

Tour Report Whales & Dolphins of the Azores 5 – 12 May 2023

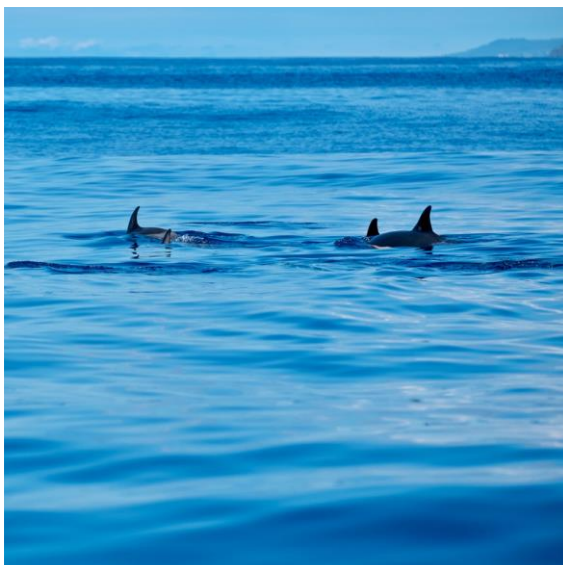
Risso's dolphin



Humpback whale



Short-beaked common dolphin



Lagao das Furnas



Compiled by Terry Goble

This trip was designed to see the many cetaceans that migrate through and reside in the Azores. The diversity of these creatures is amazing and unparalleled. In addition, the Azores is a stunningly beautiful volcanic archipelago. Even when shrouded in mist, the steep wooded valleys and numerous caldera lakes are mysterious and beautiful. In sunshine, arguably more so. All the while the culture and wildlife are brought to life by the passionate and fun guides who accompany us throughout the trip. The weather brought with it a tricky start to the tour with the disappointment of cancelled trips, but what followed more than made up. Our land trips gave us sightings of rare endemic birds, beautiful forests and lakes and - perhaps best of all - long soaks in a volcanically-heated pool.

When the weather relented and we managed to get out on the sea, all our hopes were met with sightings of great whales (humpback and sperm whale) and a myriad of dancing dolphins. The farewell from a large pod of bottle-nosed dolphin will live long in the memory.

What can make or break any tour is the group, and as a guide I couldn't have asked for more. The group was stoic in the face of disappointing news and I was delighted by the way everyone embraced the trips on land. Above all, everyone was kind, considerate towards one another, and a lot of fun. The tears at the end from both members of the group and the guides (some came to see us even though it was their day off!) as we hugged goodbye summed up perfectly the way the group embraced the whole tour. It was a real pleasure and I will be delighted to see you all again.

Day 1: Flight from Heathrow to Ponta Delgada (via Lisbon)

Friday 5 May 2023

We left a grey and overcast Heathrow on time and after a slightly bumpy flight landed under the blue skies of Lisbon. After passport control the route to connecting flights was straightforward. The gates however were a tad confusing! Although we were told it would be Gate 19, it came up on the display as 21, and was then changed to 23A! However everyone seemed to cope, and we were soon on our way over the Atlantic to Ponta Delgada.

After a smoother flight we touched down on the island of São Miguel to an overcast sky, and were soon heading off to baggage reclaim. On route we saw Atlantic yellow-legged gulls wheeling around, and closer to earth we had collared dove, house sparrow and starlings. At the luggage belt everyone gathered and introduced themselves, before we made our way out to find Daniel, who was driving us to our hotel, waiting. He was as effervescent as ever and spoke enthusiastically about the island's wildlife, whetting our appetites.

We arrived at the splendid Caloura Hotel set beside dramatic jagged cliffs and a pounding Atlantic Ocean. We checked in and settled in our rooms, arranging to meet for dinner at 20:00. The views over the ocean from the rooms are spectacular. In the distance Cory's shearwaters could be seen skimming over the waves. They harried a tern, but it was too distant to identify.

We all met up again at 20:00 for dinner. The staff were excellent as always in arranging a table for our large group and ensuring that all dietary requirements were catered for. After a long day it was nice to relax and get to know each other. We then had a briefing about the following day's activities, with the unfortunate caveat that the weather wasn't looking at all promising and the sea was pretty rough. The forecast was for conditions to improve, so we held on to the hope that we would be able to get out tomorrow morning. The plan for the afternoon was to visit the Azores bullfinch conservation area to learn about the native bullfinch (known locally as the *príolo*) and the habitat essential for its survival. After the briefing we chatted amiably until it was time to get some rest, and crossed our fingers for the next day.

The weather didn't look at all promising as we turned in: the wind and rain were quite strong. However, on a brighter note, over the noise of the wind and waves the calls of the Cory's shearwaters could be heard as they came in to roost from the sea.

Day 2: Morning Cetacean Watching & Azores Bullfinch Restoration Project

Saturday 6 May 2023

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Most of the group were up around 07:00 for a leisurely breakfast. The buffet was varied: everything from cooked breakfast to fruit and toast. Whilst chatting by the window we had a visit from a few birds, the highlight being an Atlantic canary. We then dispersed to our rooms to get ready for whatever the day was to bring. The weather was calmer, but still quite windy.

The good news, when we arrived at the dock was that we were going out to sea. The conditions were not ideal, but good enough for us to get out. So we watched a short video on the state of the ocean (harrowing!), then looked at what cetaceans were resident in and migrating through the Azores. After this presentation we donned our life jackets and set off to board our rib (Number 2).

We were soon out of the harbour and motoring through flocks of Cory's shearwater as they lifted off from the sea. Overhead passing Atlantic yellow-legged gulls and the occasional common tern flew by. On the sea numerous Portuguese man-of-war were floating on the surface. These are very beautiful but dangerous colonies of creatures. The 'float' is an entirely separate animal from the others that make up the tentacles that sting and other parts of the colony.

We picked up speed when reports of a whale sighting came through. When we arrived at the spot there was unfortunately no sign of the whale, but we were compensated with a medium-sized pod of short-beaked common dolphin around the boat. They were active and occasionally made short leaps out of the water, sometimes drifting along and occasionally feeding. The guide told us that some were probably feeding their young on milk.

We watched this group for a while then made our way back to the eastern side of the island. We hoped to find a pod of Risso's dolphin, but they were nowhere to be found. A bottle-nosed dolphin was seen briefly as it swam quickly under the RIB. It was in full feeding mode and was not about to stop and be admired. With no other sightings reported we headed around the protected island near the harbour, looking at the nesting birds. There were mainly yellow-legged gulls, common tern and a few others such as ruddy turnstone. It was by then time to head back to the harbour and get ready for lunch.

After a brief stop to hand back our lifejackets and drink green tea, we headed off to the restaurant for our pre-ordered lunch. En route we spotted a few Azorean large white butterflies and Madeiran wall lizards. The restaurant was virtually empty, so we were soon served lunch plus a complimentary glass of wine. The food was reasonable and we enjoyed a relaxed break before we had to head back to the centre for the afternoon trip.

We arrived back on time, by now aware that tomorrow's boat trip had been cancelled. Instead we were going to meet at 11:40 for lunch then set off for Lake Furnas. However this afternoon we still had the *piolo* trip to negotiate, so we set off on the fairly long drive (around one hour) to the Priolo Centre.

Here we met the guide who took us through the exhibition, which explained the ecology and habitat requirements of the birds, and the impact on the range of creatures associated with the habitat. He outlined the threats to the rare native habitat that they need to thrive, and the benefits of this project to protect them.

We then set off to walk through a tiny area of natural habitat that is being used as a nursery to help reintroduce the habitat to other parts of the island. As we walked through the beautiful forest most of the group were lucky enough to see the *priolo*. The narrow paths made it difficult for all to get a look and, despite our endeavours, they remained elusive, but at least some had a good look at this very rare bird. We walked back to the car park and thanked our guide before setting off back to the hotel to get ready for our evening meal.

Day 3: Free morning & Lagoa do Furnas

Sunday 7 May 2023

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With the cancellation of the morning whale watching we had a free morning to explore the coast and the beaches around the hotel. We were then to meet at the car park at 11:40. Most of the group ambled down to the beach from the hotel. Here there were a few common terns and curiously tens of the 'floats' from the Portuguese man-of-war. They still looked quite beautiful with their translucent bodies washed with violets, purples and blues.

After a few minutes beachcombing we headed back to the hotel, spotting an Azorean buzzard and some common birds on our way. A few people walked the hotel grounds, whose exotic plants included flowering bird of paradise. Soon it was time to prepare for lunch and our trip to the volcanic lakes.

The minibuses duly arrived at 11:40 and we drove back to the whale centre, where we parked up. Just before we headed out to lunch Stephanie gave me the dreaded news that the forecast for tomorrow was poor and the whale watching trip was cancelled once again. With this news we headed off to lunch.

When we had all gathered in the restaurant I broke the news to the group, who were naturally disappointed. We discussed the options as - quite understandably - people were not keen to have another free morning, as they felt that they had explored the area around the hotel. I agreed to negotiate with Stephanie: firstly to arrange a second land trip in the morning, and secondly to fit in an afternoon whale watching trip sometime to compensate. We continued with lunch and our spirits, initially dampened, began to lift again.

We returned to the centre and after discussion with Stephanie it was agreed that there would be an additional trip to a local lake at 09:00 next morning, then lunch, followed by the talk on whale science and ecology. We also agreed that for anyone who wished, there would be an additional whale trip on Thursday afternoon. Unfortunately anyone who wanted the additional whale trip would unavoidably miss the programmed trip to learn about the heritage of whaling and visit the *vigias*.

We drove up through the hills dotted with small agricultural plots to our first destination, a viewpoint over the lake. Unfortunately, thick mist obscured the view and we instead read the information on the display boards and the local guides (Alex and Sandra) told us about the island's geological history and the formation of Lagoa do Fogo, a caldera lake created by the collapse of a volcanic crater some 250-300,000 years ago. Geologically speaking, the formation of the island was complete around 5,000 years ago – which is incredibly recent - but is still changing due to tectonic and volcanic activity.

We carried on down to the hot spring and walked around this interesting area where boiling water bubbles up from underground, with the heavy smell of sulphur clinging to our nostrils. The geo-thermally heated water mixes with cool spring water to create hot pools, which were popular with bathers on this Sunday afternoon. We found a few Azore chaffinches and heard Atlantic canaries around the pools and in the car park. We also found Perez's frog after hearing it calling from the stream. However the main reason for visiting this site is to relax in the pools. One group went up to see the waterfall and enjoy a cooler bathing experience, while others headed straight for the hot pools lower down. A couple of people enjoyed just wandering around the area looking at the amazing plants and wildlife. After a while most of the group ended up in the hot pools, where we very much enjoyed a relaxing bath for the next 30 minutes.

It was then time to head off as our session had come to an end. Next on our list was a nearby waterfall with a drop of around 40 metres, partially concealed in a cave. We wandered around to get views of this and also enjoyed excellent views of Atlantic canaries as we returned to the car park.

We then headed to a beach of black volcanic sand, which is famed for its giant waves and surfing competitions, where we found lots of wall lizards on the basalt rocks. We spent some time watching the waves crashing on the shore, sending spray high into the air. We also looked out to sea to watch the Cory's shearwaters and yellow-legged gulls. It was soon time to head back to the hotel, so we boarded the minibus and drove back via Ponta Delgada to drop off the additional party before reaching the hotel around 18:45. We agreed to meet for dinner at 20:00.

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Day 4: Lagoa do Congro and Talk on the Science & Ecology of Whales

Monday 8 May 2023

This morning we had a leisurely breakfast and met at 09:00 to drive to a new location for this tour: Lagoa do Congro (Green Lake). The morning was grey and overcast and we were soon wrapped in a blanket of dense fog. We continued to the parking area and walked down the path to the lake.

Despite the weather it was an enjoyable walk through lovely woodland. The path was a little muddy and steep in places, but everyone managed the inclines. Liverworts, ferns and mosses gave the woodland an ancient feel and the fog added to the ambience of a place lost in time. We reached the end of the path and spilled out onto a viewing circle. At first we were looking into a wall of fog, but it gradually dispersed enough for us to see the full splendour of the lake and the steep wooded hills that surrounded it (another volcanic caldera). Enjoying the views and woodlands we chatted for a while before making our way back up to the minibuses.

Rain had been falling steadily ever since we arrived, so we agreed to return to the hotel to dry off and change before going to lunch at a new restaurant - today was a day for new places! After freshening up we drove a short way from the hotel to the restaurant. It was quite a small local place that served a variety of meat and fish dishes, while for the vegetarians there were mixed salads with cheese.

After our meal we drove back to the centre to meet Sanna, who was delivering today's talk on the science, evolution and ecology of whales. Firstly we learnt about their evolution from land animals into marine creatures that adapted over time into the cetaceans we see today. We then looked at the feeding techniques of toothed and baleen whales, before focusing on orcas and their variety of feeding types - which may lead to reclassification as different species in the near future. We discussed the need to monitor and learn about whales, dolphins and porpoises to aid their protection.

After a second short break we undertook a workshop looking at the many threats facing cetaceans today, despite the reduction in whaling. We explored such diverse issues as pollution and by-catch, climate change, shipping, and even influencing politicians and policy-makers. We ended the afternoon with a quick exercise in matching sperm whale flukes, and Sanna made a plea for everyone to get involved in citizen science by posting their whale pictures to 'Happy Whale' and spreading the message of the need for education and protection of the world's cetaceans. We left the centre with the encouraging news that the weather had improved and our boat trip was going ahead tomorrow.

The afternoon had been quite warm and the sun had even appeared briefly, but as we drove back to the hotel rain began to fall. It was quite light and still warm, so a few people walked around the hotel grounds getting great views of blackcaps and Atlantic canaries before dinner.

Dinner was the usual buffet affair with a good variety of choice. We chatted amiably and were very pleased to be able to resume our search for whales and dolphins. After dinner some went to enjoy an evening cocktail and listen to the shearwaters returning to the cliffs, while others retired to their rooms for the 06:00 rise.

Day 5: Morning Cetacean Watching, Lagoa das Furnas & Botanical Gardens

Tuesday 9 May 2023

This morning we were up at 07:00 to recommence our quest to see whales and dolphins. After the usual buffet breakfast we set off at 08:00 to the office to sign in for our much anticipated resumption of whale watching. Once we completed the formalities we lined up to board our RIB. We passed the time identifying the fish in the marina, noting red blenny, ornate wrasse and grey thick-lipped mullet among others.

We soon boarded the RIB and headed out of the harbour. The sea was a lot calmer though still a little lumpy. The skies were overcast with just a glimmer of blue, but it was dry and surprisingly warm. After heading out east of the island we soon came across a large but scattered pod of Risso's dolphins with an estimated number of around 30 individuals around the boat and further out to sea.

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We watched these graceful and curious dolphins for a while and were eventually rewarded with some cracking views as they popped their heads out of the water. The males have large melon-shaped heads that are often white as a result of scarring. Males fight each other, but also get scarred by the beaks of the squid they hunt. Their bodies are also heavily scarred, which is visible when they raise them out of the water while swimming by. We then left these beautiful creatures in peace and headed further east. We stopped on route as a boat had spotted a mola mola (sunfish). Although we managed to get a view of its large fins splashing on the surface, the fish was hard to see and we soon left it to find more cetaceans.

Further east we came across a pod of common dolphin, which happily for us - were in a playful mood. Alex (our guide) squealed in delight as she noticed baby dolphins, barely a metre long, amongst the pod. We stayed transfixed for a while, while the dolphins leapt and cavorted. Sometimes they seemed to settle down and maybe feed, before another round of bowriding and leaping - all highly entertaining.

It was now time to make our way back towards the harbour. On route we re-found the mola mola, but once again it wasn't easy to see well. We came across another pod of common dolphin but spent only a short while with them as we were nearing the end of the trip. As usual this finished with a quick tour of the protected island just west of the harbour. As we looked at nesting yellow-legged gulls and common terns, a buzzard wheeled over the island. It was then time to head back to the harbour and conclude a very enjoyable trip.

We had a few minutes to grab teas and coffees before setting off for our afternoon land-based trip to Lago das Furnas and the botanical gardens.

We first stopped at Furnas Lake and enjoyed a few birds and wildlife in the sunshine. There were a few blackcaps, Atlantic canaries and a little egret among plentiful common birds. We stopped at a neo Gothic church, which despite looking ancient and spooky was quite a recent building. Sandra and Alex related the story of the church, which was built as a monument to a wealthy man's sick wife, who later recovered. We enjoyed views over the lake as our guides explained the geological history of the calderas. On the return walk to the minibuses the sun had encouraged a few insects to become active. We saw a clouded yellow hurry by and watched an emperor dragonfly zooming around over a little ditch, watched by a pair of grey wagtails. A couple of red admirals were feeding on the sap of a tree with tens of honey bees for company.

By then it was time for lunch, and we headed to a restaurant to enjoy traditional dishes cooked using volcanic steam. It was a busy and bustling place where a few groups were celebrating and inviting the whole restaurant to join in. Amongst the raucous atmosphere the waiters brought out huge plates of steamed meats, yams and cabbage - far too much for ordinary mortals to eat.

Feeling replete, we headed off to the botanical gardens. Here we split into a few groups as some wanted to head straight for the hot pool, while others wanted to wander around the gardens first. The water was indeed hot and relaxing, but is known to stain hair, clothing and even jewellery - so care is needed! After our soak we had a quick wander around the gardens, adding ruddy shelduck and moorhen before it was time to return to the minibuses.

Our last stop was to see some volcanic vents and thermal pools. We saw the pools with their boiling mud and water. The air was heavy with sulphur and steam from the vents. One of the vents is used for cooking corn, but in addition research being conducted to look at the many bacteria found in the pools. On route back to the minibus we stopped at a shop to sample the naturally carbonated water. Most reported that it was a pleasant experience! We returned to the hotel for a rest before meeting for dinner at 19:30.

Everyone was a little tired from the long but very enjoyable day and already looking forward to our next whale watching trip in the morning. We chatted about past and future trips and a variety of other topics before we drifted back to our rooms or off to the bar.

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Day 6: Morning Cetacean Watching & Sete Cidades

Wednesday 10 May 2023

This morning we were up at the usual time to commence our quest to see more cetaceans. The dawn chorus was lovely and heralded the pleasing sight of a calm, flat sea and occasional bursts of sunshine. We met for breakfast then returned to our rooms to prepare for the day.

Daniel and Sandra duly arrived at 08:00 sharp and we soon boarded the minibuses and headed off to the centre. As usual we signed in then waited for our life jackets to board the RIB. Once this was complete we headed out the harbour and were soon speeding along to the site of a whale sighting, which sent a ripple of excitement through the group. We arrived but were frustrated that the whale had slipped unseen out of the area. We were compensated with some lovely views of common dolphins occasionally breaching around the boat.

The crackle of the radio got our hopes up as the whale was spotted again, but a long way out. We sped off in the hope of catching up with it. On reaching the area we strained our eyes for any sign, then suddenly spotted a blow about 500 metres ahead. We maintained our distance but had some nice views of a humpback whale as first it shallow dived, then deep dived showing off its flukes. It was a great experience to enjoy this wonderful animal and we watched it blow and dive a few more times before we left it in peace and headed back shorewards.

On the way back we enjoyed shearwaters gliding effortlessly (planing) over the flat seas. We noted Portuguese man-o'-war and other seabirds, but were travelling quickly as we had ventured quite far out. We had just enough time to complete our customary trip around the small island before entering the harbour. We thanked George (our skipper) and Sandra for such a great trip and headed back for a green tea and coffee.

We gathered again after a short break and walked round to the restaurant for our pre-ordered lunch. We relaxed and chatted happily after a lovely morning out at sea. After lunch we met our guides and drivers (Sandra and Daniel) for the day and set off into the Western Highlands.

On route we stopped at an aqueduct covered with vegetation. Sandra gave us a talk about aeration towers and aqueducts, and their importance to the island's early settlers. We then stopped at a few viewpoints but saw very little due to the thick fog clinging to the hills.

We next tried for a view of the two crater lakes, but in the poor light we were unable to even see that one lake was light grey and the other a darker grey. In good light one appears green and the other blue! The lighter-coloured lake is shallower and the colour difference is caused by the algal growth, but the effect is interesting. Sandra also related the romantic story of two forbidden lovers who cried on being separated, at which point the water in the lakes change to match the colour of their eyes.

We went back down the winding road to the lake and enjoyed a walk. We were able to add a few birds such as coot, mallard and common tern (we can't count the Muscovy ducks!). We also saw a lot of common birds including several Atlantic canaries. As we descended, we stopped at the attractive small church of São Nicolau, which has a splendid avenue of Japanese cedars leading up to it. Inside, curiously modern-looking stained glass windows depict the passage of life from birth to death, and around the walls the stages of the cross are illustrated in little reliefs. Our final stop was at a disused hotel that has been reclaimed by nature - now ironically a tourist attraction!

We got back to the hotel around 18:45 and thanked our drivers for a fun and interesting afternoon. As we got back so late, we agreed to have dinner at 20:00 to give us a while to relax. Dinner was the usual buffet with some vegetarian alternatives. The atmosphere was relaxed and fun as we chatted over numerous subjects and reflected on a very satisfying day. We discussed plans for the next day and after a lovely

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dinner, retired to the bar or our rooms. As I entered my room I could already hear the comical cries of the shearwaters.

Day 7: Morning Cetacean Watching & more Cetacean watching

Thursday 11 May 2023

This morning we were up at the usual time to commence our quest to see more whales and dolphins. We met for breakfast at 07:00 for the usual buffet and then got ready for pick-up at 08:00. The minibuses arrived on time and we were soon heading to the Terra Azul centre to sign in and board our boat. The relatively calm seas raised hopes and excitement of what we might see today. Shearwaters and Portuguese man-o'-wars were a given. We were not long out of harbour when we headed to our first sighting. We were soon amongst a small pod of common dolphin, which were in a more docile mood today, so we enjoyed them swimming around the boat, but didn't see much in the way of acrobatics.

Our next sightings were of very lovely Risso's dolphin. These did interact a little and a few larger males swam close by emerging from the water to get a look at us, revealing their white, heavily scarred, bulbous heads. It's always a pleasure to see these animals. However, excitement levels went up a notch when we left these dolphins and raced to attend to another sighting far out to sea.

We bounced and soared for 11 miles in an exhilarating - and occasionally damp - boat ride. When we finally arrived in the area the tension mounted as there was no sign of a whale. We strained our eyes to the horizon looking for blows, to no avail. The neighbouring island of Santa Maria was clearly visible so we knew we were a long way out and in very deep water (approximately 650 metres deep). A hydrophone dropped into the water revealed that a sperm whale was in the area, but as yet not visible. We waited patiently for it to return to the surface.

During the wait a blow was seen about half a mile away possibly by a different whale. We headed over as fast as we could, only to despair as the magnificent creature showed its flukes when we were about 200 metres away and slowly slid down into the depths. Sperm whales can stay down for 40 minutes a time and sometimes longer, so this one had escaped us. The disappointment was crushing - we had raced a long way out to miss it by only a few minutes, and now faced a long ride back. However, as in all good thrillers, we were about to leave the area when a large bull sperm whale was spotted 'logging' on the surface. To our great joy, relief and excitement we spent the next ten minutes observing this great whale on the surface, occasionally shallow diving and coming back up with its distinctive angled blow. We could make out its enormous head and back. With perfect timing it arched its back and raised its flukes to begin its slow descent into the depths to chase squid in the dark waters, at just the same moment as we were due to return to harbour.

After such a fantastic sighting the journey back was a whole lot quicker - and happier! We did the usual jaunt around the small island before a happy group docked in the harbour. We were excited at the prospect of going out again this afternoon and to see what that might bring. For now, we drank green tea and most of the group went for lunch at the harbour restaurant.

As it was our fourth visit here I asked if they could do a different dish for the vegetarians and others whose choices were limited. They were happy to serve spaghetti and tomato sauce for a change. We ate happily, chatting through the meal, planning what we would do for the hour and a half interval between trips. Some set off on short beach walks, while others went into town to look at churches and/or do some shopping. We met again at the designated time of 15:40 and began the formalities before boarding our craft for the second time today. We had Daniel at the helm, which is always entertaining, and the very knowledgeable Sanna as our guide - a great team!

The trip lived up to our expectations and, although we didn't see whales, the dolphins were just amazing! Initially we headed south then changed tack to south-east as news came in of dolphins spotted. We found a small pod swimming around sedately and riding the waves on occasion. We then spotted a flock of shearwaters amidst a feeding frenzy and decided to check it out. They were again common dolphins, but in

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a far more energised mood. They were zooming around, feeding, leaping, porpoising out the water and bow riding and were incredibly enjoyable to watch. It was a large mixed group of male and female adults, calves and young adults coming together to feed, socialise and – seen from our perspective – simply have fun!

Then we came across yet another group of dolphins, which were also quite playful, near some feeding shearwaters further out. Happily they were joined by a few striped dolphin, which are similar to common but rarely seen and often shy. These came towards the boat for a short while before disappearing. One last glimpse and they were gone. The rest of the pod of common dolphins was also dispersing and after an entertaining few minutes we decided it was time to move on.

We now headed back to shore and seemingly to the protected island for one last circuit before the harbour. Instead we veered east as we got close to the shore and found ourselves in the midst of a very large pod of oceanic bottle-nosed dolphins. This turned into a fantastic half-an-hour and finale to our trip. They swam very close to the boat and performed all manner of jumps and tail slaps, wave riding, and porpoising out of the water just a few metres away. It was magical!

When we finally dragged ourselves away, we headed for the island and completed our final circuit, adding a surprise whimbrel and a few grey wagtails to the usual seabirds. All that was left was to dock, but Daniel managed to make even that memorable by performing a high-speed turn and banking into the harbour entrance, a great salute to a fabulous day!

The final surprise was that Alex and Sandra both came to see us even though they weren't working today. They came with us on the drive back to the hotel where they bade us goodbye, which brought on a few tears - it was an emotional and fantastic day.

As we got back quite late we went straight to dinner. Once we had all gathered we drank a toast to a great week and chatted happily while we enjoyed our buffet dinner. A few tired and happy souls retired to their rooms, and some with more energy made it to the cocktail bar. As usual the air outside the rooms was filled with the weird cries of the male Cory's shearwater and the rather coarse shriek of the females. In a strange way a comforting and now familiar sound to drift off to sleep too.

Day 8: Return flight to Heathrow via Lisbon

Friday 12 May 2023

Today was a farewell day as we were picked up by Daniel and another guide and driven to the airport at Ponta Delgada. There were big hugs and farewells before we entered the airport to start our journey home.

Boarding and take-off were both on time as said goodbye to São Miguel and our time in the Azores. After a smooth flight and rather heavy landing we arrived at Lisbon airport in cloudless sunshine. We made our way to the North side of Terminal 1, stopping for snacks and drinks en route. Once there, we made our way through passport control to board the connecting flight to London Heathrow.

We took off promptly and, despite being told the flight was full, there were plenty of empty seats. After a slightly bumpy flight we landed much more smoothly at Heathrow. Meeting up for one final time at the carousel, we said our farewells as the trip came to a close.

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Checklist



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	MAMMALS	MAMMALIA								
1	Humpback whale (Migrant)	<i>Megaptera novaengliae</i>						✓		
2	Sperm whale (Resident)	<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>							✓	
3	Bottle-nosed dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncates</i>		✓					✓	
4	Short-beaked common dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	
5	Striped dolphin	<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>							✓	
6	Risso's dolphin	<i>Grampus griseus</i>					✓		✓	
7	European rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓			✓			
	REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS	REPTILIA & AMPHIBIA								
1	Madeiran wall lizard	<i>Lacerta dugesii</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
2	Perez's frog	<i>Rana perezii</i>					✓			
	BUTTERFLIES & MOTHS	LEPIDOPTERA								
1	Azorean large white	<i>Pieris brassicae azorensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Clouded yellow	<i>Colias crocea failae</i>					✓		✓	

3	Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>					✓			
4	Buff-tailed bumble bee	<i>Bombus terrestris</i>						✓		
5	Honey bee	<i>Apis mellifera</i>						✓		
6	Garden bumble bee	<i>Bombus ruderatus</i>						✓		
	OTHER TAXA									
1	Portuguese man of war	<i>Physalia physalis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Marbled shore crab	<i>Pachygrapsus marmoratus</i>		✓						