

Cape Verde Islands 12th – 20th Apr 2016



12th Apr 2016

Travelled this time with "**Birdfinders**" and 12 other participants from Heathrow via Lisbon where we managed to see Spotless Starling before boarding our connection to Praia, Santiago on the Cape Verde Islands arriving at around midnight. We transferred quickly to our hotel on the beach front of Praia, the **Hotel Perola**. The night attendant had an IQ of a wasp and messed up our sleeping arrangements, so we didn't get to bed until 0230hrs. Not an ideal start to the holiday as we were up at 0630hrs the next day.

13th Apr 2016

Sunrise from our beach view balcony produced a few species before breakfast including Cattle Egret, **Cape Verde Swift ((✓))**, **Cape Verde Sparrow ((✓))**, Common Waxbill, Grey Heron, Sanderling, Willow Warbler (a rarity on the island with less than 30 records), Grey-headed Kingfisher and the weirdly coloured Feral/Rock Pigeons.

After breakfast we hired cars and headed into the mountains to the reknowned reservoir called **Barragem de Poilao**. We parked at the top end overlooking the reservoir and walked the track down the hill and alongside the water's edge. Birds were unexpectedly plentiful and included 50 Cattle Egret, 6 Little Egret, 2 Western Reef Heron, 1 Intermediate Egret, 1 Black Heron, 12 Grey Heron, 15 Eurasian Spoonbill, 2 Glossy Ibis, 10 **Alexanders Kestrel ((✓))** here and on the journey up, 1 Eurasian Moorhen, 8 Black-winged Stilt, 4 Common Greenshank, 3 Common Sandpiper, 2 Wood Sandpiper, 1 Eurasian Collared Dove, 50+ Cape Verde Swift, 10 Grey-headed Kingfisher, 3 Blackcap, 25 Spectacled Warbler, 2 Brown-necked Raven, 50+ Cape Verde Sparrow around the village and 20 Common Waxbill.

We then visited the dam side of the reservoir where the same species were seen, with a new species in **Cape Verde Swamp-Warbler ((✓))**, initially heard and hard to see but with a bit of perseverance one showed very well in a close tree. Grey-headed Kingfishers were now becoming particularly noticeable. We then decided to visit the nearby botanical gardens at **Sao Lourencodos Orgados** and then back to the coast for the afternoon. We hadn't driven more than a couple of hundred yards when an adult **Bourne's Purple Heron ((✓))** flew over the road only a few feet above the car and landed in the field next to the road. The next hour was spent watching this enigmatic sub-species that looks nothing like the nominate Purple Heron and surely will be split in the near future. The bird spent a lot of its time picking insects from the rocky field and gave outstanding views throughout.

The valley at the botanical gardens had a picnic area where we had lunch and watched a pair of distant **Cape Verde Buzzard ((✓))** flying round the mountain tops, before another flew closely overhead before we left. Also present were 20 Brown-necked Raven and 30 Cape Verde Swift.

This time we did return to the coast and stopped at a plain where I thought I had seen larks in flight on the way up. This turned out to be a good idea as we immediately found a large party of 30 **Black-crowned Sparrow-larks ((✓))** feeding on the sparsely vegetated areas and there were even a few Bar-tailed Larks on the stony areas.

We then moved closer to the coast where another plain produced 4 Cream-coloured Coursers on the edge of town and then to the cliff edge where at least 13 **Red-billed Tropic Birds ((✓))** were going in and out of the crevices in the cliffs.

Our final stop of the day was at Praia Lighthouse for a brief sea-watch and produced at least 60 **Cape Verde Shearwater ((✓))** passing by a mid distance to the horizon. We then returned to our Hotel at dusk and went to a nearby restaurant for Pizza which was excellent washed down with the local cheap but tasty lager.

Finished the day on 32 species with 9 being lifers and a remarkable daily count of 67 Grey-headed Kingfishers.

14th Apr 2016

Having seen all of Santiago's speciality birds on the first day we decided to do a bit of leisurely exploring today. A new reservoir called **Barragem do Figuera Gordo** had been built during the last year 3kms inland from the town of **Santa Cruz** on the west coast and had been rumoured as a new breeding sight for Bourne's Heron. After driving inland on a dirt road we reached the banks of the reservoir and set up scopes to view. There was indeed a colony of 4 Bourne Heron's nests with 2 having two young, 1 having one fully grown juvenile and the other incubating eggs. Adults were very prominent on the nests, edges of the water and flying overhead and good views were had by all. The supporting cast of birds included 20 Cattle Egret, 3 Little Egret, 1 Intermediate Egret, 1 Great Egret, 3 Grey Heron, 1 Black-crowned Night Heron. Other birds in the surrounding area were 6 Helmeted Guineafowl, 4 Alexanders Kestrel, 20+ Eurasian Moorhen, 2 Common Greenshank, 1 Common Sandpiper, 1 Wood Sandpiper, 20 Grey-headed Kingfisher, 3 Blackcap, 10 Spectacled Warbler, 50+ Cape Verde Sparrow and 20 Common Waxbill.

In the afternoon we stopped again at **Barragem de Poilao** where all yesterday's birds were still present as well as 1 Common Swift, 3 Bourne's Heron and 4 Cape Verde Swamp Warbler. We then stopped at the Black-crowned Sparrow Lark site for better views as the wind had died down a bit, Bar-tailed Desert Larks had increased to four.

The last hour of daylight was spent walking round the beach area in front of the hotel where we saw 38 Sanderling, 1 Whimbrel, 1 Yellow-legged Gull (unusual here) and a Cattle Egret roost in a tree in excess of 100 birds.

The trip list was now up to 37 species and 9 lifers.

15th Apr 2016

Today we took a mid-morning flight to **Boavista** arriving 27mins after take-off. When we arrived at our hotel in **Sal Rei** we found it closed, so after an hours wait we dumped our bags at the ground agent's office at set off to the south of the Island as we only had about 5hrs of daylight left.

The journey to the south saw us seeing our first Greater Hoopoe-Lark and Osprey from the cars and also further sightings of Bar-tailed Desert Lark and Black-crowned Sparrow-lark. We arrived at the viewing point for **Ilheu De Curral Velho** after about 40 minutes. We had come here to view a pair of Magnificent Frigatebird, the only pair left in the Western Palearctic. On arrival we learned that the male bird had died a few weeks before and the female had gone wandering around other Islands looking for a mate. This was bad news as we hoped for a sighting but saw nothing in 3hrs. There were about 100 pairs of **Brown Booby ((✓))** on the rocky Island but that hardly made up for missing the frigatebird. Other birds in the area included 2 Osprey, 1 Brown-necked Raven, 4 Whimbrel and 10 Cape Verde Shearwater offshore.

Having giving up on the frigatebird we decided to visit the nearby hotel's sewage lagoons. Many species of wader were present and included 2 Black-winged Stilt, 4 Common Greenshank, 1 Common Sandpiper, 6 Ringed Plover, 20 Kentish Plover, 1 Common Redshank, 1 Greenshank, 10 Ruff, 2 Ruddy Turnstone, 4 Curlew Sandpiper, 2 Dunlin and 15 Little Stint.

Our last stop of the day was at another water hole 2kms north-west of **Hotel Riu Toureg**. The first bird I found in the bins was an American wader in the shape of a Lesser Yellowlegs and everybody had good close views of this species as well as 20 Black-winged Stilt, 1 Grey Plover, 10 Ringed Plover, 30 Kentish Plover, 1 Common Greenshank, 2 Common Sandpiper, 2 Wood Sandpiper, 10 Ruddy Turnstone, and unusually inland 20 Sanderling. Other birds in the

surrounding area included 10 Cattle Egret, 1 Little Egret, 2 Grey Heron, 1 Squacco Heron (rarity on Boavista), 1 Alexanders Kestrel, 2 House Martin (unusual for here), 1 Spectacled Warbler, 60 Spanish Sparrow and 10 Common Waxbill.

While we were away our ground agents had arranged for us to stay at another hotel and this hotel was far better than the one we were previously booked into. **Hotel Salinas** was run by an Italian couple who spoke good English and we arrived after dark, booked in and walked the 10mins to town for a great evening meal complete with live music and cheap local beer. We were due to travel to another Island to stay overnight and watch white-faced Storm Petrel coming to their burrows but the previous week the boat that takes people over had sunk when it hit a reef and the group were lucky to escape with their lives. So our leader had arranged a pelagic for tomorrow morning in the hope of spotting this not to be missed species.

The list had increased to 53 species and 10 lifers.

16th Apr 2016

When dawn broke we realized why the hotel was so named as there was a large salt pans behind the hotel. All birds seemed to be concentrated in one green corner of the pans, so a quick walk over before breakfast proved rewarding. An American Golden Plover was the first bird noticed on approaching the corner followed very quickly by good views of another bird tucked in a corner. Other birds included 20 Sanderling, 2 Black-winged Stilt, 2 Ringed Plover, 20 Kentish Plover, Greenshank, 1 Wood Sandpiper, 2 Common Sandpiper, 2 Curlew Sandpiper and a distant Egyptian Vulture over the mountains.

After breakfast we walked to the harbour and found another American Golden Plover amongst the commoner waders on the beach. Our pelagic boat turned out to be a very expensive looking large catamaran. The calm waters of bay subsided as we left the shelter of the bay and the sea turned quite rough. We travelled about 8 miles offshore for a 3hr trip. I lasted about an hour before the dreaded sea sickness kicked in and as I spewed over the back of the boat a **White-faced Storm Petrel ((✓))** probably attracted to my own version of chumming appeared out of nowhere, within 10 minutes another bird passed close by giving good views. Other birds seen was restricted to 10 Brown Booby, 1 Red-billed Tropicbird, 4 Whimbrel and 6 Cape Verde Shearwater. I managed to recover in time to land and within 30 minutes of being on land had recovered enough to walk back to the hotel, but with a thumping headache probably brought on by dehydration. A bonus was a male Egyptian Vulture circling low over the town on the way back as well as 2 Osprey.

After lunch it was time to fly back to **Praia, Santiago**, another or perhaps the same Egyptian Vulture was seen flying overhead near the airport. After taking off an hour late, the 30 minute flight landed at Praia airport and to our great surprise 8 Helmeted Guineafowl were on the edge of the runway. There wasn't much time for birdwatching left so I just viewed the bay from the hotel balcony and saw 20 Sanderling, 10 Common Waxbill and 20 Cape Verde Sparrow before dark.

The trip list has risen to 57 species and 11 lifers.

17th Apr 2016

Today we flew in the early morning to **Sao Nicolau**, our final Island to visit and the flight time was 30 mins. It took an hour to drive to our hotel in **Tarrafal** as the roads wound up through, over and then down again the mountains. We arrived midday and just had time for a walk round this Idyllic town before lunch at the **Hotel Alice**. An Osprey over the peaks was the highlight, others included 2 **Neglected Kestrel ((✓))** 10 Sanderling, 1 Greenshank and 3 Cape Verde Shearwater offshore.

Late afternoon we travelled north along the coast to an abandoned lighthouse which was now an Eco Lodge called **Farinha de Pau**. The objective here was to spot seabirds loafing about before returning to their nests at dusk. As we scanned we could see that there was a large number of birds passing and loafing about on the water. Numbers for a 2hr sea-watch were as follows, 1000+ Cape Verde Shearwater, 4 **Boyd's Shearwater ((✓))**, 4 **Fea's Petrel ((✓))**, 5 Brown Booby, 3 Osprey and 1 Sandwich Tern, a lot better than I had been expecting. A quick look at the plains behind us revealed 2 Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark, 10 Bar-tailed Desert Lark, 8 Cream-coloured Courser, 10 Brown-necked Raven and 10 Spectacled Warbler. At dusk we returned to the hotel ready for our 5hr round trip to **Razo Island** tomorrow.

List is now 62 species and 14 lifers.

18th Apr 2016

If I was sick on a 3 hour boat trip what was going to happen on a 5 hour journey. We left the harbour on a small fishing boat at 0900hrs. As we left the calm waters of the bay and the sea became extremely rough birds started to appear. The totals for the trip over and back were 20 Cape Verde Shearwater, 20 Boyd's Shearwater and 5 Fea's Petrel, with the best views on the return trip. When we arrived at **Razo** after about two hours we could see large numbers of Brown Bobby and Red-billed Tropic Birds nesting on the cliffs. No-one is allowed on **Razo** unless they have scientific authorisation, so our skipper got as close to the shore as possible for us to view the cliffs and sparse vegetation. We had a few false alarms when Cape Verde Sparrows took to the air, but after about 20 nervous minutes a fly over **Razo Lark ((✓))**, the holy grail of Cape Verde birding made an appearance and relieved the tension building up. We went on to see a further 8 birds feeding around the cliff edges. After an hours watching we then made the return journey to **Sao Nicolau** arriving in the harbour at around 1400hrs and to my amazement I had no problems with sea sickness for the whole journey. We spent the rest of the day after lunch just loafing about with the knowledge and smugness that we had seen the Razo Lark. A Cattle Egret roost of 101 birds was the highlight from our evening balcony watch.

Totals are now 63 species and 15 lifers.

19th Apr 2016

Because of the afternoon flight we decided to spend the morning in the upper mountains where the vegetation was greener and we had a chance of at least seeing something different. Birds seen around the villages and small farming plots included 20 Cattle Egret, 3 Neglected Kestrel, 10 Blackcap, 10 Spectacled Warbler, 10 Brown-necked Raven and 50 Cape Vere Sparrow.

We arrived at the airport just as the weather had taken a turn for the worst, with thick fog and then rain and strong winds making it impossible for aircraft to land and so the flight was cancelled, which would mean we would miss our connection back to London. There was nothing left for us to do except return to the **Hotel Alice** and get drunk.

No additions to the trip list today.

20th Apr 2016

A special charter flight had been put on for us this morning and we took off without any trouble at 1000hrs and arrived at Santiago at 1130hrs after first stopping at the Island of Sal briefly. We booked onto the next flight to London via Lisbon [243 Euros], which was at 2355hrs. We had 10 hours to wait so we decided to hire taxis and visit a few places around the Island. An American Birder on the same trip said he knew of a little known lagoon in the west, so we decided to visit here and then onto the **Barragem de Poilao** reservoir for the last 2hrs of daylight.

The lagoon was just south of **Pedra Badejo** and was big enough to hold a fair selection of birds such as 4 Black-winged Stilt, 15 Common Ringed Plover, 20 Kentish Plover, 1 Common Redshank, 2 Greenshank, 1 Common Sandpiper, 1 Wood Sandpiper, 3 Whimbrel, 1 Ruff, 4 Ruddy Turnstone, 3 Sanderling, 30 Eurasian Collared Dove, 2 Grey-headed Kingfisher, 10 Common Waxbill and new for the trip 3 Barn Swallow.

From here we travelled up to the reservoir seeing the same birds as before with the highlights being 1 Western Reef Egret, 1 Black Heron, 1 Intermediate Egret, 4 Bourne's Heron, 15 Spoonbill, 2 Glossy Ibis, 25 Helmeted Guineafowl, 6 Greenshank, 2 Common Sandpiper, 1 Spotted Sandpiper [American vagrant wader], 1 Wood Sandpiper, 4 Grey-headed Woodpecker, 2 close Cape Verde Swamp Warbler, 15 Common Waxbill and last but not least a **Cape Verde Barn Owl ((✓))** which performed well at dusk. This much darker sub-species of the nominate Barn Owl must surely be split in the near future.

We returned to the airport after dark and had an uneventful flight back to London via Lisbon arriving at 1000hrs in the morning.

The final trip total was 66 species with 23 Western Palearctic ticks and 16 lifers. The trip has been described as a logistical nightmare and this proved to be the case, with almost nothing going to plan on the arrangement side of things. By the time we landed at London Heathrow a day late we had taken off and landed 9 times in 8 days. The actual Islands and their people were very friendly and our organisers and guides worked their bollocks off to get things back on track. I can only recommend this trip if you are a Western Palearctic lister and are desperate to get an extra 15 species for your list.

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