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ORNITHOLOGICAL NEWS FROM THE CAPE VERDE ISLANDS IN 1995, INCLUDING RECORDS OF SPECIES NEW TO THE ARCHIPELAGO

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SUMMARY

Several bird observations, supplementary to the recently published review of the avifauna of the Cape Verde Islands (Hazevoet 1995), were made during visits to the islands in 1995. Three species new to the archipelago were observed, viz. *Phalaropus lobatus*, *Gelochelidon nilotica* and *Sterna maxima*. Also reported here are extensions in time and space of both residents and migrant visitors. These include summer records of several species of waders, herons and *Platalea leucorodia*, and range extensions of resident breeding species, e.g. the first records of *Alaemon alaudipes* from the island of Sal. In addition, some new data on breeding seabirds on the islands of Sal and Boavista are presented.

INTRODUCTION

The Cape Verde islands are an oceanic archipelago situated in the eastern Atlantic, 460-830 km west of Sénégal, West Africa. There are 10 islands (of which nine are inhabited) and several uninhabited islets. Comprehensive data on status and distribution of the birds of the Cape Verde Islands, including data up to February 1994, have recently been published by Hazevoet (1995). In the course of three visits to the islands in 1995, the authors made several observations supplementary to that work. Here we report on observations of rare and scarce species, including three species new to the archipelago, viz. Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*, Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* and Royal Tern *Sterna maxima*. It may be noted that the latter two species had already been pointed out as 'potential vagrant terns' (cf. Hazevoet 1995). There are no breeding gulls or terns in the Cape Verde Islands but their occurrence as migrant visitors is considerably more frequent than formerly inferred. For instance, Bannerman & Bannerman (1968) remarked that gulls and terns are "are truly conspicuous for their absence except on the rarest possible occasions", listing the occurrence of four species of gulls and only one tern. In marked contrast, six species of gulls and seven species of terns have now been recorded in the islands and several of these are now

known to be annual visitors in small numbers.

Also included here are data on extensions in time and range within the islands of both residents and migrant visitors. During June and July 1995, several Palaearctic and Afrotropical migrants were recorded for which there were no records so far in these months. These mainly concerned wader species, but also herons, Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, gulls and hirundines. Apparently, some non-breeding birds (particularly waders) stay in the islands during the Palaearctic and Afrotropical breeding seasons. For migrant visitors from the Palaearctic, Hazevoet (1995) treated occurrences in June as latest dates while those in August were taken as earliest dates. The few records in July were presumed to refer to oversummering birds. In reality, of course, it is not possible to make such a sharp distinction and birds in late July may well be early arrivals while some in June may be oversummering. Data on numbers of wintering waders at five different sites and in different months (August-June) were given by Hazevoet (1992 a).

Some supplementary data on breeding seabirds are also given. Those from the island of Sal clearly demonstrate the continuous and disastrously high pressure from human persecution to which seabirds in the Cape Verdes are subjected. Nowadays, the seabird populations of Sal

have almost vanished and only a tiny fraction of the large colonies that once existed there does survive (cf. Hazevoet 1994, 1995). In this connection, the need for long-term educational programmes, new protection laws and more rigorous enforcement of existing laws remains an urgent topic in the islands.

The opportunity is taken here to point out two errors that have crept into previous publications. Hazevoet (1992 b) mentioned "a ringing recovery of a Swedish bird of which further details are lacking at present" of Common Tern *S. hirundo*. In fact this concerned the recovery in April 1979 on Sal mentioned in the same paper (cf. Hazevoet 1995). In Hazevoet (1995) the observation of two Spoonbills *P. leucorodia*, 23 April 1963, on Santiago should be deleted as this concerned the observation at that date on Boavista, correctly listed as such in the check-list's species account.

Dates of the visits in 1995 were as follows: 17 January-6 February (SF, together with Wolfgang Mädlow and Christiane Quaisser), 18 June-10 September (CJH), and 18-31 July (GD). Islands visited were Sal, Boavista, Santiago, Santo Antão, São Vicente, and São Nicolau. In addition, some unpublished information, kindly supplied by Samuel Gomes and Frederick Wenzel, is also incorporated. Unless stated otherwise, all dates herein refer to 1995. Species new to the Cape Verde Islands are marked with an asterisk. General data on status and distribution within the islands, as well as those on population size of local breeders and earliest and latest dates of migrant visitors, are taken from Hazevoet (1995), to which the reader is also referred for further details on habitats, climate, geography, etc. of the Cape Verdes.

NOTES ON SPECIES

Cape Verde Shearwater *Calonectris edwardsii*

During a visit to Ilhéu de Rabo de Junco, a small rocky islet off the western coast of Sal, on 19 June, only three occupied nests (with birds incubating) and one abandoned nest (containing egg shells) could be found (CJH). This is the only known colony on Sal. There was no information from this locality since September 1965, when c. 40 pairs were reported (Naurois & Bonnaffoux 1969). Presumably due to continuous human persecution, this colony has now almost vanished. *C. edwardsii* was the most numerous species among subfossil bone remains collected at a prehistoric seabird colony (8th century according to radiocarbon dating) in the southeast of Sal, indicating that it was once a common breeder on the island (Boessneck & Kinzelbach 1993). Main colonies of this endemic species are now found on Brava, Branco and Raso, with some scattered colonies elsewhere. During the early 1990s, the total population was estimated at c. 10,000 pairs but this figure may be too optimistic. It is thought that at least c. 7500 nestlings are taken by local fishermen each year and

a collapse of the population seems inevitable if this practice continues.

Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*

On 5 March, 3-5 pairs entering nest holes were observed at Ponta da Fragata, along the southeastern coast of Sal, and teenagers at Santa Maria were carrying downy young, said to be taken at Ponta da Fragata, on 26 March (F.W. Wenzel *in litt.* 1996). This breeding locality had not been reported before. A pair was seen west of Ilhéu de Rabo de Junco, along the western coast of Sal, 23 February (F.W. Wenzel *in litt.* 1996). None were found there, however, during a visit on 19 June (CJH). The only recent reports of the species from Sal were of 1-2 pairs and a bird on the nest at Ilhéu de Rabo de Junco in January 1965 (Naurois & Bonnaffoux 1969), and a dead bird found along the northeastern coast in April 1991 (Hazevoet 1995).

On Boavista, a total of up to 16 birds (some entering holes and cavities in cliffs) was observed at Praia da Fatima and at Ponta do Sol, along the northwestern coast, 29 January-1 February (SF). This seems to confirm local information of breeding along the northwestern coast (cf. Hazevoet 1995). Elsewhere on Boavista, the only site which possibly still has a few breeding pairs is at Ilhéu de Curral Velho, off the southern coast, where two specimens were collected in 1924 and a few birds sighted in 1985 and 1993. None were seen there, however, on eight visits during the years 1986-1992 (CJH). Apart from those on Sal and Boavista mentioned above, there are breeding sites on Santiago, Brava, Ilhéus do Rombo and Raso. At present, the total Cape Verde population does not exceed 100-125 pairs, compared to at least c. 1000 pairs some 100 years ago (Hazevoet 1995).

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*

Only one was present at Ilhéu de Rabo de Junco, Sal, 20 February (F.W. Wenzel *in litt.* 1996), and 2 non-breeding adults there, 19 June (CJH). However, the considerable amount of white-wash at the site indicates a formerly much larger population. The only other recent information from Sal is of c. 10 birds at Ilhéu de Rabo de Junco in January 1991 (Hazevoet 1995), and regularly up to 20 there in March-April 1991 (F.W. Wenzel *in litt.* 1996). The breeding population on Sal is apparently almost wiped out and it seems questionable indeed if any young at the Rabo de Junco colony survive to fledge. Main colonies are on Santiago, Brava, Ilhéus do Rombo, Raso, and islets off Boavista. At present, the total Cape Verde population does not exceed c. 1000 pairs, compared to c. 10,000 at the end of the 19th century (Hazevoet 1995).

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Two at the sewage farm on São Vicente, 13 July (CJH), one near Assomada, Santiago, 21 July, and six at Tarrafal, Santiago, 23 July (GD). These are the first July records

and the species has now been recorded in all months except August. The Cattle Egret is a common Afrotropical migrant visitor, mainly from December to April. The breeding season in West Africa is from May to December (Brown *et al.* 1982). No breeding birds have been found in the islands since the years 1966 and 1968, when a few bred at the former heronry of *Ardea bournei* at São Domingos, Santiago.

Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis*

One at Tarrafal, Santiago, 23 July (GD). This is the first July record. There are now seven records (of which five since 1986), the others being in February, March (2), April, May, and September. The species appears to be a regular Afrotropical visitor in small numbers. In West Africa, the breeding season is from April to October (Brown *et al.* 1982).

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Presumably overwintering birds were observed on São Vicente, with up to five birds being present, mainly at Porto Grande and at the sewage farm, 4-14 July (CJH), and 24-30 July (GD). These are the first July records and the species has now been recorded in all months. The species is a not uncommon winter visitor, mainly from September to April.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Quite surprisingly, three immatures were present at the sewage farm on São Vicente on 13 July (CJH). This is the first July record (others being from September-May) and the first record for São Vicente, an extremely arid island with no inland surface water except for the basins of the sewage farm. There are now 17 records (see Introduction), all but the above from the islands of Santiago and Boavista, and the species is probably an annual visitor in small numbers (see also Hazevoet 1990, 1992b). Main departures from European colonies are in August-September (Cramp & Simmons 1977), and the present record suggests that some non-breeding immatures remain in the winter quarters. No data on summer records of nominate *leucorodia* in West Africa were given by Cramp & Simmons (1977), Brown *et al.* (1982), Poorter (1982) and Morel & Morel (1990). Although Spoonbills seen in the Cape Verde Islands are presumed to be migrants from Europe, the possibility remains that some *balsaci* from Mauritania occasionally visit the archipelago. The latter is mainly resident but some disperse south to Sénégal after breeding (Lamarche 1988, Morel & Morel 1990).

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

On Boavista, two were seen in the Sal Rei area, with probably a third bird at Rabil lagoon, 27-28 January, and one at

Ribeira do Calhau, 30 January (SF). No proof of breeding on Boavista has been published so far and the species' occurrence there was based only on listings without further details (cf. Alexander 1898, Naurois 1969, 1987). Presumably, the kites observed on Boavista were local birds, possibly wanderers from other islands, rather than northern migrant visitors. Kite populations (both *M. migrans* and the endemic *M. fasciicauda*) are declining throughout the islands.

Cape Verde Buzzard *Buteo bannermani*

One at João Teves, Santiago, 20 January (SF), and a pair regularly seen in the São Jorge dos Orgãos-Rui Vaz area, Santiago, 21-29 June (CJH). On Santo Antão, one pair at Ponta do Sol, a juvenile at Fontainhas, and one pair at Cova, 26-28 July (GD). Santiago and Santo Antão appear to be the only islands that still have viable populations of this rare endemic resident, although a few pairs may also reside on Fogo. Total population does not exceed some tens of pairs.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

One at the Pedra Badejo lagoons, Santiago, 24 January (SF). This is only the eighth record, but six of these are since 1988 and the species is probably a regular winter visitor in small numbers. All but one of the records are from Santiago.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Singles at the Pedra de Lume salt pans, Sal, 20 June (CJH), near Praia airport, Santiago, 21 July, and north of Baia das Gatas, São Vicente, 30 July (GD). These are the first July records and it has now been recorded in all months. Latest and earliest dates so far were 16 June and 30 August respectively. The above records indicate that some stay in the islands during the northern breeding season. The species is a not uncommon winter visitor, mainly from October to May.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Two at the Pedra de Lume salt pans, Sal, 20 June (CJH). Latest date so far was 26 May, and it has now been recorded in all months except July. The species is a common passage and winter visitor, with numbers increasing during migration, September-October and March-May.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Observed on several occasions on Sal and Boavista in January and February, with highest numbers totalling 25 and 33 birds at the Pedra de Lume salt pans, Sal, on 17 January and 4 February respectively (SF). Largest group size so far were 'parties of up to 15'. Formerly considered rare but there are now c. 35 records since 1985 and the

species appears to be a regular and not uncommon winter visitor.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Three at the Pedra de Lume salt pans, Sal, 20 June (CJH). Latest date so far was 28 April, and it has now been recorded in all months except May and July. A not uncommon passage and winter visitor with numbers increasing during migration, September-October and March-April.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Singles at Rabil lagoon, Boavista, 27 January, and at the Pedra de Lume salt pans, Sal, 4 February (SF). This is the first January record, other records being in October (5), November (3), February (5), March (1), and July (1). The species remains a rare to uncommon winter visitor.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Singles on three occasions (involving at least two different birds) at Rabil lagoon, Boavista, 27-31 January (SF). This confirms its status of a regular visitor in small numbers, October-April. There was only one January record and only three records before 1983, but regularly reported since, especially in the three eastern islands.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Up to six birds were present at the reefs south of Mindelo and at the nearby sewage farm, São Vicente, 13-14 July (CJH), and singles at Cruzinhas, Santo Antão, 26 July, and at Baía das Gatas, São Vicente, 30 July (GD). These are the first July records and the species has now been recorded in all months, indicating that some stay in the islands during the northern breeding season. A common winter visitor, mainly from September to May.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

One along Costa de Boa Esperança, Boavista, 29 January (SF), was only the third record for the islands, the others being from Sal (November) and Maio (April).

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

On Sal, 3-4 at the Pedra de Lume salt pans, 17 January and 4 February (SF). This is the first January record. There was only one record before 1983, but the increase in observations since (totalling c. 15 records) indicates that it is a regular winter visitor in small numbers, August-April. The Pedra de Lume salt pans, however, remain the only locality where the species is regularly encountered, there being only five records from other islands, of which three from Boavista and one each from Santiago and São Vicente.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

One at the Santa Maria salt pans, Sal, 31 July (GD). This is the first July record and presumably concerned an early arrival. The species has now been recorded in all months. Earliest date so far was 30 August, latest 22 June. A not uncommon winter visitor, mainly from September to May.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

One along the shore at Santa Maria, Sal, 31 July (GD). This is the first July record and presumably concerned an early arrival. The species has now been recorded in all months except June and August. Earliest date so far was 3 September, latest 14 May. A not uncommon winter visitor, mainly from October to April.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

On São Vicente, 36 were counted at the reefs south of Mindelo and at the nearby sewage farm, 13 July (CJH), and two at Baía das Gatas, 30 July (GD); on Sal, 10 near Santa Maria, 31 July (GD). These are the first July records, and the species has now been recorded in all months, indicating that some stay in the islands during the northern breeding season. Latest and earliest dates are 27 June and 8 August respectively. Turnstone is by far the most numerous wintering wader in the Cape Verdes.

***Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus*

One in winter plumage at the Pedra de Lume salt pans, Sal, 17 January and 4 February, presumably the same individual on both occasions (SF). The bird was observed at a distance of c. 30 m with light from behind and could be distinguished from *P. fulicarius* because of the completely black and very thin bill. So far, there was only one record of an unidentified *P. lobatus/fulicarius*, the latter species being an uncommon passage and winter visitor only known from records at sea. *P. lobatus* is a vagrant to Mauritania and Senegal, with only two and one records respectively (Lamarque 1988, Morel & Morel 1990), and it has also been recorded in Morocco and the Canary Islands (Cramp & Simmons 1983).

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

An immature at Palmeira, Sal, 2 February (SF). There was only one record before 1983, but the increase in observations since (totalling c. 25 records) indicates that it is a regular winter visitor in small numbers.

Yellow-legged/Lesser Black-backed Gull
Larus cachinnans/fuscus

Single immatures of either species at Ponta do Sol, Santo Antão, 28 July, and at Porto Grande, São Vicente, 29 July

(GD). These are the first July records of 'large gulls' and there are now records from all months except May. The identification of the large gulls, especially immatures, remains problematical. There are only six certain records of Yellow-legged and c. 12 certain records of Lesser Black-backed Gull. In addition there are c. 15 records of indeterminate large gulls, mostly immatures and presumably mostly Lesser Black-backed.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica

Two along the shore south of Sal Rei, Boavista, 31 January (SF). Not recorded before in the Cape Verde Islands. The species is a locally common resident breeder as well as a common Palaearctic winter visitor in Mauritania and Sénégal (Campredon 1987, Lamarche 1988, Morel & Morel 1990).

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*

One at Rabil lagoon, Boavista, 27 and 31 January (SF). This is only the second record, the first being of one on 24 March 1993, also at Sal Rei, Boavista.

Royal Tern *Sterna maxima

An immature along the shore at Santa Maria, Sal, 5 February (SF). Not recorded before in the Cape Verde Islands. The species is a locally common breeder in Mauritania and Sénégal (Campredon 1987, Lamarche 1988, Morel & Morel 1990), with most moving south after breeding (Cramp 1985, Urban *et al.* 1986).

Little Tern *Sterna albigrons*

Three along the shore south of Sal Rei, Boavista, 27 and 31 January (SF). There are now six records, all since 1988, from October to April. This seems to confirm that the species is a regular visitor in small numbers, particularly in the eastern islands. All but one of the records are from the same area on Boavista, viz. the shore south of Sal Rei and nearby Rabil lagoon, which is used as a roost.

Ringed-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

This introduced species was still present in small (< 10) numbers at the city park and in suburbs of the capital Praia, Santiago, July-August (CJH, GD), and a small population appears to be established there now. Apart from one old record of a bird collected in 1909, it was first reported from Praia in 1993. In 1995, none were seen at Mindelo, São Vicente, where small parties were seen in 1992.

Cape Verde Swift *Apus alexandri*

Two at Santa Maria, Sal, 20 June (CJH). Observations from the three eastern islands of this endemic species are few. So far, there were records from Sal and Maio in

August only and from Boavista in March-May. There is no indication of breeding in the eastern islands and birds seen there are probably non-breeding wanderers or foraging birds from other islands.

Swift *Apus apus*

Two at Santa Maria, Sal, 31 July (GD). This is the first July record and presumably concerned early arrivals. Earliest date so far was 20 August, latest 14 June. An uncommon winter visitor, formerly considered a vagrant but there are now > 15 records, mostly in December and January.

Bar-tailed Desert Lark *Ammomanes cincturus*

During a few days stay on the uninhabited island of Santa Luzia, c. 10 birds were observed near Ponta de Creoulo, at the easternmost point of the island, 2 November 1990 (S. Gomes pers. comm. 1995). This is the first record for Santa Luzia and illustrates the continuing westward expansion of the species, it having arrived on Fogo and São Nicolau only during the mid 1980s. A common resident in the three eastern islands and locally common on Santiago and São Nicolau, rare on Fogo.

Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*

Two (including a singing male) just north of Santa Maria, Sal, 3 and 5 February (SF), and again two there, 20 June (CJH), and 31 July (GD). These are the first records for Sal and the first outside Boavista and Maio (where it is a common resident), presumably indicating a recent extension of the species' range within the islands. Its peculiar distribution - restricted to the islands of Boavista and Maio - has been explained by Pleistocene fluctuations in sea level, due to which the two islands probably formed a single larger one at times but were never connected to other islands, and also by its less nomadic habits compared to the larks *Ammomanes cincturus* and *Eremopterix nigriceps*, which are common on Boavista and Maio as well as on several other islands (Hazevoet 1995). Its current occurrence on Sal shows that the species maintains at least some nomadic tendency, but it remains to be seen if a permanent population will become established there.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

One at Ribeira do Paúl, Santo Antão, 28 July (GD). This is the first July record and presumably concerned an early arrival. Earliest date so far was 9 August. The species has now been recorded in all months. A not uncommon winter and passage visitor, with records peaking in October and May.

House Martin *Delichon urbica*

One at Santa Maria, Sal, 31 July (GD). This is the first July record and presumably concerned an early arrival. Earliest

date so far was 23 August. A not uncommon winter and passage visitor, more often seen during spring migration than in autumn, with records peaking May-June.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

A male along Rabil lagoon, 28 January, and another (singing) at João Galego, 30 January, both Boavista (SF). So far, the species' occurrence on Boavista was based only on listings without further details (cf. Naurois 1969, Naurois & Bergier 1986) and the above are the first confirmed records for the island. It is not clear if there exists a local population on Boavista or that the records in 1995 concerned vagrants from the Palaearctic. No evidence of breeding on Boavista has been published so far. The Blackcap is a locally common resident on Santiago, Fogo, Brava, Santo Antão and São Nicolau, and formerly on São Vicente, where now extinct. There is also one record from Maio, possibly a vagrant from the Palaearctic.

Iago Sparrow *Passer iagoensis*

At Espargos, Sal, c. 20 were seen in January-February (SF), and about the same number in June and August (CJH), indicating the species' continued presence since a small population was first reported in the years 1991-1994. Nests containing nestlings were found under roofs, 15-19 August (CJH). No rains had fallen on the island prior to these dates, but on 17 and 18 August some moderate showers occurred. There are only few data from Sal of this endemic resident. Although collected there in 1924, breeding was not established until 1965. The species is widespread and common throughout the archipelago, except on Fogo (where absent), and on Sal and Santa Luzia (where scarce).

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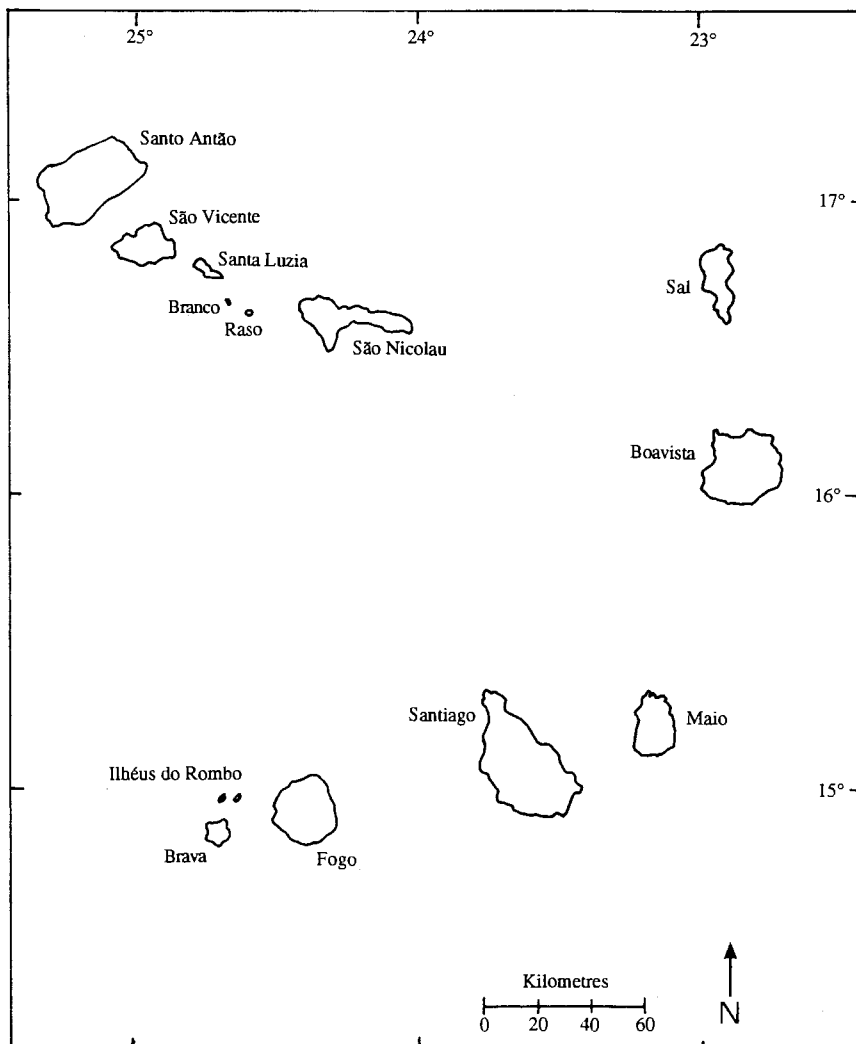


Figure 1. Map of the Cape Verde Islands.

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