

Azores, June 23-30, 2018

In search of the Monteiro's Storm-petrel



Azores, 23-30 June 2018. In search of the Monteiro's Storm-petrel

Participants: Dave Ward (USA, translator of the text in English), Raphaël Jordan (France), Alain Jortay (Belgium), Robert Hulph (England) and 5 Catalans: Salvador Cases, Miquel Bonet (photos of birds), Ana Trabalón, Diana Vizán (responsible for the blog) and Eugeni Capella (photos of the landscape and author of the text).



From left to right: Eugeni, Diana, Dave, Alain, Raphaël, Robert, Ana, Miquel and Salvador.
Thank you everybody!

For a daily summary of the experiences during this trip, you can check the blog *Un parell de motxilles amb paraules alades* by Eugeni Capella and Diana Vizán: <https://blocs.mesvilaweb.cat/dianavia7/>

In this report I focus on practical issues, in case anyone wants to go.

Targets

The Azores have many endemic plants and only two species of birds. So most people are going in the fall to increase their bird list from the Western Palaearctic and add the **Azores Bullfinch** (*Pyrrhula murina*).

However, the other endemic, the recently split **Monteiro's Storm-petrel** (*Hydrobates monteiroi*), only breeds in two colonies of the Azores in spring and summer. Therefore, if you want to see this little sea bird, you have to go there when you breed.

When

Although we get a lifer on the ferry from Terceira to Graciosa, it is best to do a pelagic trip from Graciosa. These pelagic's in theory work between June and September, being a little more expensive in July and August.

To increase the diversity of birds to see, it is best to go to the end of August and the beginning of September, because that is when you can also find the Madeiran Storm-petrel that breeds in winter. In theory, they are easy to differentiate, if they look good, because they have different plumage on moulting.

We chose to go in June, to have more options to see the Azores Bullfinch and because we could still see the little Shearwater. Earlier, even in May, seems better for the little Shearwater.

The company that organized pelagic trips, however, told us that they started to work on June 22.

We also wanted to combine a ferry from Terceira to Graciosa that does not go every day. With these limitations, there was only one possible day to do the pelagic in June.

Once the date was chosen, we invited friends, acquaintances and strangers to share the ship, and finally, we were a group of 9 people, we got on very well.

Duration

We considered a relaxed trip, where we could get a lifer or two. However, for those in a hurry they can fly directly to Graciosa and with a pelagic that day and one morning in São Miguel can be enough, if weather is good. That is, it can be done on a long weekend.

Logistics

Plane. From Barcelona, we had to connect the flight through Porto or Lisbon, and we can get to Terceira or São Miguel. We arrived in Terceira via Lisbon and left São Miguel, through Oporto (€220 per person with TAP Air Portugal) as the only option to combine pelagic, ferry and holiday. From Graciosa to Ponta Delgada, we flew via Terceira with Sata (€80 per person). The flight to the Azores can be a little cheaper at the beginning of June or May and, also, during the week.

Ferry. All the islands visited are connected by ferry and plane. The ferry is slower, but allows you birding at sea. We only chose to take the ferry from Terceira to Graciosa. We did not see the little shearwater on the ferry, but we could also have gone from Graciosa to Ponta Delgada (São Miguel) by ferry.

The Ferries timetable is not published until March and is much more frequent after the end of June. The ferries stop off on different islands. So, if you do not pay attention -how it almost happened to us-, you can end up missing your island.

Pelagic

The **Nautigraciosa-Actividades** company is totally recommended. The information brochure offers two boats: one, zodiac type for 8 people and another, more robust, where in theory they fit more than 12, although they only accept 10 so that everyone can enjoy the birds. We ordered a zodiac for 8 people by email, since it was cheaper and said it was the best option for birding. When we arrived, however, they told us that it was out of service and that we would have the largest one. Finally, the boat we went out with was not either boat but I would say it was better and bigger.

With three hours, the storm-petrel is insured. If you want to go to the Fortuna bank, maybe you should go 6 hours. An hour it's enough to get there. So, theoretically, in an hour we arrived there, we stayed there for another hour, and we spent another hour on the way back. However, obviously, the boat will stop if a Storm-petrel or a group of shearwaters are seen. So if you want to go to the Bank of Fortune, you need to spend more than 3 hours. We were almost five hours trying to find the little shearwater, and they charged us the price of three hours with the big boat (€430).

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Rent a car

In Graciosa, it is not necessary to rent a car, although it obviously makes it easier to visit the whole island. In São Miguel, we rented two different cars without problems. In Graciosa, we only rented one.

Acommodation

In São Miguel, there are a lot of accommodations and in fact the group stayed in three different places. Miquel, Ana, Diana and I stayed four days at the "Casa dos Manos", Rua do Estaleiro n. 27B, Furnas, 9675-057. A very beautiful house, where you can relax and grill while you see Furnas sulfur fumaroles.

Of the rest of the group, 3 people lodged at Ponta Delgada at the Central Hostel.

In Graciosa we also stayed in three different places. Two groups, in Santa Cruz da Graciosa and one, in Praia. Initially, the choice of Praia was a mistake, since it was planned that the pelagic should leave Santa Maria da Graciosa. Nevertheless, finally the boat left from Praia.

Highly recommended is the RESORT HOTEL GRACIOSA. A 4 star with an initial price of €100 per double room with breakfast. Through the pelagic company, however, they made a discount and supposedly the room was to cost €72. Finally, we paid €60, including a large and varied breakfast, with cheese and sweets from the island, among other foods and drinks.

The rest stayed at the Residencia Ilha Graciosa on Avenida Mouzinho De Albuquerque N°49, Santa Cruz da Graciosa. A cheaper accommodation but very nice with less extensive breakfast options. In Praia the double room cost €40.

Material

The Azores are at the W. Palaearctic. But, although we had the ["COLLINS BIRD GUIDE"](#) guide, the most widely used was ["FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF MACARONESIA"](#), because it is the only one that illustrates the different subspecies of goldcrest, common chaffinch, Azores bullfinch, Monteiro's storm-petrel, etc.

To avoid airport baggage weight limit charges we only carried a small Nikon 50X 32X telescope with a small MANFROTTO TRIPOD COMPACT ACTION, which we used to look for the bridled tern (*Sterna anaethetus*) in Vila Franca Do Campo.

Among all we took all kinds of binoculars: Leica Ultravid (old), Trinovid 10x42 (old), Swarovski 10x50 SCL (old), 10x32 EL, Zeiss Conquest 10x42, 8x32, Vortex 8x42 and Olympus 10x42.

We also took different cameras, as well as mobile phones. Most of this report is made with a Nikon P900 (Eugeni) and a Nikon D500 with a Sigma 150-600 objective (M. Bonet).

Birds

For those want to make a big list of birds, the Azores are not islands to visit: in one week we saw just 29 species, counting the rock dove and a doubtful ruddy shelduck. Since we were there a week, we tried to find all the endemic subspecies. In total, I get 2 lifers and a new one for the WP: **pied-billed grebe** (*Podilymbus podiceps*). The other team missed the pied-billed grebe, but saw the bridled tern.

This is a list of the most interesting species, most of them are an endemic subspecies:

Pied-billed grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*). There was one sighted a week before we arrived on the lake of Furnas, that team 2 failed on the afternoon of 26th, and we, at 27th in the morning, after two hours looking for it. Miquel found it on the 28th day on the blue lake, and he showed it to Diana and me the 29th in the morning. Seeing how it was hiding between water lilies and lacustrine vegetation, I would not be surprised if there are two specimens: one, in the lagoon of Furnas and another, in Lake Blau.

Buteo buteo rothschildi. Fairly common.

Columba palumbus azorica. Common.

Motacilla cinerea patriciae. Common.

Turdus merula azorensis. Very common.

Sylvia atricapilla atlantis. Common.

Regulus regulus sanctaemariae in Santa Maria Island, south of São Miguel. For some, it is a different species (Santa Maria goldcrest). We saw a few at Pico Alto (587 m in Santa Maria).

Regulus regulus azoricus in São Miguel. We saw a few when we were looking for the Azores Bullfinch. Also, on the lake of Congro.

Regulus regulus inermis in W & C Azores (Flores, Faial, São Jorge, Pico, Terceira). Dave, Robert, Alain and Raphael were looking for it without success on 23rd in Terceira. Robert found it on June 27th in Santa Bárbara (Terceira) at 800 meters of altitude.

Sturnus vulgaris granti. Very abundant.

Fringilla coelebs moreletti. Abundant.

Pyrrhula murina. Easier to see than people have commented. Surely in spring it is easier to detect it than in October.

Puffinus baroli. We failed – four times! – on the ferry, the pelagic and the ferry that goes to Santa Maria and back to Sao Miguel. Salvador Cases saw 4 black birds flying in a straight line on the 29th from a whale watch boat that might have been little shearwaters, but they were very far away.

Hydrobates monteiroi. 6 on June 23rd from the ferry and at least 10 on the pelagic the following day.

Taxonomy *Hydrobates castro*.

For some it is separated into 4 species:

Hydrobates castro. It breeds in the summer in Madeira and Salvages.

H. jabejabe. Cape Verde.

H. granti. It breeds in the Azores, Madeira, Salvages and Berlengas in winter and presents morphological and birdsong differences like *H. castro*.

Hydrobates monteiroi. It breeds only on the islands of Praia and Baixo de Graciosa, and it is suspected that it breeds on Flores and Corvo.

Of these HBW only accepts as a separate species *Hydrobates monteiroi* for sound differences (does not respond to claims of *H. castro*), breeding season (breed in spring instead of winter) and mute. The rest do not consider them as subspecies.

Onychoprion fuscatus. In 2017, it breed in Graciosa. Also in Vila islet, Santa Maria. We did not see it in Santa Maria.

Sterna anaethetus. In 2017 an individual on the island of Graciosa, in Praia, was seen for a long time. We looked for it for a while, without luck. Dave, Alain, Raphaël and Salvador saw one on June 26th in the afternoon in Vila Franca Do Campo around the little offshore island. The other group spent two afternoons looking for it, without luck.

Finally, we must point out the common quail *C. coturnix confisa*. According to the HBW the subspecies of the Azores is the same as that of Macaronesia. We heard and seen it in Graciosa.

Places

There are only two really important places: the Pico de Tronqueira in São Miguel to see the Azores Bullfinch and the Pelagic from Graciosa. The rest are points where occasionally you can find a vagrant.

For the people who want to see the subspecies of Santa Maria goldcrest and at the same time try their luck with the little shearwater, we would add Pico Alto.

Itinerary

Since we were so many people, I described the itinerary that I did and I add the different variations.

In the following link you can see the places we visited:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1EAfd1suw-Br_zrCoD3n-l1oJOQA&usp=sharing

23/06/2018	Flight BCN (6:40) – Terceira (11:00) with connection in Lisbon where we met Dave, Robert, Raphaël and Alain. Ferry Teceira (13:45) – Graciosa (17:15) where we do not pay attention and almost finished the trip in São Jorge.
24/06/2018	Morning, walking from Santa Cruz to Praia. Afternoon, pelagic.
25/06/2018	Visiting Graciosa island.
26/06/2018	Morning, flight Graciosa (11:35) – Ponta Delgada (13:15). Afternoon, Pico da Vara-Serra da Tronqueira.
27/06/2018	Morning, Furnas Lake and Congro Lake. Afternoon, Vila Franca Do Campo. At 13:15, Raphaël and Dave return to Europe.
28/06/2018	Visit Santa Maria. Ferry: S. Miguel – P. Delgada (NB) S. Maria – V. Porto (NB) 7:30 – 10:30. S. Maria – V. Porto (NB) S. Miguel – P. Delgada (NB) 21:00 – 0:00.
29/06/2018	Visit São Miguel. Salvador Cases and Alain Jortay return to Europe.
30/06/2018	Punta Delgada (15:35) – BCN (22:20).

23/06/2018. Flight BCN (6:40) – Terceira (11:00) with connection in Lisbon where we met Dave, Robert, Raphaël and Alain. Ferry Teceira (13:45) – Graciosa (17:15) where we do not pay attention and almost finished the trip in São Jorge

Diana and I arrived at the airport and immediately we found Salvador Casas, who lost his cell phone. Later, Miquel and Ana arrive.

In Terceira, we take a taxi to go to the port where the ferry leaves (€10), where we ate before leaving. In perspective, it would have been better to go to Praia by bus or taxi and have lunch there, since the ferry to the city costs €5 less for person! The ferry costs €32.5 for person. During the trip we can see about five hundred cory's shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea borealis*) and six Monteiro's storm-petrel (*Oceanodroma monteiroi*). We saw the first bird at the point (38.993556, -27.760624). Then came others.

When the ferry arrived at Praia, we entertained watching roseate tern, while we were waiting for cars and people leave. But when I said that the ferry continued, everybody started to run to get to the exit. When we arrive, they were closing the door and the ferry embarked on a trip to São Jorge, where it arrived after three hours. At first, they told us that the boat could not return to port and that we could return in two days or take a return boat earlier. Although the situation was not desperate because we already had the lifer, if we did not manage to push the ferry off, we would lose the pelagic, hotel and car money, etc. In spite of everything, the staff saw us so disgusted that the ship returned to port, from where we had left recently, and we went down to Graciosa.

We learned that people from the pelagic were waiting for us and when they saw that we did not get off, they went of. In this island everyone is known. So after a while they came to receive us and after agreeing to pick us up the next day at 9 in the morning, they took everyone by car to the lodging. They are very kindly. Word had spread and all the people already knew our pathetic incident at the ferry!

While Miquel, Ana, Diana and I had dinner at the Costa do Sol restaurant – the best option to eat in the village – Rolando Oliveira, the head of the pelagic, came to tell us that, since we would only be three hours in boat, maybe it would be better to go in the afternoon because maybe we could see the birds returning from the Bank of Fortune to their colonies at Ilhéu da Praia. The change did not have much logic because when we returned to port there was still 3 hours of daylight left. We sent a message to all, but only Dave, Robert and Raphaël answered. As the island is small, we thought someone would advise Salvador and Alain.

24/6/2018. In the morning, walking from Santa Cruz to Praia. Afternoon, pelagic.

In the morning, each one did a different activity. However, before leaving the hotel, we received an email from Salvador saying that Alain did not remember the PIN for his mobile phone, had been spent on the battery and was waited for his wife to send him the PUK. They were baffled and did not know if we had done the pelagic without them or what had happened.

Diana and I went to Praia walking: first, on a beautiful coastline road, and then on a road without cars. At two o'clock all people met in Praia, and we did the pelagic, where most of us did not see any lifers. Of course, the chumming facilitated the approach of Monteiro's storm-petrel. There were no little shearwaters, but there is three cory's shearwater.

In the evening we all went to the same restaurant as the previous day, but it was closed, so we went back to Praia for dinner at Jesua. It is also a good option to eat.

25/06/2018. Visiting Graciosa island

The day we booked for it was a bad weather, we took advantage of it to visit the island. First, Miquel, Ana, Diana and I went to the Forna do Enxofre by car. It is a pretty boiler that goes to the bottom of the Earth as if you were in a novel by Jules Verne. We met Robert who had come by bike.

Then, we went to the Termas Do Carapacho to look but on Mondays are closed. So, we took the opportunity to swim in the adjacent natural pools, on the walls of which common tern eat the fish the waves spit. You can see them two meters from within the water!

After a while, Robert arrived by bike and, later, Salvador, who had been walking from Praia and had also visited the crater. Alain had made the trip with Salvador until the last stretch, but we did not find him. The Dolphin Bar seems to be where they make the best tapas on the island, but we are going to have lunch too late, and we found it closed.

Robert, Alain and Salvador seen two quails, considered an endemic subspecies by some authorities. We heard them sing and it seems that this island is a much easier place than Catalonia to find this species.

In the evening, we will visited a bullring inside a crater. A place with a beautiful view of Santa Cruz da Graciosa.

Finally, we met all for dinner in Costa do Sol. Raphaël took advantage of the day to do scuba diving and Dave to prepare for the trip to Portugal, Spain, Bulgaria, Romania, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan where he plans to make 34 lifers. Robert arrived later, after having dinner with Alain.

26/26/2018. Morning, flight Graciosa (11:35) - Ponta Delgada (13:15). Afternoon, Pico da Vara-Serra da Tronqueira.

At the airport we were surprised because, despite having had bought the same flights, we had to travel on different planes that left at almost to exact same time. We met again in Ponta Delgada.

We have different priorities: Dave and Raphaël only have one afternoon and one morning, while Miquel, Ana, Diana and I have 4 days.

So, we four first go to Furnas to leave things in the house. Then, we start from the south (37.76587-25.20358) towards Tronqueira, while they have started a long while in the north. Before joining us, they had already easily seen their first Azores bullfinch at the point (37.796078, -25.184739) and another, then, at the Miradouro da Serra da Tronqueira (37.79631 -25.18463).

Some strange birdsong alerted us to a couple by the side of the road, then 3 more and, finally, we found the second team coming from the south. They are in a hurry to go, and we continue to the lookout. The other team were, unsuccessfully, looking for the pied-billed grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) for two hours in the Furnas lagoon, where it had been seen a week ago. In the afternoon they informed us that they had seen a Bridled Tern (*Sterna anaethetus*) in Vila Franca Do Campo!

27/06/2018. Morning, Furnas Lake and Congro Lake. Afternoon, Vila Franca Do Campo.

We spent the day looking for, without success, the pied-billed grebe and the bridled tern. First, in the lagoon of Furnas and then, in the beautiful lake of Congro, in case it had been flying. Finally, we looked for the bridled tern in front of the islet of the beautiful village of Vila Franca Do Campo.

28/06/2018. Santa Maria Island.

We recompose the groups. Miquel and Anna took the day of relaxation visiting São Miguel and looking for the pied-billed grebe again. Diana and I met again with Alain and Salvador on the ferry that goes to Santa Maria Island (2.5 hours and €55 go and return for person).

We went to this island in order to find the endemic subspecies of goldcrest and the little shearwater.

During the trip to Santa Maria, about five hundred cory's shearwater accompanied us, but there was no luck with the little shearwater. When we arrive to the island, and without any particular predetermined point, we decided to go to Pico Alto, the highest point on the island, at 587m and return by foot to the port. A friendly taxi driver picked us up (€12) and, for the first time during the trip, Diana found a bird: the Santa Maria goldcrest! Then we went down the longest path to Barreiros through a humid forest with wonderful views on either side of the island.

When we arrived at the plain, a car stopped and took us to a restaurant in Almagreira for lunch. From there, we hitched a lift – Alain preferred to walk – and immediately a very friendly teacher stopped, and took us to the capital of this little island, where after visiting and reuniting with our companion walker, we took the ferry.

On the return there was no luck with the little shearwater, although Alain continued to seek her under the reflection of the moon.

29/06/2018. Lagoa Azul- Vila Franca do Porto - thermal springs in Furnas.

The main objective of this day was to find the pied-billed grebe that Miquel had seen the day before at Lagoa Azul, perhaps the most spectacular and visited place on the island. After lunch, we went back to look for the bridled tern in Vila Franca do Campo. There was no luck, so we ended the day relaxing in the Poça de Dona Beija (€6), a set of pools with sulfur water.

30/06/2018 Ponta Delgada (15:35) - BCN (22:20).


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For more information about the pelagic:

Monteiro's Petrel and Pelagic Birding off the Azores

<http://birdingfrontiers.com/2017/03/15/monteiros-petrel-and-pelagic-birding-off-the-azores/>

For any questions, you can send me an email to eugenicapella@gmail.com

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Photos of the trip

Cover photos: Pico Alto (Santa Maria), Monteiro's storm-petrel and Azores Bullfinch.



Arriving at Graciosa Island.

The island of São Jorge in the foreground and Pico in the background, photographed from the ferry between Terceira and Graciosa.



Praia Island in front of Praia.



In Praia, it is possible to stay in a windmill.



Pelagic going out of Praia.



Monteiro's Storm-petrel



Monteiro's Storm-petrel with cory's shearwaters.



Cory's shearwaters.



Cory's shearwaters.



Sooty shearwater.



Common tern.



Termas Do Carapacho in the left.



Fringilla coelebs ssp. moreletti.



Omnipresent hydrangeas.



Santa Cruz da Graciosa.



Bullring inside a volcano in Santa Cruz da Graciosa.



Pico de Tronqueira in Sao Miguel.



R. regulus ssp. azorensis.



Pico de Tronqueira.



Lagoa da Furnas.



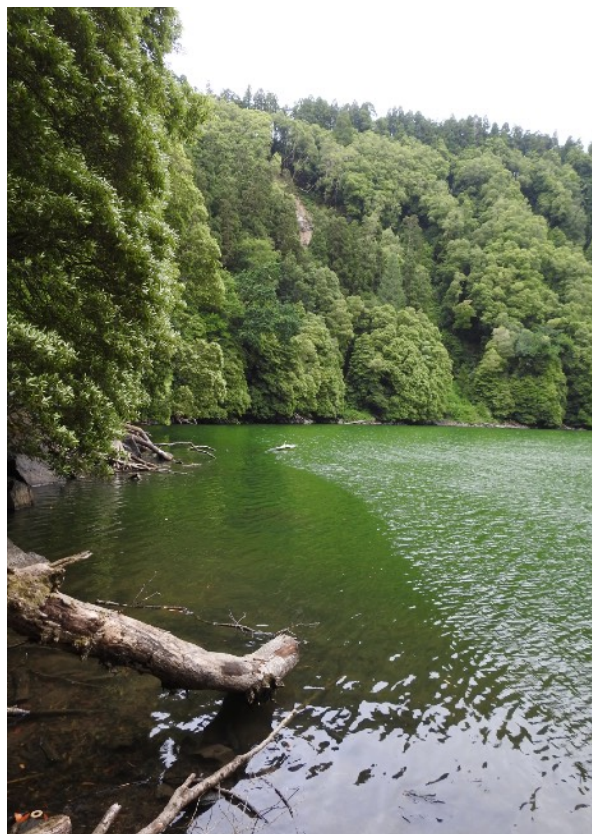
Removing the "cocido" from underground.
Azores, June 23-30, 2018



Upside down house in Furnas.



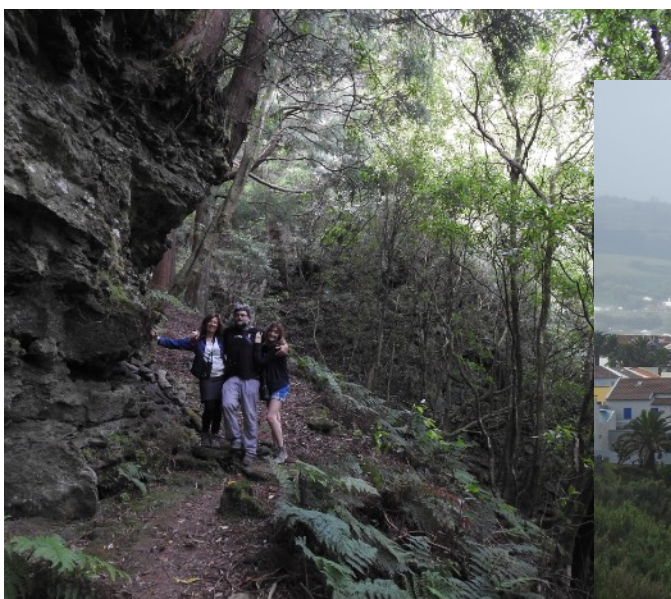
Lagoa da Furnas.



Lagoa do Congro.



Lagoa do Congro.



Lagoa do Congro.



Vila Franca do Campo.



Diana, after has found the goldcrest in Santa Maria



From pico Alto to Bananeiras.



From pico Alto to Bananeiras.



Praia Formosa.



Praia Formosa, supposedly one of the best beaches in the Azores when the tide is low.



Sete cidades.



Pied-billed grebe.