

Birding São Miguel

December 19th - 23rd 2015



BACKGROUND

This was a short pre-Xmas trip with the goal of seeing the endemic Azores Bullfinch and any American vagrants left over from the autumn. Flying out I took the direct flight from Stansted to Ponta Delgada, but since that only runs on Saturdays had to return via Lisbon with Easyjet (PDL-LIS) and Ryanair (LIS-STN). Car hire was with Ilha Verde (a Mazda 2 pre-booked through Holiday Autos - £56 for 3 days) and accommodation in the centre of Ponta Delgada was in the very reasonable and comfortable [Comercial Azores Hostel](#) (€84 for 4 nights) pre-booked through Booking.com. Latest information and site details (including GPS coordinates) were obtained from the outstanding [Birding Azores](#) website. In the event I had no problem with the Bullfinch and recorded 43 species including 5 North American species including 3 previously unreported (to my knowledge) individuals; Double-crested Cormorant, Green-winged Teal and American Coot. Whooper Swan (first record) and Shelduck (<10 records) were also notable for the archipelago. I also missed Spotted Sandpiper, Pied-billed Grebe and Glossy Ibis all of which were present on the island during my visit.

DIARY

19th December:- In transit Stansted – Ponta Delgada.

20th December:- After a trip to the airport to collect the hire car I headed east to *Lagoa das Furnas* and birded the wet area SW of the Northern parking area where I immediately found the long staying **Shelduck**. The lake margins held 2 Eurasian Wigeon, 7 Eurasian Teal and a drake **Green-winged Teal**. After a couple of hours I headed further east and about 5km beyond Povoação I saw my first **Azores Bullfinch** flying along the roadside; inevitably there was nowhere to pull in. Turning off onto the unsurfaced road to Nordeste I parked after about 3km and birded up and down the road with no success. After about an hour and a half I carried on driving north and flushed a pair of **Azores Bullfinches** from the road side a few hundred metres before the viewpoint. After descending onto tarmac roads I returned to *Lagoa das Furnas* for the last hour and a half of daylight. The Whooper Swan could be seen distantly against the Western shore whilst a walk from the Southern car park yielded a female Shoveler, 2 more Eurasian Wigeon, a pair of **American Wigeon** and an **American Coot**.



21st December:- Despite an early start I managed to lose most of the morning exploring a very damp and foggy *Achada das Furnas* failing to locate *Lagoa dos Espriados*. When, after two hours, I eventually found the small lake it was utterly devoid of birds!



Heading back to the fog-free coast I grabbed a coffee and headed west to the picnic area at *Sete Cidades* where the wet margins *Lagoa Azul* held Little Egret, Ruff and Black-tailed Godwit and the two long-staying **Ring-necked Ducks** and Greater Scaup loafed offshore. After dodging the heavy showers in the nearby Green Love café; excellent coffee with cheese & ham toasties I returned to Ponta Delgada and birded *Praia do Populo* and the *ETAR wader site* where the highlights were 5 Whimbrel and a Grey Plover.

22nd December :- My final day was calm and sunny day and an early start saw me head west to the little

fishing village of *Mosteiros* where I found 16 Turnstone dodging waves on the pier before seeing a distant cormorant on an offshore rock. Walking to the sea-watch point North of the village I put a scope on the bird to discover that it was a previously unreported first winter **Double-crested Cormorant** (41st Azores Record)! The Nearctic theme continued with an interesting long-billed Dunlin on the adjacent shoreline. *Sete Cidades* held the same waders as yesterday and although the *Aythya* ducks had gone AWOL I did locate a Coot flock just NE of the bridge which included another American. Despite the warm sun "*Phyllo-wood*" failed to live up to its name! After an early afternoon trip to *Riberia Grande* (Sanderling and Azorean Gulls) I ended up searching though the gulls at Ponta Delgada harbour but only managed to pull out a first-winter Greater Black-backed gull before dusk and the need to return the hire car to the airport.



23rd December:- In transit Ponta Delgada - Stansted via Lisbon.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

1 Lagoa das Furnas 20/12

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

1 at the North end of Lagoa das Furnas



20/12

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

A total of 4 Lagoa das Furnas 20/12

American Wigeon *Anas americana*

2 at the South end of Lagoa das Furnas

20/12



Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*

1 drake at the North end of Lagoa das Furnas

20/12

Common Teal *Anas crecca*

7 at the North end of Lagoa das Furnas 20/12

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

A few noted in all the wetland areas.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

1 female at the South end of Lagoa das Furnas 20/12

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*

2 Sete Cidades 21/12

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

1 Sete Cidades 21/12

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*

1 first year Mosterios 22/12

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

1 Sete Cidades 21-22/12

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

3 Lagoa das Furnas, 20/12; 1 Acheda de Furnas, 21/12; 1 Sete Cidades 21/12

Buzzard *Buteo buteo rothschildi*

Noted throughout

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

6 Lagoa Azul 22/12

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

ca 15 Lagoa das Furnas 20/12; ca 10 Lagoa Azul

American Coot *Fulica americana*



1 at the South end of Lagoa das Furnas

20/12; 1 Lagoa Azul 22/12

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

1 ETAR, Ponta Delgada 21-22/12

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

1 ETAR, Ponta Delgada 21/12

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

1 ETAR, Ponta Delgada 21/12; 32 Riberia Grande 22/12 including one colour marked bird that was ringed in the Netherlands in August 2012 and has returned to this site for its 4th winter.



Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

1 Mosterios 22/12

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

3 Sete Cidades 21-22/12

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*
3 Sete Cidades 21-22/12

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*
5 ETAR, Ponta Delgada 21/12

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenia interpres*
1 Prio de Populo and 6 ETAR, Ponta Delgada 21/12; 16 Mosterios 22/12; 2 Ponta Delgada harbout 22/12

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
A few offshore from ETAR Ponta Delgada 21/12

Azorean Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis atlantis*
Very common throughout

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*
1 first year Ponta Delgada 22/12

Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*
Noted throughout but very few, if any, convincing pure individuals.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus azorica*
Noted throughout

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
1 flew over the motorway East of Ponta Delgado 21/12

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea patriciae*
A common bird around lakes and streams

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
Common in wooded areas throughout

Blackbird *Turdus merula azorensis*
Very common in all wooded areas and hedgerows

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla gularis*
Seen in most wooded areas visited

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus azoricus*

Present in all wooded area with especially around Lagoa das Furnas and in "Phyllo-wood"



Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris granti*
Noted throughout but especially common in area of dairy farming

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Common throughout

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*
Small flocks at Lagoa das Furnas, Sete Cidades and Mosterios

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs morletti*
Very common throughout

Canary *Serinus canaria*
Noted throughout with largest flocks in the forested areas of the Serra de Tronqueira

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis parva*
Noted in the wooded areas around both Lagoa das Furna and Sete Cidades

Azores Bullfinch *Pyrrhula murina*
1 ca 5km East of Povoação and 2 flushed from the roadside Serra de Tronqueira 20/12



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