

Cape Verde

March 17th – 24th 2018



Cape Verde Swamp Warbler



Red-billed Tropicbird



Raso Lark

Islands (and sites) visited:

Santiago

Praia cliffs, Praia plains, Barragem de Poilão, Pedra Badejo lagoons, Barragem de Figuera Gorda, Jardim Botanico

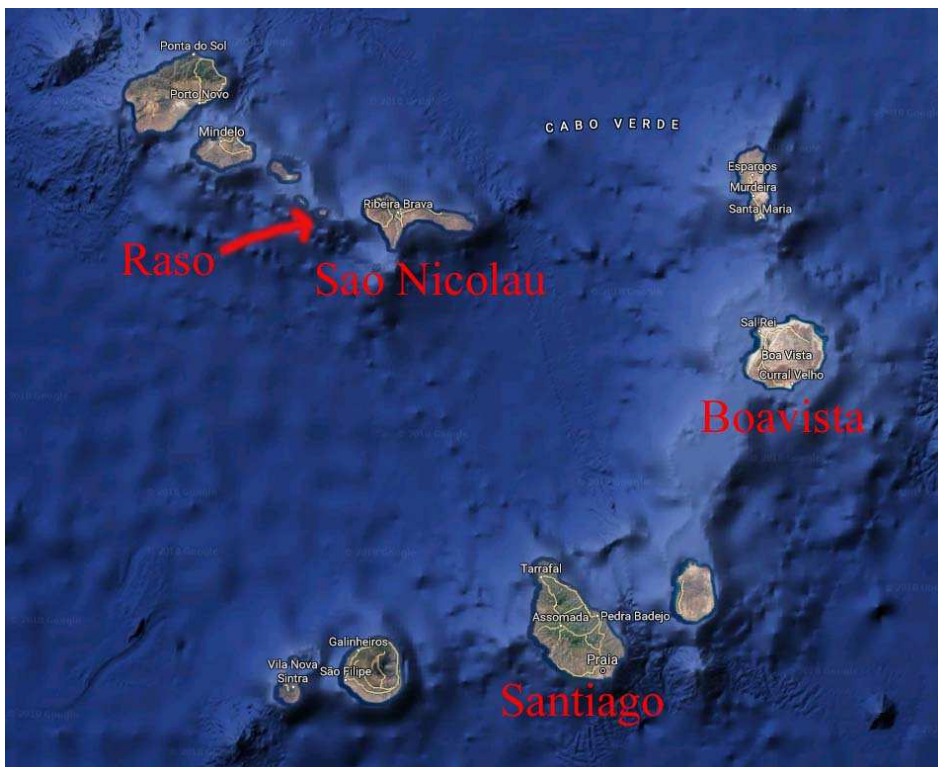
Boavista

Sal Rei harbor, Rabil lagoon, Ponta da Varandinha, Zone Humide de Lecação, Curral Velho, centre of isle

São Nicolau

Ponta do Barril, Taraffal

Raso



General Information

Getting there:

Cape Verde lies approx. 600 km west of Senegal and consists of 9 inhabited plus a number of uninhabited islands. Thus flying there is the most common way to reach Cape Verde. Most visitors will be landing on Sal or Boavista as these are the most touristic islands and several airlines go there. Santiago and Sao Vicente also have international airports. TAP heads there via Lisbon. A visa is required for EU-citizens which can be obtained in the arrival airport for 27€. This procedure requires some time, depending on the amount of passengers in the respective plane. Visas can also be requested in the Cape Verde embassies in most countries. This was 45€ for Germany.

Getting around:

Between several islands: If you want to visit more than one island the local airline Binter offers flights for reasonable prices. They are said to not always stick to the schedule but were very reliable in my case. Some islands can be reached by ferry but be aware that during the windy season in winter and spring the sea can be very rough and many people get seasick.

On the islands: This proves to be one of the expensive parts. Car rentals are possible but I'm not sure if there is possibilities to receive a car on the airport (though Hertz has a desk on the airport in Santiago). You can reach many sites by Aluguer which is a shared taxi. This is cheap but the taxi driver will skim the area for more passengers for up to an hour or so and thus this way requires patience. Hiring a taxi is more expensive but faster. A common way is hiring a taxi driver for the whole day. This is around 100€. On Boavista you should look for a 4WD as reaching some spots require a drive through very sandy areas. I made arrangements for drivers on Boavista and Santiago through a travel agency specialized on Cape Verde (see helpful contacts).

Birds:

Birdlife is not diverse but selected. Almost every breeding landbird species is either endemic or an endemic subspecies. Depending on the authority, five species of landbird (Cape Verde Sparrow, Cape Verde Buzzard, Alexander's Swift, Cape Verde Swamp Warbler, Raso Lark) and four species of seabird (Fea's Petrel, Cape Verde Shearwater, Boyd's Petrel, Cape Verde Storm-Petrel) are endemic. Several subspecies such as the critically endangered Bourne's (Purple) Heron are under revision for gaining species status. Other species of interest (for the Western Palearctic lister) are Red-billed Tropicbird, Helmeted Guinea-fowl, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Black-crowned Sparrow-lark, Greater Hoopoe-Lark, Cream-coloured Cursor, Western Reef-Heron and others.

Hazards:

Both Malaria and Dengue are known to occur in Cape Verde, however linked to the wet season and restricted to very few spots (like Praia in the case of Malaria). Both diseases occur only very rarely, nevertheless appropriate clothes and the use of insect repellent should be in your luggage. Many people on Cape Verde are poor and thefts are sometimes reported even in remoter areas. The people I met were friendly and relaxed, I have not experienced any dangerous situations. All tourists I have met shared this experience.

Helpful contacts:

Andreio Gilson: Andreio.gilson@hotmail.com (local birding guide Santiago)

Toi (guide and travel agent on São Nicolau, can arrange trips): +2389945146 (contact via Whatsapp)

Boavista

Boavista is one of the islands with a larger international airport and increasing tourism. However in comparison to Sal, Boavista is much calmer with tourists and richer in birdlife. Boavista has a mixture of habitats. Sandy beaches and semi-desert habitats attract Hoopoe-Lark, Bar-tailed Lark, Black-crowned Saprrow-Larks and Cream-coloured Courser. A few wetland sites are good for migrants and waterbirds. Some of the sites require a 4WD.

Where to go:



- 1: Sal Rei harbor
- 2: Rabil lagoon
- 3: Ponta da Varandinha
- 4: Zone Humide de Lecacão
- 5: Curral Velho
- 6: Centre of island
- 7: Ilhéu dos passaros (not visited)

Sal Rei harbor (No. 1 on map)

Getting there: Sal Rei lies in the north west of the island, only 10 minutes from the airport (by car). The harbor is easily found.

What to see: The area is interesting mainly for **waders** that search the rocky shores for food. During my short visit around noon there were eight species including **Bar-tailed Godwit** and **Grey Plover** that were generally not common on Cape Verde. Another good one was **Caspian Tern** that seems to increase on Cape Verde. A **Black Kite** gave me a near Heart Attack as this area was one of the last ones where a Cape Verde Kite was seen. Some of the desert species also frequent the area, others have seen *Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark*, *Hoopoe Lark* or *Cream-colored Cursor* here.



Kentish Plover



Common Ringed Plover

Rabil Lagoon (No. 2 on map)

Getting there: several possibilities. Coming from the airport to Sal Rei take the dirt track to the left about 200 m behind the bridge. You stay close to the main road but the areas around the lagoon can be scanned with a scope or you can walk your way (through the thickets, no path) towards the coast or inland (the scrubs can be good for migrating songbirds). To reach the part of the lagoon close to the shore, there is another dirt track another 900 m towards Sal rei entering at the disco ("Nazurca" or so). Follow this track about 1 km. You will cross a sandy area here, 4WD will be necessary if you don't want to walk. From the airport you can also drive to the giant hotel (Riu Karamboa) where you can park your car and walk a few 100m northwards.

What to see: This is one of the most popular sites on Boavista as there is quite a few rarities that have turned up here. During my stay there was nothing of great excitement. A few **waders** were present, also **Spectacled Warbler** and **Iago Sparrow**. All **lark** species were there too, they were only seen along the 4WD-track. Two **Caspian Terns** were the biggest surprise. During migration this site is said to be one of the best on the island.



Greater Hoopoe-Lark



Caspian Tern

Ponta da Varadinha (No. 3 on map)

Getting there: Actually I have no idea. This is the westernmost point of Boavista and a scenic destination that is frequently visited by quad-groups. There should be several tracks leading there but all involve the need of a 4WD. Any hired driver should know and there is probably information available at the car hire stations.

What to see: This site has not much to offer apart from the usual *lark* selection. *Ospreys* like the area around Varadinha and fly by quite often sometimes with impressive catches. The main reason to go here is the *Red-billed Tropicbirds* that seem to have a colony here (others have reported incubating birds) and can be seen at short distances. An impressive sight that you shouldn't miss and that exceeded the looks of the famous colony near Praia/Santiago.



Osprey



Red-billed Tropicbird

Zone Humide de Lecação (No. 4 on map)

Getting there: One of the sites in the south of the island and a must on Boavista. It is reached by following the road to Hotel Riu Touareg in the south of the island. Only a few hundred meters behind the hotel complex the site is seen to the right.

What to see: This is one of the two "major" wetlands on the island and thus a good spot for waders. Many rarities have turned up here. Desert species like *Hoopoe-Lark* and *Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark* are around, so is *Cream-coloured Courser*. I had eight species of waders but seem to have overlooked the *Semipalmated Plover* that was seen by a group of dutch guys the same day.

Curral Velho (No. 5 on map)

Getting there: Again, not easy to reach by car unless there is a 4WD. The main area of interest, the small island Ilhéu de Curral Velho, is located a bit east of the southernmost tip of the island and not visible from the west. There is sandy tracks (sometimes not visible but marked on maps) leading there and I was glad to have driver making his way there. Walking from Lecação is possible but can be exhausting when hot.

What to see: Unfortunately the main target here seems to have vanished: *Magnificent Frigatebirds* have bred on this island since the time of Christopher Columbus (who has mentioned these birds in his reports). Unfortunately they have decreased continuously until there were only two females left in 2016. These may be present somewhere but have not been seen for a long time. *Ascension Frigatebird* has been reported from 2017. Otherwise the island has a breeding colony of *Brown Boobys*; *Red-billed Tropicbirds* are usually present and there is a chance for other seabirds. *Cream-coloured Courser* is present, so are *Spectacled Warblers*, *Hoopoe-Larks* and *Black-crowned Sparrow-Larks*.

Centre of island (No. 6 on map)

Getting there: There is not a specific site for the centre of the island. I have taken a track from the village of Rabil towards Curral Velho off the main road. Birdlife is scarce whenever the landscape is dominated by stones, otherwise there usually is a few species to see.

What to see: The inland of Boavista is dry and scarcely vegetated. Acacia bushes sometimes occur in larger stands. All of the island is crowded with goat and donkey keeping vegetation low or absent. Therefore only few species occur, all of which are semidesert specialists. **Hoopoe-Lark** and **Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark** are quite common, **Bar-tailed Lark** can be seen regularly although it is rarer than the species mentioned above. **Brown-necked Ravens** are a common sight as well; Spectacled Warbler can be seen whenever there is a bit more vegetation. During my drive on this road, I counted five **Cream-coloured Courser**. There is probably a lot more around as I have not often stopped to check the surroundings. This track was the only occasion for **Helmeted Guineafowl** on Boavista for me. However they are quite common on the island and should be seen easily.



Spectacled Warbler



Bar-tailed Lark

Ilhéu dos passaros (No. 7 on map)

This island lies a few hundred meters off Boavistas north eastern coast. I have not visited this site therefore I cannot tell about how easy it is to reach it. There is supposed to be a small settlement nearby with fishermen than can be asked to take you there, which is quite expensive as I've heard. This place is visited for the breeding colony of *White-faced Storm-Petrels*, so an overnight stay is required as they come onto this islet only during the night.

São Nicolau

This island has not much to offer and is mainly visited by birdwatchers seeking a boat to Raso. Nevertheless, a visit can produce quite a good number of seabirds if weather (and wind) conditions are right plus the local Kestrels are of a different subspecies (*neglectus*) than on the other islands mentioned in this report. On the other hand São Nicolau is notoriously underwatched. Cape Verde Swamp Warbler has been discovered a few years ago (though I don't know where), other surprises might be waiting.

Tarrafal

This is a small village in the west of the island that offers decent accommodation and is the harbor for ships to Raso or pelagic trips. The beach has a few *waders*, **Cattle Egret** is gather in the surrounding hills in the evening, **Alexander's Swift** is quite common. Scanning the sea can be productive though for a good seabird selection you should travel to Ponta do Barril.

Ponta do Barril

Getting there: The lighthouse at this site is a popular spot for seawatching. It is located approx. 5 km northwest of Tarrafal and can be reached by Taxi (around 5€ for drop off and pick up).

What to see: A good place for seawatching that can produce all relevant seabird species of Cape Verde. During my visit on two days I had several thousand **Cape Verde Shearwaters**, several **Boyd's Shearwaters**, 3 **Fea's Petrels** plus **Red-billed Tropicbirds** and **Brown Boobies**. **Bar-tailed Larks** are in the area surrounding the lighthouse and sometimes a wader or two shows up (**Green-shank** and **Whimbrel** in my case). The seabird section has more to offer. A dutch group saw **White-faced Storm-Petrel** (I couldn't spot it), other species have been seen from here. Windy conditions usually increase numbers; the lighthouse offers some wind-shaded areas.

Raso

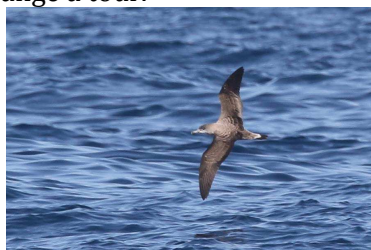
This small islet is only around 7 km² and (the only) home to one of the rarest birds in the world. Access is allowed only with permission which is granted for scientists or protection reasons only. Most birders will ignore this and enter nevertheless. Raso has undergone a strong decline in birds mainly due to illegal harvest of eggs and chicks of the seabird colony on this island: Cape Verde Shearwater breeds, so do Boyd's Shearwater, Bulwer's Storm-Petrel and Cape Verde Storm-Petrel (the latter two in small numbers). Small colonies of Brown Booby and Red-billed Tropicbird exist. The main target, **Raso Lark** may occur anywhere on the island but as they like the sparsely vegetated areas in the southwest they are chiefly found here. During display, males can be seen in songflight or sometimes perched on a rock from a boat.

The boat to Raso can be unforgotten in many cases: excellent views of pelagic birds. In my case **Cape Verde Shearwater**, **Boyd's Shearwater** **Fea's Petrel**, **Cape Verde Storm-Petrel** (*probably*) and **Pomarine Skua** were sometimes identified even without binoculars. On the downside the boat ride was one of the most horrifying experienced in my life. The waves were giant, our boat was not. For someone growing up with the MOT-certificate, safety is something else. As I've heard after my return that other (bigger) boats weren't going due to the dangerous wind conditions I strongly recommend to look for a reputable skipper and medication against sea-sickness.

Toi (see helpful contacts) can arrange a tour.



Little Egret at Ponta do Barril



Cape Verde Shearwater



Brown Booby on Raso

Santiago

Any birdwatcher visiting Cape Verde will have to go to Santiago: All endemic landbirds (apart from Raso Lark) occur here, for some species it is the only island. Desert species can be found here as well though it is harder than on Boavista and Greater Hoopoe-Lark is scarce.

Where to go:



- 1: Praia Cliffs
- 2&3: Praia Plains
- 4: Jardim Botânico
- 5: Barragem de Poilão
- 6: Pedra Badeja Lagoon
- 7: Barragem de Figuera Gorda

Praia Cliffs (No. 1 on map):

Getting there: Praia Cliffs are located between Praia and Nelson Mandela International airport.

What to see: Not many species are around. However the site is famous for its **Red-billed Tropicbirds** that breed in the cliffs. The birds frequently patrol the cliffs playing in the wind and offer spectacular views. The area is recently being built over, the birds are –at least this year- still around.



Praia Plains (No 2&3 on map):

Getting there: the most interesting areas are marked with 2 and 3.

What to see: One of the few habitats for (semi-) desert species. **Cream-colored Cursor**, **Bar-tailed Lark** and **Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark** all occur with the latter being the most common. During my visit, a large group of Sparrow-Larks were at site 2. Both Cursor and Bar-tailed Lark are known from here but prefer site 3.



Red-billed Tropicbird on Praia Cliffs

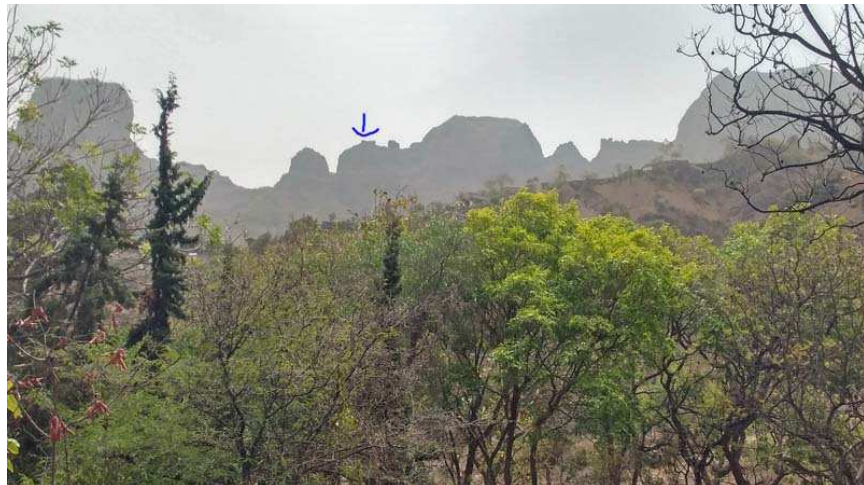


Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark on Praia Plains

Jardim Botânico (No. 4 on map):

Getting there: The botanical garden lies somewhat south of Sao Jorge dos Orãos and is signposted on the main road crossing the island.

What to see: The site is not much of an excitement but can be attractive to **migrants** as it is a rather green spot. Most visitors come to see **Cape Verde Swamp Warbler** that occurs in good numbers. Early morning visits are helpful finding this species. Another reason is the possibility to find **Cape Verde Buzzard**. These birds can turn up anywhere but the chances from this site are especially good. The birds are usually seen soaring in front of the ridges on the picture. The area marked on the picture is a favorite perch that should be checked out carefully.



View from Jardim Botânico to the Buzzard-ridges. The favorite perch is marked.

The birds are usually seen soaring in front of the ridges on the picture. The area marked on the picture is a favorite perch that should be checked out carefully.

Barragem de Poilão (No. 5 on map): Probably the best site on Santiago

Getting there: The site lies along the Sacramento <-> Pedro Badejo connection road. It is sign-posted

What to see: THE place for **herons** and migrant/wintering **waders**. All resident species plus African vagrants such as Intermediate, Black or Black-headed Heron have occurred here. Spoonbills feed regularly. **Alexander's Swift** are common around the dam especially in the morning. For **Cape Verde Swamp Warblers** cross the dam and walk to the green area with sugarcane and Papaya & Mango trees. The birds are usually heard rather than seen but they can get quite curious and show well with a little patience. Right behind the dam are burrows of **Grey-headed Kingfisher** which likes to perch nearby. **Common (Alexander's) Kestrel** bred in the dead tree in the lake. **Spectacled Warbler** and **Blackcap** are common around the lake. **Helmeted Guineafowl** and **Waxbills** occur but are a bit unpredictable. The dam seems to be a reliable place for **Cape Verde Barn Owl**. They hunt in the nearby hills and sometimes over the dam right before dusk.



Grey-headed Kingfisher



Cape Verde Swift



Common (Alexander's) Kestrel



Pedra Badejo lagoons (No 6 on map):

Getting there: The lagoons are situated between Pedra Badeja in the north and Achada Fazenda in the south. Coming from the south take a right turn in Achada Fazenda when the road forks. After 400 m the road takes a right turn. Go left onto a dirt track leading towards the coast and follow this for about 500m until you reach the waterfront.

What to see: The lagoons are a good place for migrants, especially *waders*. Quite a lot including several American species have turned up here, so has *Reed Cormorant* or *Namaqua Dove*. Resident species include *Waxbill*, *Alexander's Swift*, *Grey-headed Kingfisher* and good numbers of *Cape Verde Swamp Warbler*. For the latter skim the well vegetated areas bordering the lagoon a bit to the inland and listen for their call. *Black-crowned Sparrow-Larks* are in the area. They like to come to the lagoon early in the morning to drink.

Barragem de Figuera Gorda (No. 7 on map):

Getting there: Follow the coastal route from Santa Cruz in the south towards Canelo in the north. Shortly before Canelo the road takes a 90° left turn. Just before this turn turn off left onto a dirt track and follow this for about 3 km. The best views are from the north shore but it is also possible to get up on the dam.

What to see: This newly established wetland seems to become a major attraction as it was the place with the most freshwater during my stay. *Moorhen* has established (the only place in Cape Verde). *Bourne's (Purple) Heron* occurs in good numbers and possibly this will become a new breeding site (at least I was told a pair has been observed building a nest however without breeding). Other heron/egret species were *Cattle*, *Little*, *Black-crowned Night*, *Grey* and (four) *Western Reef Herons*. *Glossy Ibis* seems to frequent this place regularly (with six birds during my visit). The *Reed Cormorant* mentioned from the previous site has showed distantly here during my visit, this bird is the first record for the Western Palearctic outside Mauretania. Waders aren't so common but *Greenshank* and *Common Sandpiper* were present. Cape Verde Swamp Warbler (which I didn't see here) is present, so are *Waxbills*, *Helmeted Guineafowl*, *Alexander's Swift*, *Spectacled Warbler* and *Grey-headed Kingfisher*.



Western Reef-Heron



Common Waxbill

The birds:

1	Fea's Petrel	One bird on the crossing to Raso. Also visible from Ponta do Barril on São Nicolau
2	Cape Verde Shearwater	Very common at Ponta do Barril, also visible from Tarrafal. Occurs elsewhere (but I didn't try seawatching)
3	Boyd's Shearwater	Only seen crossing to Raso (4) and from Ponta do Barril (4 on March 21 st and 5 the next day)
4	Cape Verde Storm-Petrel	One bird on the crossing to Raso probably was this species
5	Red-billed Tropicbird	Seen on Boavista (Ilhéu de Curral Velho, Ponta da Varadinha with spectacular views), São Nicolau (seawatching Ponta do Barril), Raso, Santiago (Praia cliffs, very good views)
6	Brown Booby	Commoner than the Tropicbird but basically at the same sites.
7	Long-tailed (Reed) Cormorant	One bird at Figuera Gorda on March 24 th
8	Black-crowned Night-Heron	One bird at Figuera Gorda on March 24 th
9	Squacco Heron	One bird at Barragem de Poilão
10	Cattle Egret	Common on all islands visited
11	Western Reef-Egret	Four birds at Figuera Gorda on March 24 th
12	Little Egret	Common
13	Bourne's (Purple Heron)	Santiago only. Birds were seen between Sao Domingo and Rui Vaz, Barragem de Poilão and Barragem de Figuera Gorda. Numbers seem to be increasing slowly however there was no breeding attempt in 2017 (maybe because of the lack of rain)
14	Grey Heron	Only at the wetland sites on Santiago
15	Glossy Ibis	6 birds at Barragem de Figuera Gorda,
16	Spoonbill	Up to 32 at Barragem de Poilão
17	Black Kite	One bird in the harbor area in Sal Rei (Boavista)
18	Cape Verde Buzzard	Only Santiago and Santo Antao. Not seen in the Buzzard hotspots (Jardim Botanico and Aichado Letrao on Santiago). However one bird flew over my head while waiting for airport pickup in my hotel in Rui Vaz.
19	Osprey	Quite common.
20	Common Kestrel	Alexander's Kestrel common on Boavista and Santiago. Neglected Kestrel apparently rarer on São Nicolau but should nevertheless prove no problem.
21	Helmeted Guineafowl	Seen on all islands (Except Raso)
22	Common Moorhen	Barragem de Figuera Gorda seems to be the only place. After almost vanishing from Cabo Verde this newly created lake has led to an increase. I counted 32 birds.
23	Black-winged Stilt	Fair numbers in freshwater sites and lagoons.
24	Cream-coloured Courser	Boavista: inland and Curral Velho (several spots there). Not seen in Santiago but occurs Praia Plains.
25	Ringed Plover	Common in wetlands
26	Kentish Plover	Common in wetlands
27	Grey Plover	Only one bird in the harbor area in Sal Rei (Boavista)
28	Sanderling	Seen on Boavista only. A few birds in Sal Rei and Curral Velho
29	Little Stint	A few birds in Sal Rei and around 10 Zone Humide de Lecacão
30	Curlew Sandpiper	Only seen in Zone Humide de Lecacão)Boavista)
31	Ruff	One bird on Boavista (Zone Humide de Lecacão) and one bird on Santiago (Barragem de Poilão) were the only sightings
32	Common Snipe	Single birds at Barragem de Poilão and Pedra Badeja lagoons
33	Bar-tailed Godwit	Only one bird in the harbor area in Sal Rei (Boavista)
34	Whimbrel	Seen on all islands
35	Greenshank	A single bird at Ponta do Barril (São Nicolau) but quite numerous on the wetlands on Santiago
36	Green Sandpiper	3 birds at Barragem de Poilão
37	Wood Sandpiper	3 birds at Barragem de Poilão
38	Common Sandpiper	Seen on various occasions, mainly Santiago
39	Ruddy Turnstone	Common on Rocky coasts on all islands
40	Pomarine Skua	One bird chasing CV Shearwaters offshore close to Raso

41	Caspian Tern	Seen on Boavista only: One bird at Sal Rei Harbour; two birds at Rabil Lagoon
42	Eurasian Collared Dove	Common.
43	Barn Owl	Seen only at Barragem de Poilão from the dam at around 6:50 on two evenings. This seems to be a very reliable spot.
44	Cape Verde Swift	Common on Santiago, up to twenty also in Tarrafal, São Nicolau
45	Grey-headed Kingfisher	Common on Santiago
46	Black-crowned Sparrow Lark	Common on Boavista, large flock on Praia Plains (Santiago)
47	Bar-tailed Lark	Seen on Boavista only in several locations, good chances on Santiago (Praia Plains).
48	Greater Hoopoe Lark	Seen on Boavista only in several locations.
49	Raso Lark	Raso only. About 20 birds in the south-western corner of the island.
50	Red-rumped Swallow	On bird at Barragem de Poilão, probably a longstayer
51	Cape Verde Swamp Warbler	Occurs on Santiago, Fogo and São Nicolau. Sought and seen only on Santiago. Good spots were Barragem de Poilão and Pedra Badeja lagoons.
52	Spectacled Warbler	Common resident on all islands visited except Raso.
53	Blackcap	Seen on Santiago (where common) and São Nicolau (in the green Zones of Tarrafal.)
54	Brown-necked Raven	Common, seen on all islands.
55	Spanish Sparrow	Not uncommon on Santiago.
56	Iago Sparrow	Common on all islands.
57	Common Waxbill	Seen on Santiago only where common but sometimes overlooked.