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Especialidades de Cabo Verde The Cape Verde Islands are situated in the extreme southwest of the western Palearctic, c 500 km west of S n gal, West Africa. There are 13 main islands, four of which are uninhabited. Although the archipelago is situated at tropical latitudes, the climate is largely determined by the cool Canary Current. On the other hand, the islands are part of that notorious zone called Sahel. This combination of drought and sea-tempered tropical climate forms a rather unique environment.

In the Cape Verdes, there are important breeding colonies of petrels and shearwaters, with the Gon-gon *Pterodroma feae* and the Cabo Verde Cagarra *Calonectris edwardsii* being confined to the islands. For other seabirds it is the only breeding place within the western Palearctic, ie Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaeton aethereus*, Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* and Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*, the latter's total population on this side of the Atlantic being less than 10 pairs.

Landbirds are few, but there are four endemic species and c 10 endemic subspecies. The Cape Verde Swift *Apus alexandri* is a species of whose habits very little is known. For instance, it is not clear whether it is resident or migrates to the African mainland outside the breeding season. It has never been seen anywhere else than in the Cape Verdes, but its varying numbers suggest some migration at least. Its nearest relative is the Plain Swift *A unicolor* of the Canary Islands and Madeira. Unique in the western Palearctic is the occurrence of the Grey-headed Kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephala* in the Cape Verde Islands, otherwise an Afrotropical species. It occurs on the islands of S o Tiago, Fogo and Brava only but is not uncommon there. It often is remarkably confiding and may be seen close to human settlement. The birds of the Cape Verde are subspecifically distinct and known as *H l acteon*.

Without doubt the most famous endemic species is the Razo Lark *Alauda razae*. Confined to the uninhabited islet of Razo, c 7 km² in size, its total population probably does not exceed much more than 50 pairs. The species is unique among the larks because of the substantial difference in bill-size between male and female, probably an adaptation for optimal use of food-resources within a limited space.

The Cape Verde Cane Warbler *Acrocephalus brevipennis* lives on the islands of S o Tiago, Brava and S o Nicolau. Its habitat are the more vegetated areas, such as plantations and gardens. On Brava it occupies the niche of a small thrush, occurring even in towns and villages. Its closest relatives are the Afrotropical Swamp Warbler *A gracilirostris* and Rufous Swamp Warbler *A rufescens*.

The third endemic passerine is the Iago Sparrow *Passer iagoensis*. Its



89 Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*, and **90** Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*, Razo, Cape Verde Islands, March 1986 (René Pop)



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91-92 Cape Verde Swift *Apus alexandri*, Fogo, Cape Verde Islands, March 1986 (*René Pop*) **93** Grey-headed Kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephala*, São Tiago, Cape Verde Islands, February 1986 (*René Pop*)





94-95 Razo Lark *Alauda razae*, male & female, Razo, Cape Verde Islands, March 1986
(René Pop)



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96 Cape Verde Cane Warbler *Acrocephalus brevipennis*, São Tiago, Cape Verde Islands, February 1986 (*René Pop*) **97** Iago Sparrow *Passer iagoensis*, male, São Nicolau, Cape Verde Islands, March 1986 (*René Pop*)



taxonomy has recently been discussed by Summers-Smith (*Bull Br Orn Club* 104: 138-142, 1984) who found it sufficiently distinctive from the other rufous sparrows of Africa to deserve specific status. It occurs on all but one of the islands and can live under very arid conditions. The Spanish Sparrow *P hispaniolensis*, which may have arrived naturally in the Cape Verdes early in the 19th century, seems to prefer a somewhat moister environment.

The photographs were taken during the Sirius birding-expedition in February-March 1986. C J HAZEVOET

mystery photographs



98 Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*, Texas, February 1982 (René Pop)

21 The squat appearance and short legs and bill of the wader in mystery photograph 21 obviously belong to one of the smaller sandpipers or stints *Calidris*. The rather plain-coloured upperparts tell that the bird is in winter plumage. Its pale legs limit our choice to three species: Temminck's Stint *C temminckii*, Long-toed Stint *C subminuta*