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 Delgarda, 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 Espraiados. 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 Mosterios 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 squaterola*
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 harbor 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 "Phyllowood"

*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 Cidadis

*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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