

B O C A G I A N A

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THE BIRDS OF MADEIRA IN THE WINTER

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SUMÁRIO. Durante duas curtas visitas à Madeira (princípios de Março de 1973 e Dezembro de 1983) foi visto um certo número de aves, visitantes de Inverno, assinaladas para a Madeira mas pouco frequentes. Nestas observações, além de tordos nas montanhas e cotovias e correcaminhos nas terras baixas, foram vistas duas novas espécies para a Madeira, *Larus delawarensis* da América do Norte e *Oenanthe isabellina* da Ásia. A raça local de *Fringilla coelebs* tem um canto de chamada invulgar lembrando o encontrado na ilha de Palma nas Canárias. Sugere-se que *Anthus bertheloti* possa estar mais relacionado com *A. spinoletta* do que com *A. campestris*.

During two brief visits to Madeira in passing vessels in early March 1973 and December 1983 I saw a number of birds considered scarce in or even missing from the accounts of birds of the Atlantic Islands by the Bannermans (1963-1968) so it may be useful to place them on record alongside the accounts of winter visits by Buxton (1959) and Bradley (1976). I was present with my wife Mrs D. S. J. Bourne during 6-10 December, visiting the woods above Funchal on the first afternoon, the eastern extremity Ponta de São Lourenço returning via Porto da Cruz and Poiso on the second day, making an excursion out to sea to the south on the third, visiting the upper northern laurel forests at Fajã da Nogueira

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and the summit of Arieiro with the Zino family on the fourth, and leaving for the north past the Desertas and Porto Santo at dawn on the fifth. In March I was only present for two days with Dr M. P. Harris, when we were also taken to the Ponta de São Lourenço on the first day and to Arieiro (which was covered in cloud) and a ribeira above Funchal on the second by P. A. Zino.

In general there were rather few birds present in Madeiran seas in winter compared with a passing visit in July 1951. At the beginning of the winter before the herbage had grown much on the low ground the main notable feature was the presence of a number of thrushes at the upper tree-line in the hills, whereas by the end of the winter when conditions were rather miserable on the high ground more winter visitors characteristic of open country such as larks, pipits and starlings had accumulated at the bare eastern extremity of the island. Various stray migrants and vagrants were also seen on both visits, and clearly many more can be expected than have been seen yet, including American species.

We are grateful to Mr P. A. Zino and his family for their magnificent hospitality and much assistance and advice in the island. I have included all the birds seen here to provide an indication of their current abundance, but have omitted to mention the years in which they were seen as these can be inferred from the date.

Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro*.

Seen offshore once in July, once north of Porto Santo with another at the lights of the ship at night when anchored off Funchal in December, but not encountered in March.

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*.

Numerous offshore in July, but not seen north of Cape Verde in November and December, although occasional birds were present offshore again by early March.

Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis*.

Six seen dispersing north from the Desertas at dawn on 10 December.

Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*.

Numerous offshore in July, but not seen in December or March.

Teal *Anas crecca*.

A party reported in the hills by Dr Frank Zino on 8 December.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*.

Seen frequently over the lower slopes on both visits.

Buzzard *Buteo buteo*.

A number seen soaring over the hills on both visits, but not encountered near the coast as reported by Buxton (1959) in winter.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*.

Two at Ponta de São Lourenço on 7 December.

Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*.

One with the preceding.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*.

Five at Funchal and one at Ponta de São Lourenço in December.

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*.

One flushed from a levada on the middle slopes on 1 March.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*.

Eight at Machico on 1 March.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*.

Eight at Ponta de São Lourenço on 7 December.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*.

About 250 along the front at Funchal and groups at intervals along the south coast which flew east at dusk in both December and March, with a few soaring over the mountain summits and up to 40 km out to sea in December. Several of the immature birds were pale and may have been winter visitors from the north.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*.

Several old and young birds with the preceding along the shore and out at sea during both visits. Those showing any adult plumage appeared to belong to the pale race *L. f. graellsii*.

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*.

Two immatures were pointed out by P. A. Zino among other gulls on the beach at Funchal on 7 December. They were intermediate in size between neighbouring Herring and Black-headed Gulls, with wing-tips extending well beyond the tail when the wing was folded. The general pattern of the plumage resembled that of an immature Herring Gull, but they were much paler on the mantle with some contrasting dark spots, especially around the neck. There was a dark bar on the secondaries and a dark tip to the tail, although the tail markings showed less contrast than in some other young gulls. The legs and the base of the bill were pink, with a distinct dark band around the end of the bill although at least one had a pale tip.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*.

About twelve immatures at Funchal in December, and at least 21 birds there in March.

Laurel Pigeon *Columba trocaz*.

Several in the northern laurel forest above Fajã da Nogueira in December, and one in a ribeira above Funchal in March. These birds frequented the inaccessible mountain forests, which may explain why they have survived when the local race of Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*, which in view of experience elsewhere may have been more prone to visit cultivated areas, has been exterminated.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*.

A number seen, including dark birds in the cliffs and chequered or white ones in the towns.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*.

About thirty at Ponta de São Lourenço on 1 March.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*.

Seen from sea-level to the upper tree-line in December. One seen carrying food in Funchal in early March, which indicates that it must start laying much earlier than reported, in February.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*.

First one and then at least six with other thrushes at the upper limit of the trees above Funchal on 9 December. It does not appear to have been reported previously although I understand from Dr M. V. Hounscome that it has recently been found breeding.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*.

A party reported by Dr Frank Zino on 8 December, and at least six seen with other thrushes at the upper limit of the trees above Funchal the following day.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*.

At least one seen with the preceding on 9 December.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*.

A number seen in the woods up to about 1000 m. in both visits, with some subdued song in the evening already in December.

Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*.

One near Ponta de São Lourenço on 1 March.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*.

One at Ponta de São Lourenço on 7 December. It was originally assumed to be the preceding, but on close inspection as it perched on rocks was stouter with a shorter tail, more upright stance, and uniform sandy plumage with little contrast in the markings of the side of the head and wing coverts, and slightly less white at the base of the tail. It had a subdued twittering song different from that of a Wheatear.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*.

Numbers were seen in the lower woods and gardens on both visits, with some short soft song in March.

Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*.

Seen in brambles in the fields near Machico in March.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*.

Seen in the upper tree-heath and laurel forest on both visits, but not on the low ground. Notes loud and variable.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*.

Fairly common along watercourses.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*.

Two in the east of the island in March.

Berthelot's Pipit *Anthus bertheloti*.

Seen on both visits fairly widely near sea level in the bare east of the island, and on the second on the open ground around the summit of Arieiro. Since it has been suggested the populations differ, specimens of the species and its two most likely possible parents were examined in the British Museum (Natural History). The dimensions are compared in table 1:

Table 1: Average dimensions of male pipits in mm.

	No.	Wing	Tail	Culmen	Tarsus
Canaries : <i>A. b. bertheloti</i>	5	72.0	59.0	13.6	22.4
Low Madeira : <i>A. b. madeirensis</i>	2	78.0	59.3	14.2	23.8
High Madeira : <i>A. b. madeirensis</i>	5	75.4	61.8	13.6	22.1
Water Pipit <i>A. s. spinoletta</i>	5	90.0	70.2	15.1	24.8
Tawny Pipit <i>A. campestris</i>	5	93.8	73.4	17.2	26.6

It will be seen that there is not much difference in size between the birds from the Atlantic Islands. It may also be noted that while it usually appears to be assumed that they are descended from the Tawny Pipit, presumably because of their pale colour and rather similar "chup" call note (I did not hear the song), they are actually closer in size to the Rock and Water Pipits, some of which also have a pale plumage, and moreover resemble Berthelot's Pipit in having the four longest primaries similar in length. One bird was already carrying nest-material at Ponta de São Lourenço on 7 December.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*.

At least a dozen at Ponta de São Lourenço on 1 March.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*.

Two with the preceding, identified by their calls. (There were also numbers of migrants in Portugal four days later).

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*.

Some six flocks of up to 200 flew inland from Ponta de São Lourenço at the end of the afternoon on 1 March.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*.

Common in all the trees in the hills. The local race *F. c. maderensis* appears very blue and has a very distinct harsh "chew-chew-chew" call-note which apparently takes the place of the usual "chink-chink" and

may be the same as the variation reported by Cullen et al. (1952) on Palma in the Canaries. The song seemed rather short and soft.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*.

Four at Caniçal on 1 March.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*.

One at Ponta de São Lourenço on 7 December, and a party 1 March.

Canary *Serinus canaria*.

Widespread in the cultivated areas, with flocks on the bare open slopes at Ponta de São Lourenço during both visits, song-flights March.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*.

Seen in the towns.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*.

Flocks on the bare open rocky ground at Ponta de São Lourenço during both visits.

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