

Bird Watching during the Great Drought on the Cape Verde Islands

DEIRDRE DE BRUYN & OTTO KOEDIJK

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As a private initiative, we visited the Cape Verde Islands from 22 November, 1986 till 15 February, 1987. In those three wintermonths we especially watched birds, like DAVID and MARY BANNERMAN did in 1966. We only visited the nine inhabited islands. (We didn't have a boat of our own and efforts to get a lift to uninhabited islands from fishermen failed. They were willing to help us, but hadn't planned to go at the time we wanted or their motor was just under repair.)

Trying to get some information, we spoke a lot with local people. We experienced that all of them knew a lot of general aspects of the birds, but none of them could give us a good survey. Almost all of them, however, could explain exactly how and when to catch several species of birds and how to eat them.

Sal

A very special place on Sal is Pedra da Lume. This is a crater on the east coast; the bottom of it is below sea-level and it is used for salt-production. Several waders visit this habitat and seem to find their food in the very salt-pans. Amongst them are: Kentish Plover, Grey Plover, Turnstone, Dunlin, Sanderling, Redshank, Greenshank, Ruff and Reeve, Avocet and many Black-winged Stilts, which even should breed there by dozens.

Except for the last three species all those birds, completed with Bar-tailed Godwit and Whimbrel,

were also seen on the west coast of the island on places between the dunes, that contain some water, brought there by high tides.

On a deserted farm nearby Baia da Mordeira (west coast) we found a dead fledgling of the White-headed Kingfisher on the bottom of a dry well. So far, this species had not been reported from Sal. Considering its age, it seems unlikely that it flew from Santiago, Fogo, or Brava, where it is common, to Sal. It is not impossible, though.

In the harbour of Palmeira a second-year Gannet flew high above us, and when we left Sal in the evening by the cargoship 'Bubista', a Petrel, probably a Wilson's Petrel, flew in front of the ship.

Boa Vista

The landscape of Boa Vista shows a few mountains and rocky deserts, surrounded by large, white beaches. In the four days we stayed there, we saw relatively many different species of birds, migrants as well as residents. We found Kestrels, one Peregrine, Brownnecked Ravens, Spectacled Warblers and Spanish Sparrows in an oasis full of date palm-trees. Boa Vista Bifasciated Larks in the desert jumped from stone to stone, keeping an eye on us when we approached them to take pictures. Coursers were observed in the more sandy parts with some low vegetation.

On wet spots in the direction of Povoação Velha in the southwest, several migrants were foraging,

such as Kentish and Grey Plover, Turnstone, Green-shank, a Black-tailed Godwit, one Black-winged Stilt, and two European Swallows. Above the sea-shore we saw two Ospreys, several Brown Boobies, and one Fregate Bird. Although this last-mentioned species flew at Ponto da Chave, close to the village of Rabil on the west-coast, it is known to have bred on Ilhéu do Curral Velho in the south and on Ilhéu de Baluarte in the east. Their numbers are said to be decreasing very fast and it is not certain whether they are still managing to survive in colonies.



Fig. 1. Egyptian Vulture; Cova, Sto. Antão. Photo: O. KOEDIJK.

Maio

Most of our ten-days sojourn on Maio, we spent in two locations near Vila do Maio: the salinas (salt-pans), north-east of Vila, and Ponto Preta, south-west of Vila. On the large beach next to the salinas, at Ponta Banconi, we almost daily watched a pair of Fregate Birds. In the low vegetation between the beach and the salt-pans many Coursers and Bifasciated Larks (Pastors) were running around. The White fronted Finchlark (Giniro) was also present in large numbers, as well as the Iago Sparrow; we also observed some Spectacled Warblers.

On the beach we saw various wading birds: Turnstone, Grey and Kentish Plover, Dunlin, Sanderling, Whimbrel, two Bar-tailed Godwits. In addition some Grey Herons, four juveniles of the Herring Gull and even a few Sandwich Terns were present. On the south-west side of Vila, at Ponto Preta, we passed two nights in a beautiful cave on the beach, thus being able to observe birds early in the morning.

Egyptian Vultures with juveniles and one Osprey fed on fish waste. Many young Black Kites were to be seen and on a steep, but easily ascendable slope, we discovered a deserted nest of an Egyptian Vulture.

Walking eastwards in the direction of Barreiro we came across some wet areas, again with a variety of waders; Ruff and Reeve, Greenshank, and Green Sandpiper were amongst them. Above sea we saw another juvenile Herring Gull and a Fregate Bird. On our way back to Vila a Wheatear (very pale), many Brownnecked Ravens and also a considerable

number of Kestrels were seen. During a trip by car all around the island, we mainly saw Vultures and Bar-tailed Sandlarks along the track, a few Coursers and Pastors (B. V. Bif. Lark), and we regularly heard the sound of Spectacled Warblers from the dusty Acacias, occasionally a Quail.

We payed a short visit to a German agriculture project. The large numbers of Pardais (Spanish and Iago Sparrows) and Giniros (White-fronted Finchlarks) are a bother to the people as they throw themselves upon the seeds by hundreds. People trying to kill them by stones hardly ever missed one. In the north-east of Maio, (designated incorrectly as salinas on the map made in Enschede, Holland; it is a big gypsfield) we counted many Coursers and Pastors running through low vegetation, and a few Grey Herons, little Egrets, two Common Terns and a Sandwich Tern on the beach. We noticed Cattle Egrets and Quails near the village of Morrinho. A Black Kite was observed at Ponto Cais, a House Martin at Pilão Cão.

Santiago

We entered the harbour of Praia on board of the 'Bubista'. Here we saw a Red-billed Tropic Bird flying in front of the steep slopes south-east of Praia. This was a very promising observation, which unfortunately has never been repeated since. Walking from the harbour to Praia centre we heard many Spectacled Warblers; Iago Sparrows were everywhere. Brownnecked Ravens, Egyptian Vultures and Swifts are common in the city. We observed some House Martins as well. One Purple Heron was seen by two Dutch 'cooperantes' in the direct vicinity of Praia.

In the centre of Praia - o Plato - on a terrace we made our first observation of the White-headed King Fisher, catching Grasshoppers. During a trip by truck to the east-coast we saw many of them; also we saw Cattle Egrets and Blackcaps, and one Waxbill. Little boys in a ribeira south of Praia Baixo, at the east coast, showed a nest of the Kingfisher in a sandy wall, occupied by two almost fledged chicks; a third one lay dead, a few meters below. In the same area a Buzzard soared in circles, and we heard many Quails there.

Cidade Velha is an old harbour west of Praia. There were Egyptian Vultures, dozens of Swifts, some Little Egrets, Brownnecked Ravens, Iago and Spanish Sparrows, and also Kestrels. Because we did not collect birds, we did not distinguish between the subspecies of the kestrels for instance. Some local people seemed to be able to hear or see the difference between *F. T. neglectus* and the Alexander's Kestrel. If we have understood well, they are named respectively Filili and Falcão. In Tarrafal, situated on the north-west coast of the island, some 75 Cattle Egrets daily gathered in one special sleeping-tree. Many Giniros, some Swifts and Quails were around and we observed three Peregrines and a Black Kite in the ribeira of Tarrafal.

We spent Christmas days in Ribeira de Charco, the first ribeira south of Ribeira da Barca on the west-coast, searching for monkeys. Some local mango-farmers proudly told us that they recently had shot the last one; so our search was in vain. Fortunately the area was rich in birds, such as Kingfishers,

Warblers, Blackcaps, Swifts (also one Alexander's Swift), Iago Sparrows, Kestrels, Ravens, and Vultures.

Fogo

After a most uncomfortable trip by boat - the Furna - we landed in the harbour of S. Philipe, on the most western point of Fogo. The island is almost round, being a vulcano surrounded by black beaches with some vegetation and cultivation in-between. In and around S. Philipe, the Iago, as well as the Spanish Sparrow, Blackcap, Spectacled Warbler and Kingfisher were common appearances. Some miles on our way northwards we met Giniros, Swifts, Kestrels, and even a Peregrine.

Chá das Caldeiras is a village in the crater of Fogo where people run vineyards and keep cows for the milk, either of which is quite unusual on the islands. Apart from Cattle Egrets, we did not see any birds there, and climbing the vulcano itself we only perceived a few Brownnecked Ravens, at large distance. Because we had a late return from the vulcano, we happened to see a bat in the twilight.

Brava

Remarkable about Brava were the large numbers of Iago Sparrows hopping around everywhere on the rocks, for instance along the road from Vila de Nova Sintra to Porto de Faja. Brava is one of the three islands where the Cape Verdean White-headed Kingfisher is common. A Cape Verdean told us that this bird is numerous in the breeding period, catching Grasshoppers until the young ones fly away. Then they all of a sudden disappear, as quick as they came, to spend the rest of the year elsewhere.

In the harbour of Brava, Furna, we saw a Black Kite and, in a cave, two Alexander's Swifts, like bats flying in and out. A little boy kept a young Cattle Egret, as a domestic pet, in order to eat it when it would have grown big enough. It is also habitual to keep Quails in the house; these often die very soon.



Fig. 2. Alcatraz (Brown Booby); Mindelo, S. Vicente. Photo: D. DE BRUYN.



Fig. 3. Cattle Egrets; Tarrafal, S. Nicolau. Photo: O. KOEDIJK.

Santo Antão

On the north-east coast, between Ribeira Grande and Ponta do Sol, we observed both Red and Black Kites, Egyptian Vultures, Kestrels, some little Egrets, one Common Sandpiper, and Iago Sparrows. At night we heard and once saw the Coraja (Barn Owl) in Ribeira Grande. During our walk from Ribeira Grande to Cova, on a small track through several ribeiras, we were almost continuously accompanied by singing Blackcaps (Kuvuk) and Spectacled Warblers. We saw many Swifts, Ravens, Kestrels, Black Kites, and one Buzzard.

In Cova itself, a crater in which there is a Dutch forestry, there were many Cattle Egrets, Vultures, Swifts, and Quails. Waiting in Porto Novo for the boat to Mindelo, S. Vicente, close to the formerly inhabited caves in sandy slopes, we observed three Coursers, which we had not expected to meet on this island.

São Vicente

In Mindelo the very trustworthy sound of House Sparrows is heard everywhere. We hiked to Baía das Gatas in the north-east, where, apart from the usual waders, we were witness of an Osprey taking a bath at close distance, and a nervous Oystercatcher immediately flying away. The only Kestrel we saw was observed during our walk from Mindelo to Salamansa. We did not take the road, but went along the shortest way, a track leading through the mountains and over steep sandy slopes. Coursers, Ospreys, and Alcatrazes (Brown Boobies) were common in the area between Salamansa and Baía das Gatas.

In Mindelo we met a family which had kept an Alcatraz already for eight years on a short rope fastened to a flat-iron. It was not looking very healthy, but the people were no less proud to be able to show it to us. The Dutch Consul, the president of the 'associação dos amigos de natureza', told us that this association hopes to get the Passarinho (Kingfisher) back on S. Vicente, by the re-afforestation programme, now carried on for more than ten years. Also other people from S. Vicente confirmed that

Table 1. Bird observations per island, the names are based on those given by BANNERMAN & BANNERMAN. - Abbreviations: S = Sal, BV = Boa Vista, M = Maio, ST = Santiago, F = Fogo, B = Brava, SA = Santo Antão, SV = São Vicente, SN = São Nicolau.

	S	BV	M	ST	F	B	SA	SV	SN
Wilson's Petrel? <i>Ocenitus oceanicus</i>	*								
Brown Booby <i>Sula leucogaster</i>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Gannet <i>Sula bassana</i>	*								
Lowe's Frigate Bird <i>Fregata magnificens lowei</i>		*	*						
Red Billed Tropic-bird <i>Phaethon aethereus mesonauta</i>				*					
Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	*	*	*	*				*	
Purple Heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>				*					
Cattle Egret <i>Ardeola ibis</i>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*
Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*
Egyptian Vulture <i>Neophron percnopterus</i>		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
C.V. Peregrine <i>Falco peregrinus madens</i>		*		*					
Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
C.V. Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo bannermani</i>				*	*		*		
Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>			*	*		*	*		
C.V. Red Kite <i>Milvus milvus fasciicauda</i>							*		
Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	*	*	*					*	*
Quail <i>Coturnix coturnix</i>			*	*		*	*		
European Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>								*	
Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	*	*	*					*	*
Tundra Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	*	*	*						
Grey Plover <i>Squatarola squatarola</i>	*	*	*					*	
Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*
Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i>	*		*					*	
Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>	*	*	*		*			*	*
Ruff and Reeve <i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	*		*	*					
Redshank <i>Totanus totanus</i>	*								
Greenshank <i>Totanus nebularius</i>	*	*	*	*				*	
Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	*	*		*			*	*	*
Green Sandpiper <i>Tringa ochropus</i>			*						
Black-tailed godwit <i>Limosa limosa</i>		*							

	S	BV	M	ST	F	B	SA	SV	SN
Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i>	*		*						
Whimbrel <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	*	*	*	*			*	*	*
Avocet <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		*							
Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	*	*							
C.V. Courser <i>Cursorius cursor exsul</i>	*	*	*				*	*	*
Herring Gull <i>Larus argentatus</i>			*						
Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ridibundus</i>				*				*	
Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>			*						
Sandwich Tern <i>Sterna sandvicencis</i>			*	*					
Rock-pigeon <i>Columba livia</i>				*					*
C.V. Barn Owl <i>Tyto alba detorta</i>							*		
European Swift <i>Apus apus</i>				*	*	*	*		*
Alexander's Swift <i>Apus alexandri</i>				*		*			
C.V. White-headed Kingfisher <i>Halcyon leucocephala acteon</i>	*			*	*	*			
White-fronted Finch-lark <i>Eremopteris nigriceps</i>		*	*	*	*				*
Bar-tailed Sand-lark <i>Ammomanes cincturus</i>	*	*	*	*					*
Boa Vista Bifasciated Lark <i>Alaemon alaudipes boavistae</i>		*	*						
European Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>		*							
House Martin <i>Delichon urbica</i>			*	*					
Brownnecked Raven <i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Wheatear <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			*						*
Alexander's Blackcap <i>Sylvia atricapilla gularis</i>			*	*		*	*		*
C.V. Spectacled Warbler <i>Sylvia conspicillata orbitalis</i>		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Waxbill <i>Estrilda astrild jagoensis</i>				*					
Iago Sparrow <i>Passer jagoensis</i>	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Spanish Sparrow <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		*	*	*	*				
House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>								*	

Sal	*****	(24/11-27/11 + 6/2-14/2)
Boa Vista	****	(1/12-4/12)
Maio	*****	(29/12-8/1)
Santiago	*****	(28/11-30/11 + 5/12-9/12 + 18/12-29/12)
Fogo	****	(10/12-13/12)
Brava	*****	(13/12-17/12)
Sto. Antão	*****	(10/1-15/1)
S. Vicente	*****	(9/1-10/1 + 15/1-21/1)
S. Nicolau	*****	(22/1-6/2)

** = Days

this bird used to be present on the island in earlier days.

In São Pedro, a wet area close to the airport in the west, we found wading birds such as Turnstone, Dunlin, Sanderling, Kentish and Grey Plover, and we saw one Common Sandpiper. Along the runway there were some Coursers, Ravens, and Vultures. In Calhau, where we tried in vain to embark for Sta. Luzia, a boat owner told us that local fishermen use to visit Sta. Luzia in April in order to collect young birds, presumably little Shearwaters and/or White-faced Frigate Petrels.

São Nicolau

By a fortunate coincidence we had the possibility to embark on board of the 'Bubista' again, heading for S. Nicolau, where we landed at Prequica. We reached Vila de Ribeira Brava and soon it turned out that the Kestrel is much more common here than it is on S. Vicente. A Blackcap and some Spectacled Warblers were clearly singing in the centre of the town Vila.

We stayed in Tarrafal for more than a week, and made walks to the north. We once saw six Ospreys together, which could easily be approached. In

the same area, near Praia Branca, a Wheatear showed itself for a moment. Towards the east of the island birds were getting rare. In the area between Junca-linho and Carrical, the only result in birding of a walk of several hours was a simple Spectacled Warbler, singing loudly.

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The authors' address

D. DE BRUYN & O. KOEDIJK, Driehoekweg 6, NL-7737 PA Stegeren (Ommen, Overijssel), The Netherlands.