

Trip Report

The Salvage Islands

6-10th July 2005

Participants

Hans Bister, Bosse Carlsson, Göran Ekström, Steve Gantlett, Niklas Holmström and Dan Zetterström

Brief information about the Salvage Islands

If you look for the Salvage Islands or Ilhas Selvagens (in Portuguese) – the "wild islands" – in an atlas, it may take some time to find them. They are not romantic islands in the Caribbean with golden beaches and bars, but a tiny, rocky archipelago, about 162 nautical miles (300 km) south of Madeira and 80 nautical miles (148 km) north of the Canary Islands. As with all of the Macronesian islands, the Selvagens are volcanic in origin. The archipelago consists of two groups and has a total area of 283 hectares (2.83 km²). The north-east group comprises Selvagem Grande and two smaller islets, Palheiro de Terra and Palheiro do Mar. The south-west group comprises Selvagem Pequena and Ilhéu de Fora among numerous smaller islets, including the Alto, Comprido and Redondo Islets, and also the tiny group of the Norte Islets. In addition to the several small, rocky reefs that surround the south west group, which make it difficult to land on any of these islands. The Selvagem Grande and Selvagem Pequena islands lie about 15 km apart. On Selvagem Grande there is a permanent research station with two wardens year around while Selvagem Pequena is manned by two wardens between May and October. These are the only human inhabitants on the islands.

What started as a nightmare ended like a fairy tale

The tour began like something from a nightmare. Just after midnight on 2nd July, the day of the Swedes departure, Filipe Alves (the organiser of Ventura) called me from Madeira. He was very unhappy and told me that the weather forecast looked bad indeed, with a strong wind and big swells on the return from Selvagens to Madeira on the planned date on 7-8th July (we had planned to leave Funchal early in the morning on 4th July for a five-day round trip to the Selvagens Islands). It was impossible to sleep that night; instead it was time to think it over again and again, accompanied by several cups of coffee. I wrote a long and stressed email to the three British birders explaining the situation. I couldn't call them as it was the middle of night. The Brits were due to arrive on Madeira in the evening of 3rd July and they had booked flights with only one and half day's margin. We, the Swedes, had booked flights with three full days of margin. I asked the Brits if they possibly could change their flights to a more flexible ticket, to allow for any changes to our plans. We, the Swedes decided to go to Madeira as planned in the afternoon of 2nd, as it would be easier to see how things were progressing and to be able to discuss things directly with the crew of the boat company "Ventura do Mar". Of course, we had regular phone contact with Steve Gantlett, and he for his part had contact with the other two Brits.

While awaiting a final decision from the Ventura crew, we birded Madeira for three full days (see that trip report by following this link; madeira.seawatching.net/reports/Madeira_2005_NH.pdf). At noon on 5th July, Filipe called and told us we could sail to Selvagens the next morning as the weather forecast looked good for the return. Steve Gantlett was able to catch a flight directly after Ventura had delivered the good news. Unfortunately the other two Brits abandoned the trip. As there were now only six birders left (instead of the maximum of eight), we had to pay another 100 Euros to Ventura, but that wasn't really an issue as this was a once in a lifetime trip!

At 8.00pm on 5th July we picked up Steve Gantlett at the airport, who had finally arrived after a few days of stressful waiting. In the evening Amílcar Vasconcelos (Madeira Aventura) picked up four of us at our hotel for a nocturnal excursion to the high mountains, Pico do Areeiro, to listen for Zino's Petrel. We heard maybe a dozen birds calling in the dark and a few were seen briefly. After such a magical experience, we slept without any worries about Selvagens. Early in the morning on 6th July it was six happy birders that boarded "Ventura do Mar". At 08:30 hours we finally slipped out of Funchal Harbour, heading due south towards the Selvagens Islands! So, despite the tour starting like a dark dream, it turned out to be like a fairy tale, which you soon will discover reading this report...

Weather and wind

When writing this report a month has passed since we visited the Selvagens Islands. On reflection, it is amusing to think that it was the wind that almost spoilt our trip. In the summer and early autumn the weather in Madeira (and southwards to the Canaries) is dictated by the predictable north-east trade wind. Of course the strength and direction of the winds do vary. If the wind is not too brisk or hard, there is seldom any problem sailing to Selvagens as you have a tail-wind, but it is the return which is critical, as the boat, more or less, has to sail against the wind. And remember, the Atlantic Ocean is rarely totally calm and the heavy swell can make it difficult to sea watch from the boat deck. Yes, as said in the beginning, the forecast with strong northerly winds nearly spoiled the whole trip, but when we decided we could at last go to Selvagens, it seemed that the weather gods had sanctioned our journey! The wind was moderate to brisk from north to north-east during the whole period and it was no problem to sea watch from the stern deck. Add to this the perfect weather conditions of a cloudy sky (except the first hours from Funchal with sunshine) during the whole period. This mean perfect light conditions when sea watching and photographing seabirds from the boat. No need for suntan lotion, no tired eyes or headache because of strong sunshine and the glittering of sea, which can cause big problems for the sea watcher in the summer. We were indeed the very lucky ones!

Another difficulty with strong winds could have arisen when arriving at the Selvagens Islands. If the wind is hard, it is impossible to anchor at Selvagem Pequena, as this island is very flat and offers little shelter for any boat to anchor in these conditions. At Selvagem Grande the opposite is true. However, the crew on Ventura have great knowledge and choose where to anchor depending upon the conditions, but they always try to visit Pequena first if possible.

Getting there and prices

Currently there are only one Madeiran based company that run chartered boat tours to the Selvagens: "Ventura do Mar" (which usually undertake pelagics off Madeira and to Desertas). For Ventura, this tour was their first commercial one, but Ventura has done this route several times before, when transporting researchers (mainly from SPEA Madeira) to the Selvagens.

The price for a 4 ½ day round trip with Ventura is 6000 Euros, which is divided up by the numbers of passengers (max 8), for example, 750 Euros per person if there are eight participants. Everything, such as breakfast, lunch, dinner and coffee/tea breaks with snacks; license to land on the islands is included in the price. The advantages with this broad wooden boat are many; she is very stable, the stern deck is spacious and perfectly suited for keen sea watchers. Also, the boat is relatively slow, which allows both sea watchers and photographers to enjoy seabirds coming close to the boat and to see them over longer periods. Last but not least, the service onboard is excellent, whether it's food, great company and finding and identifying marine mammals!

Some advices for future visitors

Wise from the experience of this tour here is some advice one can bear in mind if planning a trip to the Selvagens Islands:

- Book a flight with 3-4 full days of margin and I think it's a good idea to pay some extra for the possibility to change dates of one's flight. Check with the flight company when booking tickets.
- If you are photographing digitally, battery power is always critical. Bring with you a couple of extra batteries. Also bring your battery recharger with you, as you can load your batteries on Ventura do Mar, but only when they have their engine on, which they have whole the time when travelling, but not when anchored.
- A light sleeping bag is necessary when sleeping onboard.
- A scope is useless onboard the boat, but is useful when sea watching from land on Selvagem Pequena or Grande (and on Madeira before or/and after the Selvagens tour).
- If you get sea sick easy you should seriously consider whether you should undertake such a boat trip. Remember, the travelling time each way takes about 25 to 32 hours depending on wind conditions.
- Make sure the company you choose has the necessary license from Parque Natural da Madeira to land on both Selvagem Pequena and Selvagem Grande.
- Bring with you a head-torch or a handheld flashlight, to light up the path in front of you: e.g. the narrow path between the beach and the field station (surrounded by the nesting holes of White-faced S-p) on Pequena and the stony and steep paths on Selvagem Grande.

Further information and photographs

Further information about the Selvagens Islands such as maps, photo galleries, seabird calls, fauna and flora and much more is available on the updated and redesigned website "Selvagens Islands":

<http://selvagens.seawatching.net>

A birding trip to the Salvage Islands. Holmström, N. 2005. *Birding World* 8 (18): 325-337 (The article contains 19 excellent photographs from the trip, of which 13 are of seabirds).

Selvagensöarna – dukat bord med havets läckerheter. Bister, H. 2005. *Roadrunner* 4: Eight pages (The article will see its release in late November 2005 and contains 35 photos from the tour, though the text is in Swedish language)

Seabird photographs: You will find many excellent seabird photos from our trip on Göran Ekström's website: www.tristis.com. Just choose "Trip galleries" in the left menu.

Day-by-day-diary (this diary text is the same that occur in the *Birding World* 8/2005)

6th July: To sail from Madeira to the Selvagens Islands takes about 27 hours (*Ventura do Mar* uses its engine as well as sail on the whole journey), and the sea watching during our first day at sea provided us with plenty of good sea birding. We encountered regular 'waves' of Cory's Shearwaters all day long and they gave excellent views alongside the boat. Bulwer's Petrels were also sighted regularly and, by the end of day, we had counted 197, most of which were quite close to the boat. One Fea's Petrel was seen and photographed southwest of the Desertas Islands (where they breed on Bugio), and the afternoon produced reasonable views of nine Madeiran Storm-petrels. This was one of our main target species, and the next soon followed: about 90km south Madeira we spotted our first White-faced Storm-petrel: it gave excellent views as it 'sailed' close to the surface of the sea in the same direction and at the same speed as the boat.

7th July: After continuing to sail all night, we awoke to a rather gloomy, cloudy dawn, but we were still heading south. The light was not good enough for sea watching until 7.00am, but the temperature was nearly 20°C, so we breakfasted on deck. We soon spotted the first White-faced Petrel of the day and, by the time we anchored at Little Salvage Island some five hours later, we had counted 108 more. Cory's Shearwaters were numerous, while two Little Shearwaters and 33 Bulwer's Petrels were also logged on this part of the journey. One of the Little Shearwaters, cleverly photographed by Göran, was atypical, with an underwing pattern more like that of the form *boydi*, which breeds on the Cape Verde Islands, rather than the local form *baroli* (see the species list below for discussion).

At 11.45am, we anchored in a small bay on the southeast side of Little Salvage Island and we were soon shuttled by dinghy from the *Ventura do Mar* to the sandy landing beach, where the wardens (Sandro Correia and Pedro Costa) were waiting for us. After a splendid lunch of fresh Tuna (an 18kg fish caught by Jorge, one of the three crew of *Ventura do Mar*, just as we were arriving), Pedro and Sandro guided us around the small island and showed us several Cory's Shearwaters and Bulwer's Petrels nesting along the path. Approximately 31,000 pairs of White-faced Petrels breed on Little Salvage and the flat, sandy island is completely riddled with their nesting burrows, so it is extremely important to keep to the narrow path.

Back at the landing beach, Dan heard an unfamiliar call from the adjacent colony of about 50 pairs of Common Terns. He scanned the area with his binoculars and then screamed "Sooty Tern!". And there it was: the species we had hoped to see, but not really believed we would, as the wardens had told us that a pair of Sooty Terns had been seen at Ilhéu de Fora about a month earlier but not subsequently. The Sooty Tern called frequently as it flew among the Common Terns for about 15 minutes, and then departed towards Ilhéu de Fora. Other birds seen on Little Salvage Island included several Berthelot's Pipits, an 2nd cal year pale morph Eleonora's Falcon, Turnstones, a single Curlew Sandpiper, Whimbrel and two adult Roseate Terns, while an evening seawatch produced 93 White-faced Petrels, 30 Bulwer's Petrels and a single Manx Shearwater. And, of course, hundreds of Cory's Shearwaters passing close to the shore.

After a tasty evening meal of seafood and rice washed down with red wine and beer, enjoyed in great company on the terrace of the field station, we walked the short, narrow path back down to the beach. Here we took a short nap in our sleeping bags while waiting for darkness to fall and the White-faced Petrels to come in to visit their nests. After dark, we heard Cory's Shearwaters every now and again (about 200 pairs breed on the island) and then, at about 11.00pm, we turned on our head-torches and we were astonished by the vision before us. Above our heads, and especially over the area between the

beach and the field station, the air was filled with hundreds of fluttering White-faced Storm-petrels, looking for all the world like a swarm of huge white moths. They were almost completely silent and, as they dropped into their nests, more appeared from the darkness above.

8th July: An early morning on Selvagem Pequena produced 12 White-faced Storm-petrels seen during a seawatch, and the Sooty Tern was again seen flying around over the Common Tern colony. >From aboard *Ventura do Mar*, we saw a Purple Heron fly in towards Pequena, where it landed out of sight and then, at about 10.00am, we weighed anchor and sailed towards Selvagem Grande, some 15kms to the northeast.

Two chumming sessions *en route* saw us circling awful-smelling oily slicks with little success. One White-faced Storm-petrel came in for a desultory sniff and several Cory's Shearwaters paused awhile but, other than that, only a few Yellow-legged Gulls and one *graellsii*-type Lesser Black-backed Gull landed in the mess before it dissipated after ten minutes or so. Perhaps calmer conditions would have yielded more success with the chum, but it was worth trying....

The crossing did produce 25 more White-faced Storm-petrels and five Bulwer's Petrels, plus a school of about 15 Bottlenose Dolphins. Large numbers of Cory's Shearwaters were also seen, with rafts of hundreds sitting on the sea and flushed by us as we neared Selvagem Grande.

We reached our anchorage in Baía das Cagarras (which translates as 'Bay of Cory's Shearwaters') on the sheltered south side of the island at about midday. The field station is located on this bay, just 50m from the shore. After lunch and an afternoon nap on the *Ventura do Mar*, and a refreshing swim for some (while Filipe and Luis, the third crew member, went scuba diving), we transferred to the dinghy and landed on Selvagem Grande at about 6.00pm. From mid afternoon onwards, the air was filled with literally thousands of Cory's Shearwaters and their calls. Now we could really see why the bay was so-named!

Once ashore, the two wardens, Paulo Moniz and Isamberto Silva, greeted us and Isamberto kindly guided us up the rocky path to show us the island and its sandy plateau (where some 26,000 pairs of White-faced Petrels breed). The view from the top was amazing and, all the time, there were thousands of Cory's Shearwaters in the air. They were over our heads and around the cliffs below us, as well as sitting on the path (where they had to be stepped over), in nesting holes, and even in the station's bathroom! The great concert of the Cory's calls filled the air constantly, from mid afternoon and throughout the night. One really has to experience this to believe it! Isamberto also showed us a Bulwer's Petrel in the hand, and some of the endemic Salvage Islands Geckos.

After a fine evening meal of kebabs, wine and beer at the field station, Isamberto and Paulo entertained us with many interesting stories about the Salvage Islands, and told us about the Swinhoe's Storm-petrel they caught there a few years ago but, from about 10.00pm, Paulo began to check his watch regularly. Soon he announced: "The great show will soon begin! With no wind on this side of the island and no moonlight, it will be an ideal night to hear the seabirds coming in to their nests".

We positioned ourselves around the steep surroundings of the field station. Torches were essential for walking on the narrow and steep paths, but there was no need to venture far from the field station. I placed myself close to Frank Zino's house (only about 100m from the field station and the only other building on the island) in order to try to record the calls of Little Shearwater and Madeiran Storm-petrel. I was able to record one hour of different calls from these two species, as well as the calls of Cory's Shearwaters and Bulwer's Petrels. While walking up to the house, I spotted two Madeiran Storm-petrels sitting on the path just a few metres away in my torchlight. Amongst the Cory's Shearwaters, Little Shearwaters and Madeiran Storm-petrels could be seen as black shadows against the sky, and glimpsed in torchlight, just overhead. We could only agree with Paulo: it was indeed a great show and, after a truly memorable evening, we finally returned to the boat after midnight. Onboard the *Ventura do Mar*, we sat on deck listening to the concert of shearwaters and petrels when, suddenly, a White-faced Storm-petrel landed on the deck! A few minutes later, and another one flew into the well-lit cabin of the boat! We quickly rescued both of these beautiful birds, photographed them and then released them. We finally fell asleep to the laughing calls of Little Shearwaters and other seabirds passing over the boat.

9th July: We set sail from Baía das Cagarras at dawn, for the long, into-the-wind journey back north to Madeira. Within the first hour, we saw three Little Shearwaters, each one of which lifted from the sea and passed the boat quickly, but quite closely. During the whole morning, within about the first 40km of Selvagem Grande, we counted 102 White-faced Storm-petrels, but we saw only six more after midday. During the morning, we also logged over 50 Bulwer's Petrels, while Cory's Shearwaters were constantly

in view. In the afternoon, Cory's Shearwaters were distinctly fewer, but two Madeiran Storm-petrels passed close to the boat within 45 minutes of each other, and a Great Skua followed the boat for a couple of minutes.

Whilst bathing in the euphoria of such a successful trip, it is best never to be tempted to relax because, being at sea in the middle of Atlantic, one may always be surprised at what could appear... At 4.20pm, Filipe and Luis shouted loudly and pointed to a small bird coming up alongside the boat. Our first impression was 'What on earth is this? A small American alcid?!' But we soon realised it was actually a Quail speedily passing the boat and heading north towards Madeira!

Our next surprise was of the kind one will never forget. We were enjoying dinner and, while the others sat in the cabin, Dan and I were sitting on the deck, eating and discussing the trip. For some reason, at 8.35pm, I looked up and spotted a large white bird flapping over the boat. 'Wow, a Caspian Tern' was my first routine thought, but Dan was suddenly screaming out loud "Red-billed Tropicbird!" and the cabin emptied in a second. The tropicbird was watched hanging over the boat for a minute or so and then did some wide sweeps before heading off eastwards towards Morocco. Just as with Sooty Tern, we had hoped to see this species, but we had never counted on it: the bird's timely appearance was almost as if it had come to us, just before dusk, to say "Farewell and have a nice return trip"....

10th July: After sailing all night again, the final day of the return trip was relaxed, with the usual Cory's Shearwaters being seen regularly in small numbers, plus we enjoyed nice views of two Madeiran Storm-petrels and our last White-faced Storm-petrel. As we approached Madeira, the sea gradually became calm and, to our surprise, the sun even found its way between the clouds: it was the first time we had seen it since we had left Madeira five days earlier! The last five 'tropical' hours on the boat produced some particularly good views of Bulwer's Petrels, with a day's total of 412, included many tight flocks (of up to 18 birds) resting at sea. Most of the flocks lifted when the *Ventura do Mar* sailed too close and then offered us excellent flight views. Close to Madeira we also saw two or three distant Sei or Bryde's Whales, several schools of Spotted Dolphins and three Loggerhead Turtles.

We arrived back in Funchal Harbour at about 3.00pm. A celebratory meal of an excellent trip followed in one of the harbourside restaurants.

11th July: We had ordered two cabs to Gordon at 4.00am in the morning taking us to the airport. We all six left Madeira at 6.00am. Well in Lisbon Steve catch his flight to Gatwick (hoping that the Sooty Tern at Anglesey still were present) and we, the Swedes, did catch our flight to Arlanda. After such a great journey (knowing how bad it started) there was of course traces of melancholy when we all separated, one after the another. That's life, but I think the tour will be a great memory for everyone of us that join!

Species List

Fea's Petrel – *Pterodroma feae*

One seen very close to the boat a few hours south off Madeira and south-west of Bugio (Desertas Islands) on 6th July. The bird passed the boat within only 10 metres. We all thought that this bird belonged to Fea's Petrel because of its heavy bill, but we wasn't 100 per cent sure before we saw the photos a few weeks later.

Well back home we studying Göran Ekström's excellent photos of the bird and it indeed show a large bill prolonged by long "tubes", which stretch to the half of the bill. On Zino's Petrel, the tubes extend for only about 25% of the somewhat weaker bill length and are hardly visible in the field. Frank Zino have checked the photos and could only confirm that bird is a Fea's Petrel. He also told us that the only character that does not overlap between this two species is the structure of the bill. Hypothetic characters like the length and form of the wing and body structure are very subtle and variable depending on angle and distance. The only way, as we think, to get a 100% positive identification is the combination of seeing the bird at very close range in field and that the bird are well-documented by close-up photographs, for consulting afterwards.

Bulwer's Petrel – *Bulweria bulwerii*

Seen regularly during the five-day tour at sea with following numbers: 197 recorded on the first day 6th July, 33 in the morning on 7th July (before anchor at Pequena), 30 during the landbased seawatching from Pequena in the evening (18:00-20:00) on 7th July, 2 from Pequena in the morning on 8th July, 5 from the crossing between Pequena and Grande on 8th July, 53 seen from the boat on 9th July and finally 412 Bulwer's seen from Ventura on the last day, 10th July. On the last day (close to Madeira) we saw several dense roosting/feeding flocks up to 12 and 18 birds!

Besides the birds seen in flight from the boat Ventura we also had nice views of nesting ones and handheld birds on Selvagem Pequena and Selvagem Grande as well as calling birds at night.

Cory's Shearwater – *Calonectris diomedea borealis*

Seen daily in high numbers and in fact it was impossible to count correctly! Anyone who read this report and need photos on Cory's in the future should contact one of the photographs on the trip as they should possess thousands of photos on Cory's, both in flight and sitting! On Selvagem Grande we saw thousands of thousands, both seen and heard!

The estimated 14-15,000 pairs of Cory's Shearwaters breeding on the Selvagem Grande represent one of the largest colonies of this species (here *C. d. borealis*) in the world, but the total population for the island is more than this, as there may be an additional 30,000 non-breeding birds also present. Interestingly, breeding Cory's Shearwaters on the Selvagens visit their nests by day as well as by night, unlike other populations in the Macaronesian Islands.

Voice: You can hear both male and female calls on the Selvagens website, under the section "Seabird sounds".

Manx Shearwater – *Puffinus puffinus*

Surprisingly we didn't see any Manxies during our departure or arrival of Madeira. The only one seen was recorded from land on Selvagem Pequena in the evening on 7th July.

Little Shearwater – *Puffinus assimilis baroli*

At sea: Two seen in the morning on 7th July, about 40 kilometres from Selvagens. Three seen within 10 minutes of each other about 6 kms north of Selvagem Grande on 9th July. All of them was roosting/feeding at se and lifted when Ventura get to close to them.

At night: It is impossible to estimate the numbers we heard on Selvagem Grande in the evening/night on 8th July, but 50-100 sound reasonable. Note that about 2.000 pairs breed on Selvagem Grande!

Voice: Easy to recognize. A soft "laughingly" whistling drill recalling that of Whimbrel .In tempo like Madeiran Storm-petrel, but longer and more clear in tone.

Note: We (or more correctly Göran) was only managed to photograph one of the five Little Shearwaters we saw during the trip. Very few Little Shearwaters have ever been photographed in the Atlantic, but the bird photographed show a surprising underwing pattern. Most observations of Little Shearwaters off the

Canary Islands and Madeira have involved birds with comparatively narrow dark borders to the underwing (a diagnostic identification feature compared to Manx Shearwater). The small size, compact shape, weak bill and rounded head of the depicted bird all indicate that it is a Little Shearwater, but the entirely dark under-surfaces of the remiges and dark 'patagium' area toward the forearm on the bird is a so-far undocumented underwing pattern within the *baroli* population of Little Shearwater which breeds in this area. It is tempting to speculate that the photographed bird is actually an example of the Cape Verde form of Little Shearwater, *P. a. boydi*, despite the lack of dark undertail-coverts, but there are indications that *baroli*-types with a similar underwing pattern to this bird do occur on the Salvage Islands (F. Zino pers. comm.). Clearly, there is more to learn about this enigmatic seabird. (You will find photographs on the bird in the Birding World article or at Göran Ekström's photographic website; www.tristis.com).

White-faced Storm-petrel – *Pelagodroma marina hypoleuca*

At sea: One seen about 90 kilometres south of Madeira on 6th July. 109 birds counted between 07:00 and 11:45 on 7 July. At least 93 birds were seen during the seawatch from Pequena during two hours in the evening (18:00-20:00) on 7th July. On the third day, 8th July, 12 were seen from Pequena in the morning and 26 from the boat crossing between Pequena and Grande. On 9th July a total of 102 birds were seen from the boat within 50 kilometres from Selvagem Grande (= 5 hours travel by boat towards Madeira) and only six birds between 12:15 and 16:20 hours (which was the time for the last bird for the day seen). On our last day at sea, 10 July, we recorded one White-faced at 09:45 hours (about 60 kilometres from Madeira).

At night: Hundreds of hundreds seen in the dark at Selvagem Pequena (in the light of our torches). They were swarming like big moths all over the island and their breeding grounds. Several birds landed in front of us on the beach or on the deck of Ventura do Mar. It is impossible to describe the sight of hundreds of birds frozen in one sight with the flashlight!

ID at glance: Seeing the species from boat and from land is two completely different issues! If the sky is cloudy the sea will give you a greyish backdrop and the upperparts of the White-faced "melting" together with it and make it difficult to discover the species. The underpart is more contrastingly patterned and therefore easier to spot. It is interesting, from a boat you always see the frequently "jumps" from the birds passing. Instead of using their wings to get speed they seem to use their feet to push themselves forward regularly and then just keep sailing close to the surface. But from land it is very difficult to see these regular "jumps" (often done down in the swells) and the impression of flight action then differs much compared when seen from a boat. When seawatching from land at Pequena distant White-faced resembles much of small Manxies; the underpart pattern (white belly and underwing coverts in contrast to dark remiges) as well as the shearwater-like flight style, even if the bows were relatively high but shorter in length. From land the best ID character was the white belly contrasting to a black tail and secondly white underwing coverts against dark remiges. The species was difficult to spot if it only glided forward and showing the upperparts. It always seems to get close to the sea surface.

We saw a few different flight styles of the species from the boat. Most commonly was the gliding and jumping, but we regularly recorded a strange flight action which is difficult to describe in words; suddenly the birds start to whirl like a high-speed butterfly or a leaf by autumn. At last, the species is very typical in plumage and flight, so there would be no problem to identify it when seen from land or at sea.

Voice: The species are virtually silent when coming ashore to visit their nests, but one can sometimes hear a soft, barking "oooo" as they enter their nesting burrows. Another quiet call, squeaking call, is apparently given only when they bump into each other or other objects in the dark, heard now and then.

Madeiran Storm-petrel – *Oceanodroma castro*

At sea: In total we saw 13 birds, of which all offered close and nice views! In the afternoon on our first day at sea (6th July) we saw 9 birds (within 60-80 km south Madeira). The majority was discovered sitting on sea in front of the boat (three of them together with Bulwer's) and when the boat got closer they lifted and flying around the boat briefly before they disappeared. On our return we saw two Madeiran on 9th July (1 at 15:50 and 1 at 16:35 hours) and two on our last day at sea on 10th July (1 at 09:00 and 1 at 09:35 hours).

At night: Up to hundred were heard (+ many seen) in the evening and night on Selvagem Grande on 8th July. It is somewhat difficult to understand that this species (along with Little Shearwater) is so hard to see at sea, when they are so easy to hear (in high numbers) on their breeding grounds at night! Except

for 50-100 calling birds I saw 20-30 and also two sitting on the path in the lit of my headlight when walking upwards looking for a good spot to recording Little Shearwaters at Selvagem Grande on 8th July.

ID at glance: Madeiran Petrel is very like Leach's Petrel in size and plumage pattern but, as its alternative name 'Band-rumped Storm-petrel' well implies, its white rump patch is obviously narrower and extends more onto the sides of the rear flanks. The white rump-sides are clearly visible on birds resting on sea, when Leach's look all dark. In flight, Madeiran Petrel shows its black tail more than its white patch whereas, in Leach's, it is the broad white patch on the rump that dominates the impression of the rump and tail pattern. The tail is squarish and not forked as in Leach's, although this can sometimes be difficult to discern clearly in Leach's. All 13 of the Madeiran Petrels we saw at sea had a clearly visible pale band on the upperwing coverts, but it was not so distinct and conspicuous as in Leach's or Wilson's Petrel. Also the wing shape in Madeiran are less angled that in Leach's.

Voice: At night – when the species visiting their nests – it is very loudly and easy to hear. The most frequent call resembling of the sound when rubbing a wet finger against a window-glass; *kerr wheecha wheecha wheecha wheechahuh*. When I recorded their calls I also heard (and recorded) a short faint double-clicking *che-che* repeated frequently, probably a contact call from birds in nest. You can hear both calls on the Selvagens website, under the section "Seabird sounds".

Red-billed Tropicbird – *Phaethon aethereus*

One adult seen "hanging" over the boat (Ventura do Mar) in the evening on 9th July for a few minutes. After the very close view the bird took some wide sweeps around the boat before it headed eastwards. We had hoped to see this species, but it wasn't more than a dream. However, up to four birds were seen around the islands from late May to mid June 2005.

Purple Heron – *Ardea purpurea*

One seen coming in from the sea in south direction and heading for Selvagem Pequena, where it also landed, somewhere, in the morning on 8th July. A very unexpected sighting!

Eleonora's Falcon – *Falco eleonorae*

One immature pale morph were seen well for several minutes on Pequena in the afternoon on 7th July. Could it possible be the same bird which was recorded in the area on 10th June this year? Possibly a bird from the colony which breed on the small islets off Lanzarote (Canary Islands) about 180 kilometres south-east of Selvagens.

Quail – *Coturnix coturnix*

One passing the boat in high speed towards north in afternoon on 9th July. Seeing a migrating Quail in flight must be a rare experience for many birders? At the very first we thought that the bird was a little brown alcid from North America or something like that. The bird seem to fly in a straight direction towards Madeira!

Curlew Sandpiper – *Calidris ferruginea*

One seen together with Turnstones at Pequena 7-8th July.

Whimbrel – *Numenius phaeopus*

One heard and seen at Pequena on 7-8th July.

Turnstone – *Arenaria interpres*

At least 8 in one flock was seen on Pequena on 7th July.

Great Skua – *Stercorarius skua*

One following the boat for a couple of minutes in the afternoon on 9th July. The bird looked like a ordinary Bonxie and not one of the Antarctic/subantarctic species that may occur in these waters.

Atlantic Yellow-legged Herring Gull – *Larus michahellis atlantis*

We were happy to see very few of these "flying rats". Yellow-legged Gulls have become established on the archipelago only recently. They predate many of the other seabirds (even at night by moonlight) and, to protect the other species, the wardens control their numbers by collecting their eggs.

Lesser Black-backed Gull – *Larus fuscus graellsii*

One adult seen between Selvagem Pequena and Grande on 8th July when we using chum at sea.

Roseate Tern – *Sterna dougallii*

Two adults (and a possible juvenile) were seen along the shore of Selvagem Pequena together with Common Terns in the evening on 7th July. They was discovered by its typical call, which recalling that of Spotted Redshank. The birds were seen in a few minutes the they disappeared. About 15-20 par breed on the Selvagens Islands.

Common Tern – *Sterna hirundo*

A colony of about 40-50 pair breed on the south-western part of Selvagem Pequena. Many young had already fledged, but there was still many chicks in nests. We saw no terns at Selvagem Grande.

Sooty Tern – *Sterna fuscata*

One adult seen in the area (south-western tip) of Pequena where a Common Tern colony was located, close to the field station and the beach where we landed. The bird was seen in the afternoon on 7th July and in the morning on 8th. The bird offered many and close views and was easy to photograph. The bird was also heard calling frequently; recalling much of a faint and nasal Gull-billed Tern. The Sooty Tern has bred on Pequena once, but are recorded now and then during spring and summer.

Plain Swift – *Apus unicolor*

In total three were seen flying north on 9th and 10th July. Migrates or just feeding birds from Madeira?

Berthelot's Pipit – *Anthus berthelotii berthelotii*

3-4 pairs were seen on Selvagem Pequena on 7-8th July. At least three pair seen on Selvagem Grande on 8th July.

Plumage differences: The Berthelot's Pipits on the Selvagens Islands occurs in the Canarian form *A. b. berthelotii*, rather than in the Madeiran subspecies *A. berthelotii madeirensis*. However, it was interesting to see that the birds on Selvagem Pequena looked like ordinary Berthelot's, but on Selvagem Grande all birds we saw was slightly different from the experience we have of the species from Madeira and Canaries. On Grande the birds was more cold greyish in the upperpart primary colouration and had a even more distinct white supercilium.

Cetaceans

Atlantic Spotted Dolphin – *Stenella frontalis*

Several small schools was seen close to Madeira on the return on 10th July.

Bottlenose Dolphin – *Tursiops truncatus*

A close school of about 15-20 were seen bowriding close to the boat for about 15 minutes in the strait between Selvagem Pequena and Grande on 8th July.

Sei/Bryde's Whale – *Balaenoptera borealis/edeni*

At least two or three were seen close two Madeira on the return on 10th July.

Sea turtles

Loggerhead Turtle – *Caretta caretta*

A total of 12 was recorded during our five-day tour. All of them "paddling" at the sea surface close to and passing the boat. Two was seen together and the last one we saw, close to Madeira on 10th July, was a real huge one! Just wonder how old it was?

Reptiles

Selvagens Gecko – *Tarentola bischoffi*

We only saw this endemic species on Selvagem Grande, with great help from our guiding warden Isamberto Silva, who found them under stones on the high plateau of Grande.

Fishes

Besides the Tuna fish that Jorge catch and cooked a nice dinner of, we saw several flying fishes daily. Very annoying fishes as they very much recalling sailing White-faced close to the surface at the very first glimpse.

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Contacts

Hans Bister, Sweden: Hans.Bister@mrf.se

Bosse Carlsson, Sweden: bobird.carlsson@swipnet.se

Göran Ekström, Sweden: goran@tristis.com

Steve Gantlett, Britain: steve@birdingworld.co.uk

Niklas Holmström, Sweden: niklas@seawatching.net

Dan Zetterström, Sweden: danz@work.utfors.se