Laughing Gull stealing fish from the Common Terns still feeding their chicks. After our picnic we headed for the harbour to try and see some more gulls. However, we had no luck with gulls; all we saw were the usual Atlantic Gulls. We decided to go and check a small water reservoir instead, and here we saw a Herring Gull, several Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and hundreds of Atlantic Gulls. We went to the Harbour of Angra do Heroismo where we didn't see anything of interest, but in our way back we went to a rubbish dump with thousands of gulls standing everywhere. Atlantic and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were numerous, but one looked strange and stood out from the others. It looked more bulky and had a heavier bill; a good candidate for a young American Herring Gull. Unfortunately, a bunch of dogs with a strange man appeared and scared off all the birds before we had settled on an id, and we only got a few photos of the bird. With the last light we went back to our hotel, and for

dinner we went to a local restaurant near the hotel. We were getting close to the end.

October 20th: Terceira - Lisbon - London

Weather: Sunny. 15 - 25°C.

Soon after breakfast we went to catch the flight to Lisbon. In Lisbon we said goodbye to each other, and Ray and John caught their flight to London and I caught mine to Barcelona. This was the end of a terrific tour, and I thank John and Ray for being so easy-going and making everything very enjoyable.

I hope to see you again soon,

Cristian Jensen Marcet

N	English name	Scientific name	14th October 2007	15th October 2007	16th October 2007	17th October 2007	18th October 2007	19th October 2007
1	Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>		2				
2	American Wigeon	<i>Anas americana</i>						2
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>						
4	American Black Duck	<i>Anas rubripes</i>					2(5)	
5	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			1			
6	Blue-winged Teal	<i>Anas discors</i>			1			
7	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>			2			
8	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>			1			
9	Teal sp	<i>Anas crecca/carolinensis</i>			1			1
10	Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea borealis</i>	60+	200+	200+	200+	200+	200+
11	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>			4 to 5			
12	Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>						
13	Little Shearwater	<i>Puffinus assimilis baroli</i>		5 to 9				
14	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		1				
15	American Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba egretta</i>						1 1
16	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		5 10	10	2	3	1
17	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>				1		1
18	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo rotschildi</i>		3 10	1	1		1
19	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			1			
20	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		7x			1	2
21	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>						2
22	Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>			2		5	11 6
23	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>						X
24	American Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis dominica</i>						1 3
25	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>						4
26	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>						3
27	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			3 3	4		40+
28	Semipalmated Sandpiper	<i>Calidris pusilla</i>			2		1	2 8
29	Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>			1			
30	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>						2
31	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>						1
32	White-rumped Sandpiper	<i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>		1 2	1			7 5

