

West African Pelagic 2013

**Cape Verde Islands – continental shelf edge,
Mauritania & Western Sahara – Canary Islands –
Selvagen Islands – Desertas Islands – Madeira**

Summary and Species List by Simon Cook

5th –13th May 2013, aboard M.V. Plancius

5th May

Praia, Cape Verdes and at sea

During the first day there were opportunities to explore the island of Santiago and the bird highlights were **Brown-necked Raven, Western Reef & Intermediate Egret, Eurasian Spoonbill, Cape Verde Swift, Cape Verde Sparrow, Cape Verde Warbler** and a totally unexpected **Cream-coloured Courser**. An early evening departure from Praia rewarded us with our first **Boyd's Shearwaters**.

6th May

Off Razo Island, Cape Verdes and at sea.

At tiny Raso Island there were the endemic larks to be seen from the Zodiacs (but generally not well), a breaching **Humpback Whale, Osprey, Red-billed Tropicbirds** and a flock of 40 **Cape Verde Sparrows** which landed on the ship; some stayed until the ship reached Madeira! On our way to the African coast, a number of new exciting species were seen: **Cory's and Cape Verde Shearwaters, Fea's Petrel, Bulwer's Petrel, Leach's and Madeiran Storm-Petrels, a huge Blue Whale, Sperm Whales, Pantropical Spotted, Risso's, Spinner and Atlantic Spotted Dolphins** plus **Green and Loggerhead Turtles**.

7th–9th May

At sea off the coast of West Africa.

These next two days were spent “coasting” along the shelf edge off West Africa and they were very productive for additional species such as **Grey Phalarope, Wilson's Storm-Petrel, Royal and Black Terns**, large numbers of both **Sabine's Gull** and **Pomarine Skuas**, heading back north to their breeding grounds in the Arctic. **Northern Minke Whale, Common Bottlenose, Short-beaked Common and Striped Dolphins, Short-finned Pilot Whale, Gannets** (plus one aboard), **Manx, Sooty and Scopoli's Shearwater** and our first **White-faced and European Storm-Petrels**. There

were masses of stars at night, bio-luminescence at the stern and a green fringe to the setting sun one evening (the 'green flash').

10th May

At sea, through the Canary Islands.

We approached and passed the Canary Islands, with the ship being closest to La Gomera. Further away the summit of Tenerife could be seen (3,717 metres). This morning there was visible migration in the form of **Plain Swifts**, 15 of which were returning to the islands from African wintering grounds. The usual seabirds were accompanied by **Barolo's Shearwater**, **Yellow-legged Gull** and a flock of **Whimbrel**.

11th May

At sea, the Salvage Islands.

Conditions were good enough at Selvagem Pequena for us to go out in the zodiacs; numerous **White-faced Storm-Petrels** heralded our arrival. Landbirds were few and far between, Swallow, House Martin, Ruddy Turnstone and song-flighting **Berthelot's Pipits** were noted. Unfortunately the sea state at nearby Selvagem Grande prevented us from landing but a possible **Bryde's Whale** appeared close to the ship. An evening cruise around the island featured thousands of gathering **Cory's Shearwaters**, ready to return to their nests.

12th May

At sea to the Desertas Islands

During the morning of the ship was en route to the Desertas Islands (Bugio and Deserta Grande). Whilst no Pterodroma petrels were seen, there were good numbers of **Cory's Shearwater** and **Bulwer's Petrel**. The rangers were very welcoming, as were the local lizards, **Atlantic Canaries** and **Berthelot's Pipits**. In the evening only 6 of the 11 sparrows could be found on board and we enjoyed a sumptuous barbecue ashore.

13th May

At sea and arrival to Madeira.

The ship stayed at anchor until around 03.00, when we set off for an area just to the north of Madeira. The sea was a little choppy but three good species were present: **Manx**, **Cory's** and **Barolo's Shearwater**. By late morning the ship was at the pier in Funchal and our remarkable voyage had, very quickly it seemed, come to an end. However, before disembarking, we watched a pair of **Roseate Terns** fishing near the ship.

Species List

Birds

Fea's Petrel
Bulwer's Petrel
Cape Verde Shearwater
Scopoli's Shearwater
Sooty Shearwater
Manx Shearwater
Boyd's Shearwater
Barolo's Shearwater
Wilson's Storm-petrel
White-faced Storm-petrel
European Storm-petrel
Leach's Storm-petrel
Madeiran Storm-petrel
Red-billed Tropicbird
Brown Booby
Northern Gannet
Cattle Egret
Western Reef Egret
Little Egret
Intermediate Egret
Great White Egret
Grey Heron
Eurasian Spoonbill
Osprey
Common Kestrel
Helmeted Guineafowl
Common Moorhen

Black-winged Stilt
Cream-coloured Courser
Whimbrel
Ruddy Turnstone
Grey Phalarope
Pomarine Skua
Arctic Skua
Long-tailed Skua
Great Skua
Sabine's Gull
Yellow-legged Gull
Royal tern
Roseate Tern
Common Tern
Arctic Tern
Black tern
Collared Dove
Cape Verde Swift
Plain Swift
Grey-headed Kingfisher
Raso Lark
Barn Swallow
House Martin
Berthelot's Pipit
Cape Verde Cane Warbler
Spectacled Warbler
Blackcap
Brown-necked Raven
Spanish Sparrow
Iago Sparrow
Common Waxbill

Marine mammals

Blue Whale
(Bryde's Whale)
Humpback Whale
Northern Minke Whale
Sperm Whale
Short-finned Pilot Whale
Short-beaked Common Dolphin
Bottlenose Dolphin
Atlantic Spotted Dolphin
Pantropical Spotted Dolphin
Spinner Dolphin
Striped Dolphin
Risso's Dolphin

Other wildlife

Green Turtle

Loggerhead Turtle

Hawksbill Turtle

Hammerhead Shark sp.

Flying Fish sp.

Portuguese Man-of-war

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