

WINTER BIRD OBSERVATIONS IN THE ISLAND OF PORTO SANTO IN JANUARY 2011

BY CATARINA CORREIA-FAGUNDES ¹,
HUGO ROMANO ¹, FRANCIS ZINO ² & MANUEL BISCOITO ³

With 3 figures

RESUMO. No presente trabalho os autores reportam a presença de 27 espécies de aves migratórias na Ilha do Porto Santo em Janeiro de 2011. Destas, 12 espécies são assinaladas pela primeira vez para esta ilha. Ao todo, um total de 94 espécies de aves migradoras estão referenciadas para a ilha de Porto Santo.

ABSTRACT. In the present paper the authors report the presence of 27 species of vagrant birds in the island of Porto Santo, in January 2011. Of these, 12 are recorded for the first time from this island. In total, 94 species of vagrant birds have been recorded from Porto Santo.

INTRODUCTION

Porto Santo is a small island ca. 20 miles northeast of Madeira (Fig. 1) with ca. 5000 inhabitants. During summer months it is a popular tourist resort, receiving over 20,000 visitors, but during winter there is very little tourism. Winter is ideal for observing vagrants, especially on irrigation ponds and dams, as well those on the recently built golf course.

¹ Madeira Wind Birds, Rua da Pena, 10J, 9050-099 Funchal, Madeira, Portugal.

E-mail: catarinafagundes@gmail.com

² FCP – Freira Conservation Project, Av. do Infante, 26, 9000-015 Funchal, Madeira, Portugal.

³ Museu de História Natural do Funchal, Rua da Mouraria, 31, 9004-546 Funchal, Madeira, Portugal.

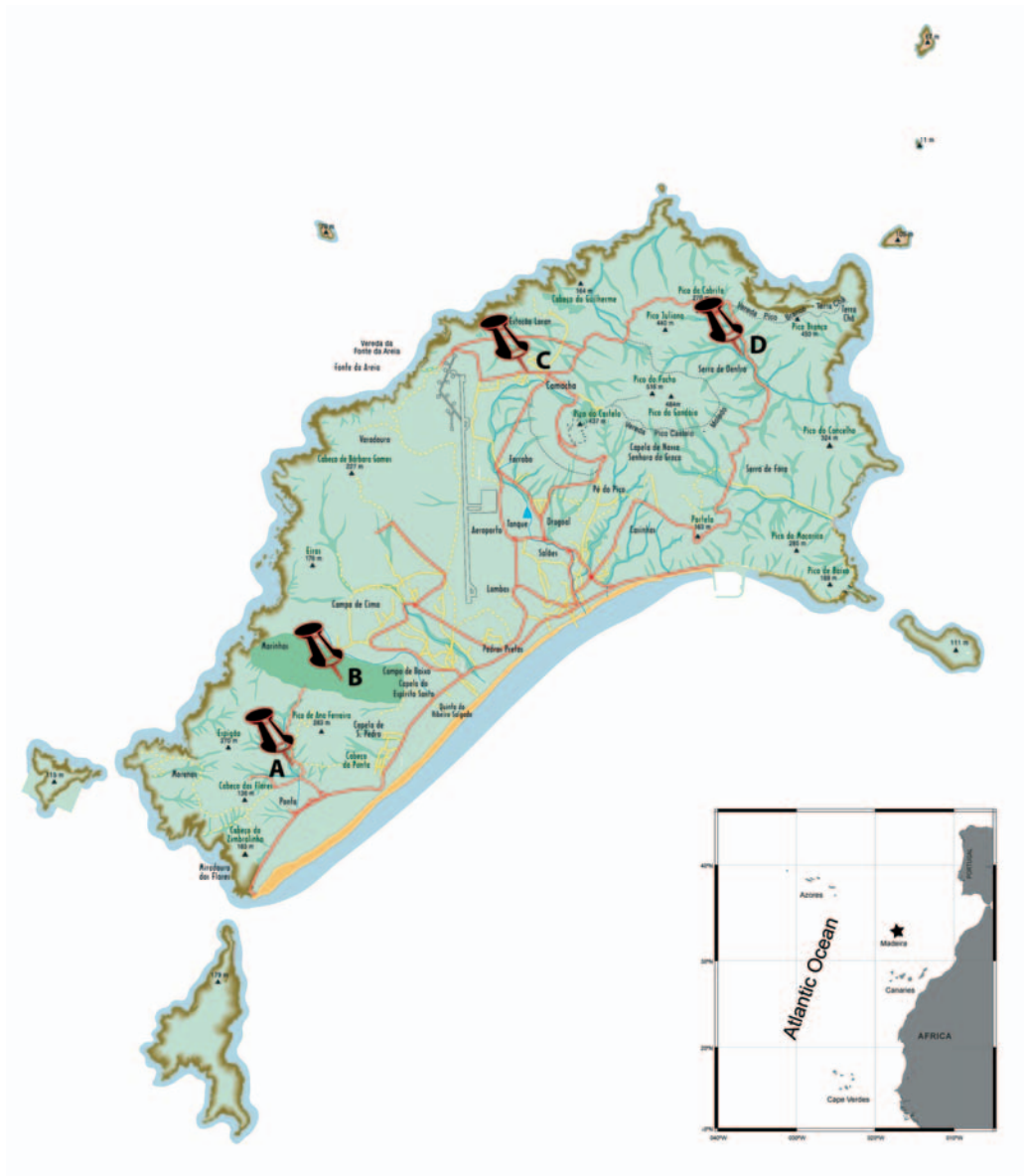


Fig. 1 - Map of Porto Santo showing the observation sites (black pins).

BANNERMAN & BANNERMAN (1965), summarizing all known previous observations, list 71 species of vagrant birds from Porto Santo. In October 1979, BUXTON (1980) records the presence of only three vagrants: the Western Cattle Egret, Wilson's Phalarope and Grey Phalarope, the latter two are new additions to the vagrant fauna of the island. ZONFRILLO *et al.* (1986) during a visit in September 1984, list 4 vagrants, two of which, the Black-headed Gull and the Sandwich Tern, are new additions to the Porto Santo vagrant's list. ZINO *et al.* (1995) list 4 new records to Porto Santo: Shag, Long-Tailed Skua, Caspian Tern and Wood Thrush and ROMANO *et al.* (2010) add another two: Brant Goose and Northern Fulmar.

In January 2011 the authors went on a birdwatching trip to Porto Santo, a report on which is given here. A list of 27 vagrants were seen, 12 of which are new additions to the Porto Santo bird fauna: Taiga Bean Goose, Pink-Footed Goose, Northern Shoveler, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck, Garganey, Common Merganser, Common Snipe, Black-Tailed Godwit, Common Greenshank, Common Sandpiper and Mediterranean Gull.

METHODS

Five observation points on the island of Porto Santo were visited between 6th and 8th of January, 2011: Tanque pond (TP); Golf Course (GC); Lombo Pond on the way to the golf course (LP), Serra de Dentro dam (SD) and Camacha (CA) (Fig. 1). For the bird observations a spotting scope and binoculars were used and whenever possible photographs were taken.

The taxonomic arrangement and the English names of the species listed here follow GILL & DONSKER (2010) with the exceptions adopted by ROMANO *et al.* (2010). For each species the frequency status is according to ROMANO *et al.* (2010).

Field observations

Vagrants

Taiga Bean Goose, *Anser fabalis* (Latham, 1787)

One bird observed at GC on the 7th and 8th. Frequency status: exceptional.

Pink-footed Goose, *Anser brachyrhynchus* Baillon, 1834

One bird together with *A. fabalis* at GC on the 7th and 8th. Frequency status: exceptional.

Gadwall, *Anas strepera* (Linnaeus, 1758)

A pair on GC on the 7th and 8th. Frequency status: occasional.

Northern Shoveler, *Anas clypeata* Linnaeus, 1758

One male observed at GC on the 7th and 8th. Frequency status: exceptional.

Eurasian Teal, *Anas crecca* Linnaeus, 1758

Five males at LP and 1 female at GC on the 6th. On the 7th there were 4 females at LP and more than 11 birds at GC. On the 8th there were 5 individuals at GC, 2 of which were males. Frequency status: Seasonal.

Common Pochard, *Aythya ferina* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Two birds on a pond at GC on the 6th and 1 on the 7th and 8th. Frequency status: exceptional.

Tufted Duck, *Aythya fuligula* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Six birds at GC on the 6th and 8th, 2 of which were males, while on the 7th there were 5 birds, 3 males and 2 females. Frequency status: exceptional.

Garganey, *Anas querquedula* Linnaeus, 1758

Two juvenile birds seen and photographed by two of the authors (CF and FZ) on the 8th at SD. Distant photos were taken, but it was possible to identify the birds by its pale loreal spot and stripes over and below the eye. When seen flying they showed white edges on the secondaries without any other colour than brown. This is the first documented record of this species for the archipelago of Madeira. Frequency status: exceptional.

Common Merganser, *Mergus merganser* Linnaeus, 1758 (Fig. 2).

One bird seen on the 6th at TP and on the 8th at GC. On the 18th of December 2010 a bird was observed at TP by Tim Farr (*in litt.*), but as no photographs were obtained, it was not possible to confirm the record. According to the criteria used by ROMANO *et al.* (2010), this species' frequency status should be exceptional.



Fig. 2 - Common Merganser photographed at golf course.

Eurasian Spoonbill, *Platalea leucorodia* Linnaeus, 1758

One bird at GC on the 6th and on the 7th. Frequency status: occasional.

Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea* Linnaeus, 1758

Three birds observed at GC on the 6th, 1 at LP and 1 at GC on the 7th and 2 on the 8th at GC. Frequency status: frequent.

Western Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Seven birds at GC on the 6th and on the 8th. Frequency status: occasional.

Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta* (Linnaeus, 1766)

Seven birds observed at TP on the 6th and some on GC both on the 6th and 7th. On the 8th there were 2 birds at TP and more than 5 at GC. Frequency status: frequent.

Northern Lapwing, *Vanellus vanellus* (Linnaeus, 1758)

At least 7 birds at GC on the 6th. Frequency status: seasonal.

Common Snipe, *Gallinago gallinago* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Two birds seen at LP on the 6th, another 4 on the 7th and at least 3 at GC. Three at SD on the 8th and several at GC. Frequency status: seasonal.

Black-tailed Godwit, *Limosa lapponica* (Linnaeus, 1758)

One bird seen at GC everyday from the 6th to the 8th. Frequency status: occasional.

Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus phaeopus* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Three birds recorded at GC on the 6th and 2 on the 8th. Frequency status: seasonal.

Eurasian Curlew, *Numenius arquata* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Four birds on GC on the 6th. Frequency status: occasional.

Spotted Redshank, *Tringa erythropus* (Pallas, 1764)

One bird on a pond on GC from the 6th to the 8th. Frequency status: exceptional.

Common Greenshank, *Tringa nebularia* (Gunnerus, 1767)

One bird at LP on the 6th and 1 on GC on the 7th. Frequency status: occasional.

Common Sandpiper, *Actitis hypoleucos* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Two birds on GC on the 7th, 1 at SD and 1 on GC on the 8th. Frequency status: seasonal.

Ruddy Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Several birds observed on GC on the 6th and more than 29 on the 7th. Frequency status: frequent.

Curlew Sandpiper, *Calidris ferruginea* (Pontoppidan, 1763)

One bird observed on GC on the 7th. Frequency status: seasonal.

Dunlin, *Calidris alpina alpina* (Linnaeus, 1758)

More than 7 birds on GC on the 6th, 5 on the 7th and 7 on the 8th. Frequency status: seasonal.

Black-headed Gull, *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* (Linnaeus, 1766)

More than 25 birds observed on GC on the 6th and more than 40 on the 7th. Frequency status: seasonal.

Mediterranean Gull, *Ichthyaeus melanocephalus* (Temminck, 1820)

At least 2 birds on GC on the 6th and 1 on the 7th. Frequency status: seasonal.

Common Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris* Linnaeus, 1758

A flock of about 15 to 20 birds flying over CA on the 8th. Frequency status: seasonal.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba alba* Linnaeus, 1758

Two birds on GC seen on the 6th, 16 on the 7th and 5 on the 8th. Frequency status: seasonal.

Breeding species

Red-legged Partridge, *Alectoris rufa* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Four at GC on the 8th.

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos* Linnaeus, 1758

Several uncounted birds on GC on the 6th, at least 4 pairs on the 7th and 9 birds on the 8th.

Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Three adults at TP on the 6th.

Eurasian Coot, *Fulica atra* Linnaeus, 1758

Six birds at TP on the 6th and more than 25 on GC on the 7th.

Several on GC and 5 at TP, on the 8th, together with a few Yellow-legged gulls.

Buzzard, *Buteo buteo* (Linnaeus, 1758)

One bird on GC on the 7th and 3 at SD on the 8th.

Eurasian Hoopoe, *Upupa epops* Linnaeus, 1758

Several birds on GC on the 7th and 8th.

Blackcap, *Sylvia atricapilla* (Linnaeus, 1758)

One bird seen on GC on the 7th.

Common Blackbird, *Turdus merula cabreræ* Hartert, 1901

One bird seen on GC on the 8th.

Spanish Sparrow, *Passer hispaniolensis* (Temminck, 1820)

Several birds on GC on the 7th and 8th.

Madeiran Berthelot's Pipit, *Anthus berthelotii madeirensis* Hartert, 1905

Several birds on the 7th on LP.

Atlantic Canary, *Serinus canaria* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Several birds on the 7th at LP and on the 7th and 8th on GC.

Common Linnet, *Carduelis cannabina guentheri* Wolters, 1953

Several birds on GC on the 7th and 8th.

COMMENTS

As Porto Santo is off migration routes it is interesting to get such a high number of species of vagrant birds. Also interesting to note is the variability of numbers when compared with previous observations of BUXTON (1980) and ZONFRILLO *et al.* (1986), which may denote an influence of the prevailing winds previous to the ornithologist's visits.

During November and December 2010, strong winds from the NE to SE quadrants were recorded at Porto Santo airport meteorological station (Fig. 3). As past observers have noted and is indeed the authors' experience, winds from easterly quadrants during migratory seasons, always bring a welcome fall of vagrants.

It should not be forgotten that the construction of dams and more recently the golf course and its ponds may have significantly altered the ecological conditions on the island, making it much more attractive to waders and other aquatic birds. Of the 12 new records for Porto Santo, only one species, the Mediterranean Gull, may not be attracted to freshwater ponds and dams. Of the 27 vagrant birds recorded, 33% are Anatidae and 55% are waders.

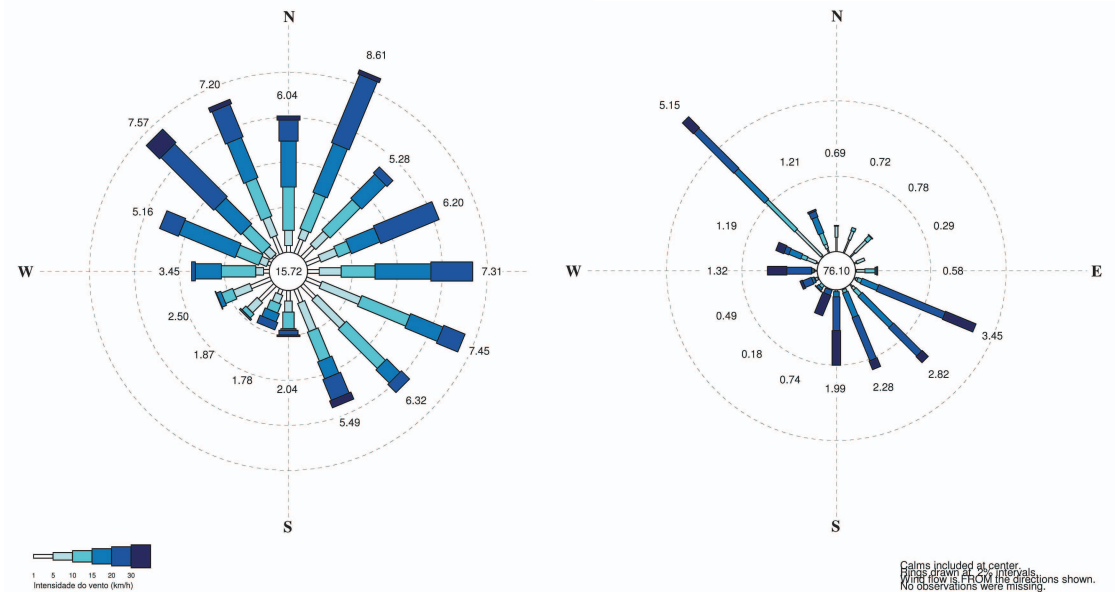


Fig. 3 - Wind roses for November (left) and December (right), 2010 from Porto Santo airport meteorological station.

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