

Common and regular birds in the Azores.

Eurasian Wigeon, *Anas penelope*, Piadeira-comum

There are very few flocks of ducks in the Azores, and you normally only see just one or a few birds in the lakes. One of the more common species is the Eurasian Wigeon, sometimes seen in small flocks, and it can be found in lakes all over the archipelago. They seem to winter here, arriving mostly in late October or November and departing in early spring.

Eurasian Wigeons seem to outnumber the American Wigeon with at least three to one. Autumn and early winter birds are in young or eclipse plumages where detailed studies on head color, as well as great coverts and underwing colors should be checked to separate them from American Wigeons.

In the period 2001-2005 there were on the average at least 13 birds per year reported.

Eurasian Common Teal, *Anas crecca*, Marrequinho (Marrequinha)

This small duck occurs in all islands from September to April with a peak in midwinter. It is the most common duck in the Azores, and sometimes seen in the larger lakes in flocks exceeding 100 birds.

Most birds are in juvenile or winter plumage and difficult to separate from the American Green-winged Teal. The numbers of more easily separated adult males indicate that the vast majority of the birds are European, while the American counterpart seems to be comparatively rare.

Except for larger lakes, this duck also thrives in very small and more temporary wetlands. The number of wintering birds fluctuates highly between years, and just counts a few individuals in poor years.

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*, Pato-real

This is one of the more common and well known ducks in the northern hemisphere, but in the Azores only a rather scarce winter guest. Mallards have been breeding on a number of occasions in Flores and maybe on Corvo, but this was more often a long time ago. In recent years breeding has been confirmed only in a few occasions, and some have been involving hybridization with American Black Duck *Anas rubripes*.

Migrating Mallards arrive from September, highest numbers seem to be in midwinter, and most are leaving in early spring. They have been reported from all islands in singles, pairs or more rarely in flocks with up to ten birds.

Beware of the very similar but normally much larger domestic Mallard-type ducks that are present in many of the larger lakes. There are also many Black Duck hybrids around, the males with more or less green on the head, and the females dark with aberrations in wing pattern, tail feathers and bill.

Ring-necked Duck, *Aythya collaris*, Caturro

Of the diving ducks wintering in the lakes of Azores, the North American Ring-necked Duck is the most common. It differs from its European counterpart, the Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, by a number of characters of which the triangular head shape is visible in all plumages.

Ring-necked Duck is a regular visitor from mainly October-March, but early birds occur already in late August or September, and some individuals stay on until May. During the winters 2004-2009 an average of 21 birds has been recorded all over the islands.

They mostly favor lakes in Flores or São Miguel, and are most easy to see in the twin lakes Lagoa Azul/Verde or in Lagoa das Furnas. Here they often stay together in small flocks, often together with other diving ducks.

[More details about Ring-necked Duck.](#) Or go to **Rare birds** in the Azores (including references).

Red-legged Partridge, *Alectoris rufa*, Perdiz-comum

Very little is known about the status of this bird in the Azores today. It has been introduced to the islands in a number of occasions, and was formally known to breed on at least Santa Maria and Pico. Introductions to São Miguel and Terceira seem to have failed and there are only a few observations there in later years.

The birds were imported for hunting, and so often became very shy and difficult to see. There are observations of single birds as well as groups both in Pico and Santa Maria from the 1970s and 1980s. In the years after 2000 there are a few but regular observations in northwestern Pico where there seem to be a small but stable population. Recently there have been several observations of single birds in Graciosa, but if these birds are from an established population or from new releases is not known.

The lack of present time knowledge makes every new sighting valuable and interesting!

Common Quail, *Coturnix c. conturbans*, Codorniz

This is a common resident breeder in open fields, meadows and pasture land. It is in most places much hunted, and the numbers seem to vary according to hunting pressure as well as to actual land use and also between years. Even if it is a shy bird you will often flush it, or if you whistle the right tone in breeding season you might attract it almost down to your feet.

The Common Quail is reported from all islands, but seems to be very rare on Flores and Corvo. The local population is probably non migratory, but migrating birds from other populations are supposed to reach the islands.

There are different theories about races involved, where some say the Azorean birds consists of the endemic race *conturbans* closely resembling the African race *africana*. On the other hand, there are observations of migrating birds of the mainland race *coturnix*. How this mixture can result in a pure endemic race is a difficult question. Especially combined with the speculations about the species have been introduced just a few hundred years ago.

Bulwer's Petrel, *Bulweria bulwerii*, Alma-negra

This long-winged and long-tailed dark petrel is a rare breeder in the Azores. Population size is probably about 50 breeding pairs. Santa Maria is the only known breeding location, although breeding is also suspected on Graciosa and São Jorge.

They are present from early May to late September, and you may see one or two when sea-watching, or from the São Miguel-Santa Maria ferry. Since the Bulwer's are highly pelagic and stays far from the shore the best option to see them is a boat trip, and since there are larger populations of this bird on Madeira the best waters would be in the southeast.

Cory's Shearwater, *Calonectris diomedea borealis*, Cagarro (Pardela-de-bico-amarelo)

The most abundant of all seabirds in the Azores, seen from all shores except during winter when very few are around. Breeding birds return to their colonies in early spring and the very long breeding period continues into late autumn. The Azorean colonies hold more than half of the entire Atlantic population.

Counting them is difficult and estimations of the total number vary from a bit under 100.000 pairs to almost the double. The species seems to be declining, and in spite of the high numbers it is considered vulnerable.

The colonies are distributed all over the archipelago, and you will often see a steady passage rounding the peninsulas. Sometimes you can count up to 100' per minute. They are rather noisy and often heard in the nights on their way back and forth to their breeding grounds.

In late autumn you might find "stranded" Cory's in odd places like on roads and parking lots. This is probably young shearwaters taking their first flight out from the nest. Please help them back to the water!

The race breeding in the Atlantic is *Calonectris diomedea borealis*, which is different from the Mediterranean *C. d. diomedea*. Keep an eye open after the Cape Verde Shearwater, *Calonectris (diomedea) edwardsii*, sometimes treated as a full species, a bird that might turn up here. This bird is slightly smaller with shorter wings, longer tail, slimmer and greyish bill and is darker on cap, neck and mantle.

Great Shearwater, *Puffinus gravis*, Pardela-de-barrete (Cagarro-de-coleira)

Most of the Great Shearwaters pass the Azores in late August and in September on their migration loop back to the breeding islands in the South Atlantic. At this time of the year you might see them in hundreds, but you might also find the odd one later in the autumn. There is unfortunately very little data to rely on but at least 100 per hour were passing Flores in mid-September 2001. At the same time there were similar amounts between Pico and Terceira, and at Mosteiros on São Miguel. More consequent sea-watching counts from this time of the year are needed to get more reliable figures.

To find it look among the Cory's for a rather slim, more black and white shearwater with a white collar.

Sooty Shearwater, *Puffinus griseus*, Pardela-preta

This is a regular visitor from the southern oceans. Mainly in small numbers and a little scattered in time even if most are seen in September. This is a mostly dark shearwater, except for pale center of under wing, and a little smaller than Cory's Shearwater. It can be seen out at sea and when sea watching from any of the islands, but they mostly occur one by one and you have to wait for the next to come.

Except for the regular appearance in late August to early October, there are a few scattered observations from the winter months. Since very few counts of seabirds have been carried out, the real numbers are unknown – but there are at least a few dozen passing each autumn.

Manx Shearwater, *Puffinus puffinus*, Fura-bucho-do-Atlântico (Estapagado)

Most of the Manx Shearwaters you will see both at sea and while sea-watching from land are probably migrant birds from the larger colonies in the UK and Ireland. But there is also a small breeding population of around 200 pairs in the Azores, the major part of them in Corvo and Flores.

After Cory's this is often the easiest shearwater to find, with a few around on most prolonged sea watches. Beware of confusion with rare Balearic Shearwaters *Puffinus mauretanicus* or the resident Little Shearwaters *Puffinus assimilis*, the latter however with a more flapping flight low over the surface.

Macaronesian Shearwater, *Puffinus baroli*, Pintainho (Fruelho)

Little Shearwaters were first discovered to breed within the archipelago in the early 1950s and the population is currently estimated at a minimum of 700 pairs. They are found around all major islands, even if there are very few on São Miguel and breeding has never been observed on Terceira. Laying takes place in late winter; most chicks fledge in May, and they stay in the neighborhood of the breeding colonies all year around except in June and July.

Little Shearwater is obviously smaller, shorter and more compact than Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*. Since there are not many of them you often need a few hours of scanning the seas before you can pick one out for certain. The subspecies occurring in Azorean waters is *baroli*, which differs from the Cape Verde form *boydi* by all white under tail coverts, black instead of brownish upperparts, and at close distance you can see the dark eye isolated below the dark cap.

Band-rumped Storm-petrel, *Oceanodroma castro*, Roquinho (Angelito)

Breeding was not confirmed until the early 1990s, probably due to this species' secretive hole-nesting habit on remote islands, and exclusively nocturnal behavior. As far as known, there is a population of about a thousand pairs, with major colonies on small islets off Graciosa and Santa Maria.

Recent work has revealed two seasonal populations, one summer breeding (May-June) and one winter breeding (Oct-Nov). Furthermore, morphological characters, and morph metric measurements suggest that there might in fact be two different species.

There are extremely few day time sightings near the islands, and you probably have to try the ferry routes or chartering a fishing boat for a night visit close to the breeding grounds to see (or hear) the birds. If you are lucky to find any storm-petrel over the seas, it is probably one of three species that occur rather regularly in Azorean waters; Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*, or Madeiran Storm-petrel. The Madeiran is a little more broad- and short-winged, the tail is square cut, the white rump is broader than long, and the flight are rather shearwater-like. Beware of Wilson's that not always shows long legs where feet are beyond tail.

Northern Gannet, *Morus bassanus*, Alcatraz (Ganso-patola-comum)

Northern Gannet is both a passage migrant and a regular winter visitor. Fishing birds are regular in small numbers in winter all over the archipelago and are easy to see at most seabird lookouts like in Mosteiros on São Miguel.

It is rather common in migration periods mostly in September-November or February-March, and cold northerly winds in mid-November and in February have rendered counts of several dozens. Non breeding individuals of this large seabirds can however be seen in any month of the year, even if summer individuals are very rare.

This large seabird nests in large colonies on cliffs in the North Atlantic. It is a good flyer and dives spectacularly straight into water at high speed, but it is rather clumsy when it comes to takeoffs and landings.

Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*, Carraceiro (Garça-boieira)

This is the only white egret in Azores occurring in larger flocks. Up to 40 have been seen together of this widespread egret. Most new arrivals seem to turn up either in late autumn or in winter, and it is not known from where they all come. They might come from America, from Europe, or maybe from both sides?

Most birds have favored São Miguel, but these small yellow-billed egrets have been found on all islands where they are seen both along the coastlines and inland feeding on moisture fields, or resting at small ponds or wetlands.

The number of birds varies from year to year, but seems to be increasing during the last years. Some groups have lately also been staying for several months occupying a winter territory.

[More details about Cattle Egret.](#) Or go to **Rare birds** in the Azores (including references).

Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*, Garça-branca-pequena

You will probably see most small white egrets in the larger harbors, or along rocky shores. But sometimes also in the more vegetated lakes, or in temporally wet fields. Most of these small egrets would be Little Egrets, which normally are one by one and rarely more than a very few together. A larger flock with small white egrets would probably be Cattle Egrets with short yellow bills. Check all Little Egrets carefully for the almost identical but rare Snowy Egret or Western Reef Heron. There are even sightings of confusing small white egrets that perhaps could be hybrids.

The Little Egret is found on all islands, and maybe is a little more common in the east. An estimation from available reports will be around 50-150 individuals in winter. Since bird watching is very low in the Azores in summer time, and there is very little data to rely on, the summer population still remains unknown.

Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea*, Garça-real

A few Grey Herons seem to be around on most islands, but they are probably not breeding, although breeding has taken place on Santa Maria. You will find them mostly one by one, in harbors and on costal rocks as well as far inland along creeks and in the lakes. They are a little more common on São Miguel where you sometimes can find them in small groups, especially in the larger lakes. The largest group that is reported so far seems to be 24 at Lagoa das Furnas.

As in many species the summer population is poorly known, but there is an increase in autumn when mostly young birds arrive from mainland Europe. An estimation from available reports will be around 150-300 individuals in winter.

Common Buzzard, *Buteo buteo rothschildi*, Milhafre (Águia-de-asa-redonda)

The Common Buzzard is the only resident bird of prey in the Azores. It is a fairly common breeder in the central and eastern islands, but is missing on Flores and Corvo.

The local race *rothschildi* is a rather small buzzard, mostly dark but with variation in colors like its mainland counterpart. They are widespread from the coast to areas in the high mountains. You will see them soaring up in the sky, sitting on lookout posts waiting for a prey, or walking on the meadows searching for worms.

This bird is said to be responsible for the name of the archipelago - Açores. When the first sailors reached the islands long ago, they saw this soaring bird that they mistook for a goshawk – which is "açor" or in plural "açores". The bird on the Azores flag also more resembles the Common Buzzard – or "Milhafre".

Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus*, Galinha-d'água

A few birds of this rare breeder can be heard or seen on any time of the year. There are not many of them, and the best places are just northwest of the bridge between Lagoa Azul and Lagoa Verde in São Miguel, or in the ponds at Praia da Vitoria in Terceira.

The Common Moorhen is breeding on at least four of the islands; Santa Maria, São Miguel, Terceira and Flores. Since the bird is rather secretive and only needs small wetlands, it might possibly even breed on one or two of the other islands. The only really stable populations seem to be on São Miguel and Terceira, and the total population is probably just 10-20 pairs.

Eurasian Coot, *Fulica atra*, Galeirão-comum

This is a rather common winter visitor, which is found on most islands with the highest numbers in the larger lakes at Sete Cidades and Furnas in São Miguel.

The Eurasian Coot has been breeding in the islands, and could probably do so even today (in 2012 both at Lagoa Azul and in Paul da Praia). Some first-year birds have been seen in Lagoa Azul early in the autumn, but if these are resident or migrant birds are not verified.

Be sure to check all the coots for the rare American one with a different bill and white under tail coverts. The total winter population counts around 50-100 individuals.

Common Ringed Plover, *Charadrius hiaticula*, Borrelho-grande-de-coleira

There are four small *Charadrius* plovers in the Azores. Of these the Common Ringed Plover is the second most numerous but the one that is most widespread. It is most abundant in migration but there are also many staying for the winter, and a few observations from summer. It can be seen on all islands mostly along the coastline, but sometimes also at inland wetlands and fields.

It is normally just one or a few birds around, and not in larger flocks like the dark-legged Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*. The winter population is hard to count since the birds are scattered to so many places, but is probably a bit lower than a hundred.

Common Ringed Plover can be hard to tell from the rare Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* (long-legged and without obvious white wing-bar), or the very alike American Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus* which in some periods can outnumber the Common Ringed Plover. To separate them, if you not are happy to hear their different calls, you will need detail studies of toes and markings at base of bill.

Kentish Plover, *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Borrelho-de-coleira-interrompida

Kentish Plover is maybe the most common wader in the Azores. In any way it is at least the wader occurring in the largest flocks. They are present in numbers all year around at Cabo da Praia, often exceeding a hundred birds and occasionally more than double of that. Even more Kentish Plovers are often seen from at least September to March on or around the runway at Santa Maria airport. The record here seems to be 1 800 birds at 2012-12-08. In all other islands these small plovers on the contrary are just scarce or even rare.

They have been proved breeding only on Terceira, Graciosa and Santa Maria, which also seem logic taken into consideration the areas with suitable habitat. The number of confirmed broods is very low, and a more thorough count in the breeding period might well render both higher figures as well as discovers of the odd breeding pair in other islands.

Grey Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*, Tarambola-cinzenta

This is one of the more widespread waders that regularly are visiting the Azores. Since this bird is breeding circumpolar in the far north, this could mean that migrating birds could come from both northwest and northeast. Adult early and late migrants are in bright black and white plumage, while young and wintering birds are mostly grey (compare the American name Black-bellied Plover with the English Grey Plover).

First birds seem to arrive from late July, but more are arriving later in autumn, and some are staying all winter, with late dwellers far into late spring or early summer. A few new birds seem to arrive in late spring, which would be birds migrating north from their winter quarters in Africa.

Single birds or small flocks have been seen on all islands, mostly along the coast lines. Here they are found in different habitats like sandy shores, airfields, rocky coasts, small islets, and piers in harbors. Now and then larger flocks with several dozen are occurring mainly in Santa Maria and Terceira.

Northern Lapwing, *Vanellus vanellus*, Abibe-comum

This is a regular but scarce winter visitor to all islands. Normally there are most single birds or small flocks, but now and then they occur in higher numbers in connection with winter storms.

First autumn birds appear in late October or in November, some staying all winter, and latest spring observations are from March.

The Lapwings favors flat agricultural areas and the majority of all observations are from São Miguel.

In recent years the winter population seems to be just a few up to around 40 birds, but there are older reports in connection with winter storms talking about hundreds of Lapwings.

Red Knot, *Calidris canutus*, Seixoeira

This is a scarce passage migrant in the Azores mainly in the autumn. First birds arrive in late July, and most are passing through in August-November. A few are staying over winter, and the last birds can leave so late as in early June.

This long flying migrant could come from breeding grounds in Canada, Greenland or central Siberia. New arrivals also seem to turn up after westerly as well as easterly winds, and they have been seen on all islands. They occur in the Azores normally not so far from the coasts in just single birds or small flocks, but occasionally with up to 20 birds together.

Early autumn and late spring individuals of this bulky and large *Calidris* show more or less complete red summer plumage, while young and winter birds appear in a dull grey plumage.

Sanderling, *Calidris alba*, Pilrito-das-praias

In migration and winter Sanderlings are both common and widespread along the coasts. They prefer lower lying coastal areas such as the quarry at Cabo da Praia, or sandy beaches. But you will also find them on rocky coasts, and running along piers in the harbors.

This is the most common *Calidris* wader in the Azores and since they breed throughout all arctic, birds might come from both west and east. They arrive from July onwards and most are leaving in mid spring, even if there are a few observations from both May and June.

They are often encountered in singles or small groups, but larger flocks of around 40-80 birds have been seen in different places. Young and winter birds appear in a dull grey plumage, but early autumn and late spring individuals may show some of the summer plumage with red head and breast.

Little Stint, *Calidris minuta*, Pilrito-pequeno

This is a rare passage migrant in the Azores mainly in the autumn. First birds arrive in August, and most are passing through in September-November. A few are staying over winter, leaving in late spring.

Birds have been seen on all islands, mostly one by one or in small flocks. The only place where they are regular for some longer periods seems to be Cabo da Praia on Terceira. Here you will find a few on almost every autumn or winter visit.

This species arriving from the breeding areas far in the northeast can be difficult to separate from its North American relative the Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*. Both are occurring in same areas and habitats, but Little Stints shows more rufous in the feathers, and often have white lines forming a "V" on the back. Normally the Little Stint outnumbers the Semipalmated with at least two to one, but you have better check them carefully.

White-rumped Sandpiper, *Calidris fuscicollis*, Pilrito-de-uropigio-branco (Pilrito de Bonaparte)

In migration and winter White-rumped Sandpipers are regular and widespread in the Azores. They prefer lower lying coastal areas such as the quarry at Cabo da Praia, or coastal beaches. But you will also find them in inland fields and lakes.

This is one of the three most common *Calidris* waders in the Azores, arriving from the breeding grounds in northern Canada. Most birds arrive from late August to October, and many seem to move on in late autumn or early winter. Only a very few are seen in spring or early summer. The numbers of reported individuals of this long-winged wader vary a great deal between years, where good winters like 2005-2006 and 2007-2008 have produced around a hundred, and poor years like 2006-2007 and 2008-2009 only counted in average 23 birds.

They are mostly encountered in singles or small groups, but larger flocks of around 30-50 birds have been seen in different places. Any large flock of *Calidris* wader in the Azores would probably be either Sanderlings or White-rumped Sandpipers.

[More details about White-rumped Sandpiper.](#) Or go to **Rare birds** in the Azores (including references).

Curlew Sandpiper, *Calidris ferruginea*, Pilrito-de-bico-comprido

This is a scarce passage migrant in the Azores mainly in the autumn. First birds arrive in late July, and most are passing through in August-November. A few are staying over winter, leaving in late spring.

Birds have been seen on most islands, mostly one by one but now and then in flocks of 5-10. The only place where they are regular for some longer periods seems to be Cabo da Praia on Terceira. Here you will find a few on almost every autumn or winter visit.

The Curlew Sandpiper has been seen mostly along coast but also at inland fields and shores of crater lakes. Early autumn and late spring birds show more or less complete red summer plumage, while young and winter birds appear in a dull grey plumage.

Dunlin, *Calidris alpina*, Pilrito-de-peito-preto

In migration and winter Dunlins are both common and widespread in the Azores. They prefer lower lying coastal areas such as the quarry at Cabo da Praia, or coastal beaches. But you will also find them in inland fields and lakes.

This is next to Sanderling the most common *Calidris* wader in the Azores and since they breed throughout arctic birds might come from both west and east. Not much attention has been drawn to the races involved but at least north-eastern *alpina*, northern *schinzii*, and Greenland *arctica* seem to be present.

First autumn birds arrive in late July, the majority migrating through but a few are staying over winter and leave from mid spring to early summer.

They are often encountered just in singles or small groups, and larger flocks with more than 15-20 birds have so far not been reported. Any large flock of *Calidris* waders would probably be either Sanderlings or White-rumped Sandpipers.

Ruff, *Philomachus pugnax*, Combatente

This is a regular but rather rare migrant from northeast, and a winter visitor seen on most islands. They favor flat agricultural areas and the majority of all observations are from inland localities, but it also is a regular guest at Cabo da Praia.

Normally there are most single birds, but now and then they occur in small flocks with up to 5-10 individuals. First autumn birds appear in July-August with some staying all winter. There are also many late spring observations which indicate a passage of northbound migrants.

Since the majority of the birds are in their rather plain juvenile or winter plumage, and mostly appear in areas which few bird watchers visit, it is difficult to state the number of birds involved. But judging from the available data the yearly total is probably lower than a hundred birds.

Common Snipe, *Gallinago gallinago*, Narceja-comum

This is a scarce or rare breeder, which can be found in the wet moor-like areas in many of the islands. Confirmation of breeding is still missing for Santa Maria and Graciosa, but on the other isles the population was estimated 2005 to be 378-418 pairs.

Loss of breeding habitats mainly due to forestation, and in some areas a very intense hunting has led to fears for a too hard pressure leading to extinction. This is probably already a danger in São Miguel.

In migration and winter the breeding population is mixed with snipes coming in from the north. Among these is the subspecies *delicata* encountered, of many now considered a separate species – Wilson's Snipe.

Eurasian Woodcock, *Scolopax rusticola*, Galinhola

The Woodcock population was probably larger in earlier days, now declining in many areas due to hunting extended even in breeding season. They are still found in numbers in most of the islands, but are very rare or missing in Graciosa, Santa Maria and in parts of São Miguel.

This mostly night active bird is found in wooded areas where you might accidentally flush it, or observe it displaying late in the evening. In some places you might even find it walking on the ground along the roads.

The size of the population for this non migratory breeding bird is not known. It can be rather scarce in some areas but abundant and hard to miss in areas like Fajã Grande in Flores or in the eastern wooded ravines in Corvo.

Black-tailed Godwit, *Limosa limosa*, Milherango

There are three species of *Limosa* waders that have been reported from the Azores. Of these the Black-tailed Godwit is the most regular, occurring both as singles or in small flocks up to around 10 birds.

They are however, as far as known at the moment, regular just on Terceira and São Miguel, and found only as stragglers in two other islands. Both coastal and inland beaches are visited, and most are just passing through in migration. A few have been staying all winter, and since young birds have been seen all summer there are observations from every month.

Most birds are of the Icelandic race *islandica*, which are more reddish, and have shorter legs and bills. But a few of the north-eastern nominate race *limosa* have also been encountered.

Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus*, Maçarico-galego

A rather common winter visitor, that is found almost anywhere along the rocky coasts all over the migration period. Whimbrels breed in northernmost Europe and winters mainly in Africa, but many seem to fly far out at sea and end up in the Azores. Here they are one of the most well spread waders, where almost any beach seems to host one or two birds walking around looking for food among the small pools and lava blocks.

Mostly there are single birds, or small groups, but now and then little larger gatherings in popular areas like the quarry at Cabo da Praia or in Ponta Delgada airport or east of the harbor. Here flocks of 15-20 birds are regular.

Check the birds carefully, and you might find one with a dark rump, which is the subspecies *hudsonicus* from the Nearctic.

Common Greenshank, *Tringa nebularia*, Perna-verde-comum

This is by far the most common *Tringa* wader in the Azores. Still the numbers are low since they mostly occur one by one or rarely a few together. There are probably less than a hundred visiting each year.

This migrant from northeast is very widespread during winter and migration. They are seen on all islands along rocky coasts or at inland lakes, and are most numerous in late summer and autumn. A few stay over winter and leave in mid spring.

Ruddy Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres*, Rola-do-mar

This is one of the most numerous wader species you can find in the Azores, and absolutely the most widespread. You will mostly find them on the rocky coasts all over the islands, and this is probably the first wader you will see when visiting a harbor. But they also move a bit inland visiting grazed fields, airports, and shallow wetlands. Sometimes they gather in large flocks with 50-100 birds, but away from Cabo da Praia and a few other places there is normally just small flocks or singles around.

This is a migrating bird from the northern parts of Europe and America, and numbers build up in the autumns. Many stay for the winter, but there are also many younger birds remaining all summer. This has led to speculations about breeding in the Azores, but there is yet no evidence for that.

Most birds seem to be of the nominate race *interpres* while a few show characters of the true American race *morinella*, which adult birds are smaller, have less dark crown streaking, and have more deep chestnut-red and less black on coverts and scapulars.

Black-headed Gull, *Larus ridibundus*, Guincho

The Black-headed Gull is mostly a winter visitor to the Azores, arriving from September onwards and leaving in March and April. But there are also a few observations of birds staying all summer.

In daytime it is often seen foraging on inland fields, on beaches, or over the seas, at evenings gathering to roost at special places like large harbors. Flocks of up to about 300 birds have been seen winter time in both Praia da Vitória and Ponta Delgada.

Other small gulls occur now and then with the Black-headed Gulls, and you have better check them for the odd Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* or Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia*.

Ring-billed Gull, *Larus delawarensis*, Gaivota-de-bico-riscado (Gaivota do Delaware)

This Nearctic gull has long been known from the Azores, with at least a few dozen each winter. The first birds turns up in October, the maximum is reached in midwinter, and most leave in early spring with a few lingering into April and May.

Among single birds the first-winters dominate, and they are most often encountered around the harbors. These medium sized gulls sometimes occur in flocks up to around 50, but when in flocks there are mostly adult birds. Many of these are spread out during day time, but are easier to see when they arrive for the evening roost in harbors like in Praia da Vitória or Ponta Delgada.

The numbers fluctuate between winters, and they seem to be more frequent in islands with larger harbors. But since many of the smaller islands have very few visiting bird watchers during winter the total distribution is still not very well known.

Ring-billed Gulls *Larus delawarensis* in the Azores. Numbers in seven different winters.

First figure = number of reports Second figure = number of individuals Third figure = maximum number of individuals together.

Islands	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012
Corvo	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(3-3-1)	(1-1-1)	(8-8-1)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)
Flores	(10-12-2)	(7-9-2)	(13-15-2)	(13-15-2)	(9-10-2)	(0-0-0)	(8-8-1)
Faial	(3-3-1)	(4-5-2)	(6-9-2)	(3-3-1)	(6-10-3)	(3-6-3)	(0-0-0)
Pico	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(1-2-2)	(0-0-0)
São Jorge	(0-0-0)	(1-1-1)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)
Graciosa	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(1-1-1)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)
Terceira	(6-26-17)	(11-182-28)	(4-39-19)	(7-50-15)	(34-358-24)	(43-567-34)	(27-212-19)
São Miguel	(16-32-4)	(48-115-5)	(28-47-12)	(26-27-1)	(21-37-5)	(24-26-2)	(1-1-1)
Santa Maria	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)	(0-0-0)
All Azores	(35-73-24)	(71-312-38)	(55-114-37)	(50-96-20)	(78-423-35)	(71-601-41)	(36-221-21)

Lesser Black-backed Gull, *Larus fuscus*, Gaivota-d'asa-escura

This gull with the size of the Yellow-legged Gulls is a regular visitor to all islands, but not in very high numbers. Most birds are encountered on the central and eastern islands, where places like larger harbors in Ponta Delgada and Praia da Vitória are favorites. But roosting flocks also occurs on many of the beaches on São Miguel and sometimes even in the larger crater lakes.

Older birds seem to dominate, and both races *gracillii* and *intermedius* occur – *gracillii* dominating. Adult birds of both races are a little darker on the mantle and upper wing than Yellow-legged Gulls, *intermedius* being the darkest and *gracillii* the one most near to Yellow-legged. They have probably increased in later years

corresponding to their overall increase and range expansion in north Western Europe.

Both single birds as well as flocks occur in migration and some seem to stay all winter. The total winter population is a few hundred birds, with the roosting flocks often counting 20-80 birds. The first autumn birds arrive in September, probably accumulating in late autumn, and they seem to depart in early spring.

European Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus*, Gaivota-prateada

The Herring Gull seems to be a rare but regular winter visitor to the Azores. This northern relative to the local Yellow-legged Gulls have previously not been much taken into consideration since it for long time been both doubtful, difficult and for many uninteresting to separate them. There is now much new knowledge about identification of larger gulls, but there are still very few bird watchers having the interest in or time to focus on these birds.

Never the less there are sightings reported from all over the archipelago, mostly in midwinter and mostly younger birds. They seem to have the same favorite areas as other large gulls, but they seem also to visit rubbish dumps/landfills rather frequently.

Judging from the still rather few and scattered observations there are not many around, and even the Great Black-backed Gull seem to outnumber them. Depending on the weather and the amount of northerly winds it is difficult to judge the numbers, but there are probably up to 20 birds around most winters – the majority of them probably of the north-western race *argenteus*.

Yellow-legged Gull, *Larus michahellis atlantis*, Gaivota-de-patas-amarelas

This is the only breeding gull in the Azores, present all year around. It is common everywhere around the coasts, and can be seen in large gatherings in harbors, at rubbish dumps or landfills, and in the greater crater lakes. The breeding population is increasing, probably due to increase in refuse production and its availability. It is a colony breeder all over the islands (4249 pairs counted in 2004), with the largest colonies at Ilhéu do Topo off São Jorge, and Lagoa do Fogo in São Miguel.

Breeding Yellow-legged Gulls in the Azores are of the local race *atlantis*, which differ from the continental *michahellis* in many ways. Adult birds have slate dark upperparts almost similar to the *graellsii* Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Winter birds show a heavily dark-spotted head creating a hooded appearance more like Herring Gulls races *smithsonianus* or *argentatus* than *michahellis*. Also younger birds are much darker looking often more similar to *smithsonianus* than to *michahellis*. In winter there are a lesser number of other large gulls visiting the Azores, and among these there are normally a few *m. michahellis* from the mainland.

Great Black-backed Gull, *Larus marinus*, Alcatraz-comum (Gaivota-grande)

This large gull is a regular winter visitor on all islands, but not in any high numbers. The total winter population is around 50-100 birds, with the largest aggregations rarely more than ten birds.

First and second winter birds dominate, but also older and full adult birds occur. Most birds are seen together with groups of other large gulls, where larger harbors like in Ponta Delgada and Praia da Vitória are favorable places.

The first autumn birds arrive in September, most are coming later up to midwinter especially with cold northerly winds, and they seem to depart in early spring. A few birds have been reported even spending the summer in the Azores.

Black-legged Kittiwake, *Rissa tridactyla*, Gaivota-tridáctila

Especially in winters with much cold northerly winds this small gull can be rather common in Azorean waters. This is a colony breeder in high cliffs in the northern Atlantic and very attached to active fishing harbors. Still they are rarely entering the Azorean harbors or rest on the cliffs, and most are seen far out at sea or flying along the coasts.

The first birds arrive in October, most are seen in midwinter, and there are very few observations after April. This is globally the most numerous of all gulls, and since their winter range normally ends in Azorean waters a spell of cold and northerly winds could bring large number of birds. Sea watching in midwinter would normally gain a few up to one or two hundreds a day, with young birds slightly dominating.

Roseate Tern, *Sterna dougallii*, Gaivina-rosada (Garajau Rosado)

The majority of the west Palearctic population of this long-tailed white tern breeds in the Azores. Most birds arrive from the wintering grounds in April and May, and the return migration starts in late August with a few birds lingering later in the autumn.

The total population at up to a 1000 breeding pairs is well distributed over most of the islands. They often breed in mixed colonies together with the more numerous Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*.

The Roseate's can often be tricky to sort out among all the much alike Common Terns. Especially in nonbreeding plumage when the "Spotted Redshank"-like call "chiv-ik" is a distinctive and helpful clue to the identity.

Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo*, Gaivina-comum

This is the most abundant tern in the archipelago, and you will find them around all the islands. They outnumber the Roseate Tern by four to one, with a population up to 4 000 pairs. They have been found breeding in quite different habitats like steep cliffs as well as in more traditional low shores or islets, and even inland at crater lakes.

The Common Tern normally arrives earlier than the Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* in spring, and also remains roosting in the harbors far into the late autumn.

Common Pigeon, *Columba livia*, Pombo-das-rochas

The number of pure Rock Doves is uncertain since many colonies are mixed with Feral Pigeons. The dark subspecies *atlantis* in the Azores is the same as in Madeira, but different from the mainland as well as the Canaries. Since they interbreed with the Feral Pigeons, the composition of the free breeding population is hard to tell.

Pure wild individuals of many subspecies show a distinct white rump, pale grey mantle and upper wing plus two black bars across secondaries. But the *atlantis* birds are over all much darker which make them more look like many Feral Pigeons, and according to some they might be derived from feral stock.

They are very numerous breeders all over the archipelago, from remote shoreline cliffs to inland buildings. In towns or even in most of the larger islands very few pure *atlantis* seem to be present. It is instead easier to find *atlantis* birds in the smaller islands, in remote breeding colonies on islets or in cliffs facing the sea.

Common Wood Pigeon, *Columba palumbus azorica*, Pombo-torcaz

This bird is spread all over the islands, where it is found in the more wooded areas. It is common on Pico, São Jorge, Terceira and São Miguel, but scarce or rare on all the others. It has during later years spread to Flores where there now exists a small population. Probably birds from there have also been seen on Corvo. The Woodpigeons are very secretive probably due to a sometime rather intense hunting.

The Woodpigeons in the Azores are of the endemic subspecies *azorica*, where especially the males are rather dark slate-grey with a deeper and more vinous color on the chest. You will encounter them mostly one by one, but outside breeding season they sometimes gather in large flocks.

Long-eared Owl, *Asio otus*, Bufo-pequeno

Scarce or rare breeder on most of the islands, but seems to be missing on Flores and Corvo. The Long-eared Owl is a very secretive and apparently much silent owl in the Azores, with most observations near places often visited by man. The owl is spread over many islands where there is seemingly lot of suitable habitats, and the pressure from potential predators seems low. This all points to a possibility of a rather large population, but extremely little is known about breeding Long-eared Owls in the Azores.

Since the ornithological activity in the Azores is low in the breeding season and almost no night censuses listening for food begging nestlings has been carried out the real number of breeding pairs is still not known.

Grey Wagtail, *Motacilla cinerea patriciae*, Alvéola-cinzenta

This grey and yellow, short-legged and long-tailed Wagtail of the endemic subspecies *patriciae* is a resident and regular breeder in all the islands. It is very common and widespread, and is occupying a number of niches where you normally not expect it to be. This is probably due to the fact that there is no competition from pipits or other wagtail species in the Azores.

They are normally not in flocks but sometimes in breeding time you might encounter a few together in territorial fights or in a family group. You will see them daily, all the way from the harbors and coastline high up in the mountains. They like the open roads in the countryside, and when driving you will often get a glimpse of a long tail with white markings when they fly off.

European Robin, *Erithacus rubecula*, Pisco-de-peito-ruivo

European Robins are well known Azorean breeding birds, often being obvious around houses and gardens. They are however common in all areas with woods and in areas with bushes or trees, from the coastline all the way high up in mountains. These permanent residents are mostly encountered one by one or in pairs, and even if they are common the total numbers are much lower than in the very abundant Chaffinch or Canary.

They are for some unknown reason missing on Flores and Corvo, and any sighting there would probably more likely be of a migrating bird from north-eastern Europe.

Some authors think that the robins in the Azores may be different from the European nominate race *rubecula* but no real studies have been carried out. The Azorean birds are at least a little more of bright red on the breast.

Northern Wheatear, *Oenanthe oenanthe*, Chasco-cinzento

The Northern Wheatear is a regular passage migrant, where birds of the Greenland race *leucorhoa* use the Azores for a stop-over on their way to and from the winter quarters in Africa. These birds are possibly mixed with smaller European birds of the nominate race *oenanthe*. Although there is no in hand confirmation, there are a few probable sightings of these birds mainly from the autumns.

A few Northern Wheatears are also encountered in winter, and there was a breeding attempt in Corvo 2006. The most probably origin of these birds out of migration season would also be from the mainland population.

First birds are seen in September, more are coming in October – November, and there seem to be a few new northbound birds passing in April and May. Northern Wheatears are seen mostly one by one in open habitat all over the archipelago from the shoreline to high up in the mountains.

Common Blackbird, *Turdus merula azorensis*, Melro-preto

Being the only breeding thrush in the islands the Blackbirds in the Azores are free to occupy a number of niches. And they are found on all islands in most habitats from forest, farm-land, to gardens in urban areas, all the way from the coast-line up into high-altitude vegetation. They are commonly seen in fields and on stone-walls, especially numerous in early mornings or just before dusk.

Blackbirds in the Azores of the local endemic race *azorensis* are darker and a little smaller than mainland nominate birds. Like many other isolated populations, the numbers of aberrant albino individuals are rather high. This is extra obvious in these black birds where the white feathers are much visible.

Eurasian Blackcap, *Sylvia atricapilla gularis*, Toutinegra-de-barrete-preto

Being the only resident warbler in the islands, the birds occupy a large variety of habitats. In fact, this might be the only warbler you might see, since even the Chiffchaff is a real rarity in the island. The song and sounds of this endemic race - *gularis* - can sometimes be a little confusing, being a little different and more variable than its mainland relatives.

Blackcaps are common in most habitats, found on all island from the shoreline high up in the juniper and heath-covered hills. They also thrive in more totally open terrain than is normal in the mainland.

There is also a dark melanistic variety known by the local name *Touto vinagreiro*. These birds are long known

from most islands, but there seem to be no known records from Graciosa, São Jorge and Corvo. In western Flores they have been seen from at least 1999 onwards.

Goldcrest, *Regulus regulus*, Estrelinha-de-poupa

There are three subspecies breeding in the islands, all of them endemic:

- *regulus sanctaemariae* in Santa Maria (paler overall, more whitish below)
- *regulus azoricus* in São Miguel (long-billed, short-winged, with more yellow below than *inermis*)
- *regulus inermis* in Pico, Terceira, Faial, São Jorge, and Flores (less buff, more whitish on the throat, belly and flanks).

They are very numerous in all more or less wooded areas from the sea high up in the mountains. Even with rather dense populations on both Flores and São Jorge, they still are missing on nearby Corvo and Graciosa – the sea seems to be an effective barrier.

Common Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris granti*, Estorninho-malhado

Common Starlings in the Azores are by some considered to be of the endemic race *granti*, while others believe it is just a form of the nominate race. Azores birds are somewhat smaller and darker with a more purplish tinge on the back. In any case they show the same familiar behavior including periodical flocking, and a song with numerous imitations.

They are resident breeder on all islands, more common in lower altitudes and in open country. In some areas they are hunted, being considered a threat to vineyards and fig tree plantations.

The local population stay on the islands all year around, and any presumed vagrants from the mainland would be difficult to detect among them.

House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*, Pardal

First introduced in Angra de Heroísmo in Terceira in 1960-1961, it took this bird just 25 years to spread all over the archipelago. Santa Maria and Corvo were the latest islands to be “invaded” by this species. It is now a very common breeder in all open terrain connected to farms, villages etc. In some areas it is now already competing with the Canary and the Chaffinch in being the most numerous bird species.

As expected from an isolated and introduced species the number of aberrant mainly albino individuals are rather high. You might find all categories from the rare totally white individuals to the more common ones showing just a few white feathers.

Common Waxbill, *Estrilda astrild*, Bico-de-lacre

A small population exists today on São Miguel and Terceira, originating from introduced or most probably escaped birds. A number of first year black billed birds, and nest building activities indicate that breeding have been in progress for some time. First observations of small flocks are in São Miguel from around 1984 and in Terceira from at least in 2000.

Birds are mostly found in small groups over most of the two islands, but more regular populations seem to exist only in north-western São Miguel (from Mosteiros to Porto Formosa), and in south-eastern Terceira (from Praia da Vitória to Angra do Heroísmo).

This social little bird from the African long-grassed savannahs is a popular cage-bird that has been introduced to many areas in the world, and seems to thrive extra well on a number of remote islands. Now also a resident on the other Macaronesian islands as well as on the Portugal mainland.

Common Chaffinch, *Fringilla coelebs moreletti*, Tentilhão-comum

Probably the most common land bird on the Azores, and it is found almost anywhere on all islands. A non-migratory breeding bird which normally go one by one but outside breeding season sometimes gather in flocks with other Chaffinches or mixed with Canaries.

The local endemic race *moreletti* is more dark and bluish than the European mainland birds, more resembling the Madeira or African races. Males are duller than mainland birds, with overall more greyish-blue colors, greener back and less vinaceous-red on breast and belly. Their calls and songs also differ a lot from the nominate forms in the mainland.

Being a very common and largely migratory bird in the mainland, stragglers from the nominate more brightly colored birds would be expected to turn up in the Azores. However there seem to be no records, and one reason for that is that they probably are overlooked among all the local birds.

Atlantic Canary, *Serinus canaria*, Canário-da-terra

The Canary is a resident and regular breeding bird all over the islands. It is probably the most numerous land bird and it could be seen almost everywhere. Outside the breeding season they often aggregate in large flocks, sometimes exceeding a hundred birds. They are staying on the islands all year around, but flocks have at a number of occasions been seen flying out at sea and even been seen “migrate” between the nearby central islands.

Beware of this species as it is a great vocalist, and the variation of calls may resemble that of Greenfinch, Linnet and Goldfinch.

This is a popular cage bird, the popularity mostly due to its song, but in its wild state this species is confined to Macaronesia.

European Greenfinch, *Carduelis chloris aurantiiventris*, Verdilhão

The Greenfinch in the Azores is of the Mediterranean subspecies *aurantiiventris*, which is larger and brighter than the northern ones.

The species was probably introduced after 1860 on São Miguel and probably later on Terceira. The populations are very small and the birds are scattered over most of the two islands. Best chances to see them are probably in or around parks in the larger towns.

This resident breeding species is still to be confirmed from the others islands, but there is so far at least one sighting reported from each of Pico and Faial.

European Goldfinch, *Carduelis carduelis parva*, Pintassilgo

This smaller and a little greyer Goldfinch race *parva* is the same as in South-West Europe, Madeira and the Canaries.

It is a scarce breeder in the eastern and central islands, and could sometimes be seen in small flocks – but normally just one or two. It is also commonly kept as a cage bird, and has probably been introduced to these islands by man some years after 1850.

It is now also a rare but regular breeder on Flores where it is most common in the eastern parts. This late expansion has also led to observations on Corvo, but still there is no breeding record from there.

Azores Bullfinch, *Pyrrhula pyrrhula murina*, Priôlo

The Azores bullfinch is one of Europe's most endangered birds. It is only found in the east of the island of São Miguel, in just a few square kilometers of wood in Serra da Tronqueira. The finch was a locally abundant pest of fruit orchards in the nineteenth century but became rare after 1920. Changes to the native vegetation of the Azores have destroyed the species' natural habitat and led to a decline in numbers to just 120 pairs. The population today is around 1000 individuals.

Breeding occurs from mid-June to late August. Birds feed on seeds of herbaceous plants in summer, seeds of fleshy fruits in autumn, tree seeds and fern sporangia in winter and flower buds in spring. A mosaic of vegetation types is therefore necessary, and due to periodically shortage of food, there are today a number of feeding stations. There is also a management plan which aim to “manage the habitats of the Special Protection Area Pico da Vara / Ribeira do Guilherme in a manner that is compatible with a sustainable future, guaranteeing the conservation of Priolo”. This means in practice to save and enlarge the areas with native vegetation.

The most striking feature that distinguishes the Azores bullfinch from its mainland counterpart is that males and females look the same, most like the female, and are lacking the red of the male Common Bullfinch.

Snow Bunting, *Plectrophenax nivalis*, Escrevedeira-das-neves

This is mainly a winter visitor, where first birds normally arrive in October. There are observations from all islands except São Jorge, and odd birds have been seen in almost any month. In connection with cold winters and northerly winds the numbers increase, and birds have in those times also occurred in 40+ flocks. Most times they are however encountered just one by one or in small flocks.

Many sightings are from open terrain in higher altitudes, where São Miguel counts for most observations. The wintering areas for this vagrant are normally far north of the Azores.

Being a circumpolar breeder birds arriving to Azores might come from different populations. Both races *nivalis* and the darker Icelandic *insulae* are possible, but no further studies about this seem to be at hand.

<http://sr-oland.se/onewebmedia/CommonandRegularBirdsintheAzores.pdf>

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