

Madeira, Portugal

February 27th to March 6th 2006

Hans M. Høiby - hans.hoiby @ loqal.no



As this was our winter vacation, the value of this report should be read taking the following limitations into account:

- the trip was booked as a one-week charter tour with four levada / nature walks, see itinerary for details.
- no use of hired car, only public transport or arranged.
- did not bring telescope/tripod
- thus limited seawatching opportunities.

General:

Stayed at Hotel Florasol in the Lido area in west Funchal the whole week. We had an apartment on the 2nd floor with 'limited seaview', - and some traffic noise. Arrived at noon on Monday 27th, left the hotel at 9am on the 6th – meaning 6 ½ effective days on the island.

It was raining when we arrived, and quite heavy during the first night, but from then on everything improved. Temperatures reaching 22/23° C, and it was possible to sit outside during evening meals most nights.

Price level comfortable, but not cheap by any means. Food was overall good. Shopping was not prioritized, but seemed to happen in a pleasant and polite manner.

Itinerary.

Sunday 26th Feb.

Leaving our home at 1630. Due to heavy snowfall over the weekend the bus services were somewhat delayed, but – fingers crossed – not critical. ¾ hrs domestic flight from Trondheim/Værnes to Oslo/Gardermoen. Check-in at Airport Motel 2115. Closing Ceremony of the Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy on the TV.

Monday 27th Feb.

Leaving Airport Motel at 0500 (-10C), and Oslo/Gardermoen on schedule 0650. Arrival at Funchal 1040 local time.

First birds from airport parking: **Yellow-legged Gulls**. On the route to Funchal, **Spanish Sparrows** and **Plain Swifts**. Since check-in at the hotel was delayed, we took a walk in the Lido area.

Rock/Feral Pigeon, **Blackcap** and **Canary Siskin** seemed to be anywhere. More rain made the afternoon/evening perfect for indoor life.

Tuesday 28th Feb.

Guided walk in the Rabacal / Risco / 25 Fountains area.

All our walks were organized by Madeira Explorers with English-speaking guides. This first day there were two mini-buses with a total of 17 persons. Due to the weather conditions huge SW swells and waves was hitting the coast, damaging the marina at Ponto do Sol quite severely during the day. We passed the Lugar do Baixo twice this day, but due to all other circumstances, I found no reason to ask for a five minute stop-and-check.

The weather also influenced the levada walk itself. The rain decreased, but the strong wind meant we had to stay in the lower part of the area, walking a 800 meter tunnel both ways.

Birds: **Chaffinch**, **Black Thrush** and **Madeiran Firecrest**.

Wednesday 1st March.

Guided walk on Ponta da Sao Lorenzo. Originally this day was meant to be a tour across the highest mountains, but since the night had produced snow and ice there, this was altered. 13 persons was collected on the way towards east. In the town of Canical we saw 2 **Starlings**, many Spanish Sparrows and 4 **Ruddy Turnstones** in the harbour.

The weather had improved even more over night, but a strong northerly wind followed us most of the day.

Berthelot's Pipits were in good numbers here. A **Sparrowhawk** showed up at the parking area and a flock of **Linnets** passed by. Near the stone fence at the Reserve entrance a mixed flock of swifts and swallows craved my attention. Plain Swifts in good numbers, **Barn Swallows**, a few **House Martins** and a single **Red-rumped Swallow**. A **Kestrel** was constantly hovering against the wind. Further out a **Northern Wheatear** was present. In the slope next to the Ranger's house one **Whimbrel** was heard and seen, and by the house itself at least two **Goldfinches** flew around. We had our lunch picnic near the stairs to the sea and several lizards held us with company.

Thursday 2nd March.

No excursion today, and since the weather was more than OK, we caught a bus for Funchal Centro. Somewhat early in the day and low-season means many shops were out-of-business. After a while we just took another bus to the area of the Botanical and Orchid Gardens. Not so much to see and hear, but one **Buzzard** and several **Robins** were added to the list. Kestrel, Plain Swift, Black Thrush and Canary Siskin were also present.

Just before sunset one **Little Egret** was trekking past Lido towards Funchal Centro (eastwards).

Friday 3rd of March.

Today a guided tour to the Queimadas – Calderho Verde – Ilha on the northeast part. 8 participants + the guide. I had some expectations to this trip, but the benefit was a little disappointing. The weather was very pleasant, but since this levada walk was in and out of tunnels, crossing some spraying waterfalls and keeping to the shadows, good clothing was essential. My slight vertigo/acrophobia also affected my own experience, since portions of the walk was next to a free fall of several hundred feet. The safety fence was more a psychic than physical thing. Overall, it was a positive experience. Chaffinch and Madeiran Firecrests in good numbers, Robins and Black Thrushes also abundant, but not so numerous. I had hoped to see the Trocaz Pigeon here, but the nearest was my wife's glimpse of a 'large and greyish' bird deep down in the valley below. In the late afternoon both wind, waves and light in favorable combination made an unique opportunity to practice some seawatching from the apartment balcony. Though, with 8x binocs this was really a 'light' version. Honour bright! The only specie honestly identified was the **Manx Shearwater**, of which 25 individuals came quite close to the shoreline during the one-hour watch, all migrating westwards. Two other individuals went towards east, seemed more grey and could certainly be Cory's, but light and distance say I shouldn't dare to try. Three Kestrel, up to 8 Plain Swifts as well.

Saturday 4th of March.

This should have been a 2nd attempt for the Pico de Areeiro – Pico de Ruivo tour, but due to strong wind and mist it was cancelled again. We were given two options to compensate for this, but we waived both of them.

Instead we went to town again, had a nice walkabout, tasted some (more) Madeira etc. Around noon we took the Cable Line to Monte, a village with a famous church in the hills above Funchal. Real recreation in the sun with a light lunch and good views. We saw Buzzard, Kestrel, Robin, Black Thrush, Canaries and Chaffinches – also good numbers of Blackcap here.

We chose not to use the toboggan (sledge) offer downhill (€25 for two), but found a local bus. For €1,30 each we had ¾ hours of rollercoaster sightseeing in the western suburbs of Funchal.

Sunday 5th of March

To late to regret the waiving of today's morning excursion, perhaps the last chance to see the Trocaz P. We put on sunscreen, sun glasses and the lightest clothing and made it for the seaside promenade from Lido and to the west. Sunday meant lot of people around, and despite close views of Blackcap, Canary and Kestrel there were few photographic chances here.

In the afternoon I made the vacation's only, real birdwatching tour. I went to Funchal harbour to look up some gulls or whatever. Again, timing was not the best. The sun & heat plus the amount of people anywhere made this a challenge. There were plenty of activity around, making birds vary and on the move. The outside pier, the three steam outlets and the seaside walk gave results.

2 2cy **Ring-billed gulls**, 25+ **Black-headed Gulls** together with the usual YLG's. One Ruddy Turnstone on the pier, and thirteen on the beach. One **Grey Wagtail** was seen, and at last four Kestrels and one Buzzard together

Manx Shearwaters (3) were seen from the apartment again this early evening.

In the evening we caught a short glimpse of a **Barn Owl** on our way to a restaurant. This was in the well known breeding area of the species near the Grand Pestana Hotel.

Monday 6th of March

Return journey back home. Funchal – Oslo/Gardermoen – Trondheim/Værnes – Fannrem.
Dep. 0850 and arrival 2305.

Tuesday 7th of March

Up at 6 o'clock for work, and -15C. Home, sweet home?

Species List (Bold = lifers)

	Norsk navn	English Name	Scientific name	First seen on Madeira
1	Havlire	Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	Funchal
2	Silkehegre	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Funchal
3	*Musvåk	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo hartertii</i>	Funchal
4	*Spurvehawk	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus granti</i>	P. da Sao Lorenzo
5	*Tårnfalk	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus canariensis</i>	Funchal
6	Steinvender	Turnstone	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Canical
7	Småspove	Whimbrel	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	P. da Sao Lorenzo
8	Hettemåke	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Funchal
9	Ringnebbmåke	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	Funchal
10	*Gulbeinmåke	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis atlantis</i>	Santa Cruz
11	Bydue	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columbia livia var. domestica</i>	Santa Cruz
12	*Tårnugle	Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba schmitzi</i>	Funchal
13	Kanariseiler	Plain Swift	<i>Apus unicolor</i>	Funchal
14	Kanariplerke	Berthelot's Pipit	<i>Anthus berthelotii</i>	P. da Sao Lorenzo
15	*Vintererle	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea schmitzi</i>	Funchal
16	Låvesvale	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	P. da Sao Lorenzo
17	Amursvale	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	P. da Sao Lorenzo
18	Taksvale	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	P. da Sao Lorenzo
19	Rødstrupe	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Funchal
20	Steinskvett	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	P. da Sao Lorenzo
21	*Svarttrost	Black Thrush	<i>Turdus merula cabreræ</i>	Funchal
22	*Munk	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla heineken</i>	Funchal
23	Madeirafuglekonge	Madeiran Firecrest	<i>Regulus madeirensis</i>	Rabacal
24	Stær	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Canical
25	Middelhavsspurv	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	Canico
26	*Bokfink	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs madeirensis</i>	Rabacal
27	Kanariirisk	Canary Siskin	<i>Serinus canaria</i>	Funchal
28	*Stillits	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis parva</i>	P. da Sao Lorenzo
29	*Tornirisk	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina nana</i>	P. da Sao Lorenzo

Mammals

Madeiran lizard – anywhere

Butterflies

Quite a few, but identification was not thought of.

Reflections

Altogether a very pleasant vacation, my vertigo wasn't that disappointed not to reach the highest mountains. Had we known this earlier, we would perhaps have chosen either the Porto Santo ferry trip or a day-tour to the Ilhas Desertas instead. Since dipping the Pigeons, and being off-season for many sea-birds I have plenty of reasons for making a re-visit.

One personal regret: I didn't check the trees and vegetation around the Ranger Field Station on the Ponta de São Laurenço. Other reports indicate this could prove rewarding.

Bibliography:

Svensson, Mullarney & al.: Gyldendals Fugleguide, Oslo, 1999. (The Collins in Norwegian).

<http://www.seawatching.net>, THE webportal to Birdwatching information from Azores and Madeira. Pictures, Sightings, Trip Reports and whatever.

Other aids:

8x32 binoculars

Konica Minolta 5D / 17-85 / Sigma 100-300 – Generously supplied by joint co-operation of my two sons, [Håvard](#) & [Kjetil](#).