

# Birding on Corvo, Azores, and Nearctic vagrants in 2005-09

*Peter Alfrey, Simon Buckell, Vincent Legrand, David Monticelli & Birding Azores*

Located in the mid-Atlantic, 1890 km west of mainland Portugal and 1930 km south-east of Newfoundland, Canada, it is little wonder that Corvo (39°42'N, 31°06'W) – the most north-westerly of the nine main islands in the Azores archipelago – is the premier site in the Western Palearctic (WP) for Nearctic landbirds. The combination of its location, small surface area, relatively sparse vegetation (in an Azorean context) and mosaic of habitats provides near-perfect conditions to concentrate and find vagrants. But notwithstanding its potential for Nearctic species, the fauna and flora of Corvo is predominately Palearctic, and it also attracts migrants and vagrants from Europe, Asia and elsewhere. Situated halfway between the Palearctic and the Nearctic, with influences from the Holarctic and comprising part of the unique Atlantic and Macaronesian assemblages, Corvo represents a true avifaunal 'melting pot'.

The primary purpose of this article is to explore that part of the avifauna for which Corvo is most well known – Nearctic vagrants. Recognizing the island's potential for American accidentals, Bannerman & Bannerman (1966) wrote: 'As a haven for vagrants ... [the Azores] must rank very high ... it is on Corvo and Flores that we should expect these overseas wanderers to arrive ... It would be astonishing if Corvo, in time, could not supply an even more interesting list of American migratory species.' It took 39 years for that prediction to be fully realised, when Peter Alfrey set out for Corvo at the height of a multi-decadal cycle of Atlantic storm activity in October 2005. Hoping to see an American landbird or two, he actually found 52 individuals of 17 species (Alfrey 2005). In the five years since that discovery, there have been several interesting developments. First and foremost has been the confirmation that American

**410** View of Corvo village from hill of high fields, Corvo, Azores, 1 November 2006 (*Vincent Legrand*)





**411** Semipalmated Plover / Amerikaanse Bontbekplevier *Charadrius semipalmatus*, first-winter, airport area, Corvo, Azores, 24 October 2007 (Rafael Armada)

**412** Common Nighthawk / Amerikaanse Nachtzwaluw *Chordeiles minor*, juvenile, main road to lighthouse, Corvo, Azores, 25 October 2007 (Vincent Legrand)





**413** Black-and-white Warbler / Bonte Zanger *Mniotilta varia*, first-winter male, Ribeira da Ponte, Corvo, Azores, 6 October 2009 (*Rafael Armada*) **414** Savannah Sparrow / Savannahgors *Passerculus sandwichensis*, first-winter male, high fields, Corvo, Azores, 29 October 2009 (*Vincent Legrand*) **415** Yellow-billed Cuckoo / Geelsnavelkoekoek *Coccyzus americanus*, first-winter, middle fields, Corvo, Azores, 19 October 2009 (*Vincent Legrand*)





**416** Tree Swallow / Boomzwaluw *Tachycineta bicolor*, high fields, Corvo, Azores, 19 October 2007 (*Vincent Legrand*)  
**417** Chimney Swift / Schoorsteengierzwaluw *Chaetura pelagica*, Fojo, Corvo, Azores, 25 October 2009 (*Daniele Occhiato*) **418** American Barn Swallow / Amerikaanse Boerenzwaluw *Hirundo rustica erythrogaster*, first-winter, high fields, Corvo, Azores, 25 October 2006 (*Vincent Legrand*) **419** Yellow-bellied Sapsucker / Geelbuiksapspecht *Sphyrapicus varius*, first-winter male, Fojo, Corvo, Azores, 29 October 2008 (*David Monticelli*)

landbird vagrants are a regular feature each year on the island. Also notable has been the increased interest in Corvo and the number of birders visiting the island, with several key individuals playing important roles, namely Rafael Armada, Simon Buckell, Pierre-André Crochet, Eric Didner, Olof Jönsson, Frédéric Jiguet, René-Marie Lafontaine, Vincent Legrand, Dominic Mitchell, David Monticelli, Darryl Spittle and, of course, Staffan Rodebrand, the architect of the Birding Azores website ([www.birdingazores.com](http://www.birdingazores.com)). In October 2009, there were as many as 30 birders present at one time, with many others visiting throughout the course of the autumn. For WP birders, Corvo has become a must-visit location, and for many it is already the most exciting birding destination in the

region (cf, eg, Alfrey 2006ab, Hering & Alfrey 2006, Ek 2009).

## Avifauna

### Breeding birds and regular non-breeding visitors

The resident, regular and breeding avifauna of Corvo is represented by a small suite of passerines and landbirds, some migratory shorebirds and seabirds and also some breeding seabirds. There are very healthy resident landbird populations on the island (often represented by endemic or Macaronesian subspecies), with ubiquitous feral Rock Doves *Columba livia*, Common Wood Pigeons *C. palumbus azorica*, Grey Wagtails *Motacilla cinerea patriciae*, Common Blackbirds *T. merula azo-*



**420** Myrtle Warbler / Mirtezanger *Dendroica coronata*, lighthouse valley, Corvo, Azores, 26 October 2008 (David Monticelli) **421** American Yellow Warbler / Gele Zanger *Dendroica petechia*, Ribeira da Ponte, Corvo, Azores, 15 October 2009 (Peter Alfrey) **422** Black-throated Blue Warbler / Blauwe Zwartkeelzanger *Dendroica caerulescens*, Ribeira do Cantinho, Corvo, Azores, 28 October 2006 (Vincent Legrand) **423** Summer Tanager / Zomertangare *Piranga rubra*, first-winter, middle fields, Corvo, Azores, 28 October 2006 (Vincent Legrand)

*rensis*, Eurasian Blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla gularis*, Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris granti*, House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*, Azores Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs moreletti*, Atlantic Canaries *Serinus canaria* and smaller numbers of European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis parva* (contra Clarke 2006). There is also a small population of Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, mainly in the eastern valleys. Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* breeds in the caldera (or caldeira), from where there is also a breeding record of Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* (Hering & Hering 2006ab). A regular hybrid flock of Mallard *A platyrhynchos* and American Black Duck *A rubripes* commutes between the caldera and the neighbouring island of Flores.

Breeding seabirds include 1000s of pairs of Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris borealis*, with smaller numbers of Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* and Barolo Shearwater *P baroli*. Monteiro's Storm Petrel *Oceanodroma monteiroi*, the recently split hot-season breeding form of Madeiran Storm Petrel *O castro*, has been heard during seabird monitoring expeditions (Monteiro et al 1999). Great Shearwaters *P gravis* are regular autumn migrants. A significant population of Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* is present in the summer months and Common Tern *S hirundo* is also a breeding summer visitor. Atlantic Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis atlantis* is a numerous resident on the island. The Sociedade Portuguesa Para O Estudo das Aves (SPEA) has a near-constant



**424** Indigo Bunting / Indigogors *Passerina cyanea*, Ribeira da Ponte, Corvo, Azores, 23 October 2007  
(Rafael Armada)

**425** Baltimore Oriole / Baltimoreorioepial *Icterus galbula*, middle fields, Corvo, Azores, 16 October 2009  
(Darryl Spittle)



presence on Corvo, monitoring and conserving its seabird populations.

### Migrants and vagrants

Corvo is relatively remote from any major migration routes. A few Northern Wheatears (presumed to be of the Greenland subspecies *O o leucorhoa*) are seen most autumns and could be regular, and Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Sanderling *Calidris alba*, Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* and Lesser Black-backed Gull *L fuscus* are presumably regular passage migrants and/or winter visitors. The majority of migrating birds are scarce or vagrants, occurring in small groups or as singles. Scarce migrants and vagrants arrive from all points of the compass, and are dealt with in the following sections.

#### European/Holarctic scarce migrants and vagrants

There have been 73 Palearctic bird species recorded on Corvo, compared with 69 Nearctic and 27 Holarctic, and one subtropical seabird (Trindade Petrel *Pterodroma arminjoniana*). Perhaps most surprising in terms of Palearctic migrants has been the occurrence on Corvo of rarities such as Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* (14-15 September 2009) and Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* (19 September 2008). There are many species or (recently split) species pairs which occur in both the Nearctic and the Palearctic, particularly those with a northerly breeding distribution. Many of these Nearctic taxa are potential vagrants or have already been recorded. These include Greater Scaup *Aythya marila* (with Nearctic *A m nearctica* (not yet recorded)), Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* (with Nearctic American Eider *S m dresseri* (not yet recorded) and Northern Atlantic Boreal Eider *S m borealis*), Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* (with Nearctic Rough-legged Hawk *B l sanctijohannis*), Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* (with Nearctic Northern Harrier *C c hudsonius* (one putative record, under consideration)), Merlin *Falco columbarius* (with Nearctic Taiga Merlin *F c columbarius*; Crochet 2008), skuas and jaegers *Stercorarius*, Common Gull *L canus canus* and Short-billed Gull *L c brachyrhynchus* (Alfrey & Ahmad 2007), Glaucous Gull *L hyperboreus*, Sandwich Tern *S sandvicensis* and American Sandwich Tern *S s acullavida* (one putative report), Common Redpoll *C flammea* (with Greenland Redpoll *C f rostrata*) and Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus* (with Nearctic *C l subcalcaratus* (not yet recorded)). Differentiation between Nearctic and Palearctic taxa has not always been possible and therefore it is often impossible to ascertain their geographic origin. For more information on (sub)species to

look out for, see [www.birdingazores.com/?page=subspecies](http://www.birdingazores.com/?page=subspecies).

#### Nearctic species

Corvo is famous for its Nearctic vagrants, especially landbirds (see table 1). No fewer than 37 Nearctic landbird species have been recorded in 2005-09, including the only three WP records of White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus*, and a supporting vireo cast of two Yellow-throated V *flavifrons*, two Philadelphia V *philadelphicus* and 12 Red-eyed Vireos *V olivaceus*. The island is also the location in the WP for American warblers; 35 individuals of 14 species have been recorded in 2005-09, including single Black-and-white *Mniotilta varia*, Tennessee *Vermivora peregrina*, American Yellow *Dendroica petechia*, Chestnut-sided *D pensylvanica* and Blackpoll *D striata* and Canada Warblers *W canadensis*, at least two Northern Parulas *Parula americana*, two Hooded Warblers *Wilsonia citrina*, three Black-throated Blue Warblers *D caerulescens*, three Black-throated Green Warblers *D virens*, three American Redstarts *Setophaga ruticilla*, three Ovenbirds *Seiurus aurocapilla*, six Myrtle Warblers *D coronata* and six Common Yellowthroats *Geothlypis trichas*. One Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra* still is only the second record for the WP in more than 50 years, and there have been three records of Scarlet Tanager *P olivacea*. There has been a minimum of 14 Indigo Buntings *Passerina cyanea* reported since 2005, an extraordinary total for a species which has only been recorded seven times in the rest of the WP region (Slack 2009). The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius* in October 2008 was one of the main highlights of the study period, as was the flock of 27 Chimney Swifts *Chaetura pelagica* in late October 2005 (part of an influx that brought almost 120 to the archipelago in the last few days of October and first days of November).

## Analysis of Nearctic landbird vagrant records

### Data summary

Table 2 lists the number of Nearctic landbird species recorded on a weekly basis throughout the study period (2005-09). The peak year was 2009, which can be explained by intensive observer coverage and complementary weather conditions. Overall, the period 6-26 October seems to be the most exciting for new discoveries. Indeed, shortly before and shortly after this period there is a sharp drop in the number of species discovered weekly. Of course, this does not account for the total

Birding on Corvo, Azores, and Nearctic vagrants in 2005-09

TABLE 1 Nearctic vagrants on Corvo, Azores: number of records (with number of individuals in brackets); all data sourced from database maintained by www.birdingazores.com. Not all records have yet been processed by the Portuguese rarities committee.

Species	Pre-2005	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total number of records
Wood Duck <i>Aix sponsa</i>	2 (3)						2
American Wigeon <i>Anas americana</i>					3 (8)		3
American Black Duck <i>Anas rubripes</i> (including hybrids)	x	x	x	x	x	x	(15-27 resident birds)
Blue-winged Teal <i>Anas discors</i>		1 (4)			1	2 (4)	4
Green-winged Teal <i>Anas carolinensis</i>						1 (6)	1
Ring-necked Duck <i>Aythya collaris</i>				2 (3)	1	2 (3)	5
Hooded Merganser <i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>	1						1
Pied-billed Grebe <i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>			1				1
Double-crested Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>	2 (6)					1?	2-3
American Great Egret <i>Casmerodius albus egretta</i>					1	1 (2; same as in 2008)	2
Great Blue Heron <i>Ardea herodias</i>				1	1 (2; same as in 2007)	1	3
Semipalmated Plover <i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>	1		1	6 (12)	2 (3)		10
Killdeer <i>Charadrius vociferus</i>			1				1
American Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis dominica</i>		1		2			3
Semipalmated Sandpiper <i>Calidris pusilla</i>	1			1 (3)		3	5
Least Sandpiper <i>Calidris minutilla</i>						2	2
White-rumped Sandpiper <i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>	2	1 (6)		3	1(2)	4 (9)	11
Pectoral Sandpiper <i>Calidris melanotos</i>	3 (6)		1 (2)	3 (4)	1	4 (7)	12
Buff-breasted Sandpiper <i>Tryngites subruficollis</i>					1		1
Wilson's Snipe <i>Gallinago delicata</i>	1		1		1	3	6
Short-billed Dowitcher <i>Limnodromus griseus</i>			1 (3)				1
Long-billed Dowitcher <i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>				1			1
Hudsonian Whimbrel <i>Numenius hudsonicus</i>		1		2	1		4
Upland Sandpiper <i>Bartramia longicauda</i>				1			1
Spotted Sandpiper <i>Actitis macularius</i>	1			2 (4)		2-3	5
Greater Yellowlegs <i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>			1				1
Lesser Yellowlegs <i>Tringa flavipes</i>	2 (4)		1	1			4
Wilson's Phalarope <i>Phalaropus tricolor</i>				1			1
Laughing Gull <i>Larus atricilla</i>	1	1		1			3
American Black Tern <i>Chlidonias niger surinamensis</i>	1						1
Forster's Tern <i>Sterna forsteri</i>		1					1
American Mourning Dove <i>Zenaida macroura</i>		1					1
Yellow-billed Cuckoo <i>Coccyzus americanus</i>	1	1		(5)		2	9
Common Nighthawk <i>Chordeiles minor</i>				1	1	1	3
Chimney Swift <i>Chaetura pelagica</i>		1 (27)	1			1	3
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker <i>Sphyrapicus varius</i>					1		1
White-eyed Vireo <i>Vireo griseus</i>		1			1	1	3
Yellow-throated Vireo <i>Vireo flavifrons</i>					1	1	2
Philadelphia Vireo <i>Vireo philadelphicus</i>		1				1	2
Red-eyed Vireo <i>Vireo olivaceus</i>		1	2	1	3	5	12
Tree Swallow <i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>		1		2			3
Purple Martin <i>Progne subis</i> *	1 (2)						1*
American Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica erythrogaster</i>			1 (2)				1
American Cliff Swallow <i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>		1					1
Hermit Thrush <i>Catharus guttatus</i>					1		1
Grey-cheeked Thrush <i>Catharus minimus</i>		1		1			2
Summer Tanager <i>Piranga rubra</i>			1				1
Scarlet Tanager <i>Piranga olivacea</i>		1		1	1		3
American Buff-bellied Pipit <i>Anthus rubescens rubescens</i>		1				2	3
Rose-breasted Grosbeak <i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>		2	2		1	1	6
Indigo Bunting <i>Passerina cyanea</i>		(7)	1	2		4	14
Savannah Sparrow <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>						1	1
White-crowned Sparrow <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>		1					1
Bobolink <i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>		2				3	5
Baltimore Oriole <i>Icterus galbula</i>		1				2	3
Black-and-white Warbler <i>Mniotilta varia</i>						1	1
Northern Parula <i>Parula americana</i>					1	1	2
Tennessee Warbler <i>Vermivora peregrina</i>		1					1

TABLE 1 (continued)

Species	Pre-2005	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total number of records
American Yellow Warbler <i>Dendroica petechia</i>						1	1
Chestnut-sided Warbler <i>Dendroica pensylvanica</i>						1	1
Black-throated Blue Warbler <i>Dendroica caerulescens</i>		1	2				3
Black-throated Green Warbler <i>Dendroica virens</i>					1	2	3
Myrtle Warbler <i>Dendroica coronata</i>			3		1	2	6
Blackpoll Warbler <i>Dendroica striata</i>					1		1
American Redstart <i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>						3	3
Ovenbird <i>Seiurus auricapilla</i>		1				2	3
Common Yellowthroat <i>Geothlypis trichas</i>		1	1		2	2 (3)	6
Hooded Warbler <i>Wilsonia citrina</i>		1			1		2
Canada Warbler <i>Wilsonia canadensis</i>						1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>213</b>

\* Purple Martin: two on Corvo on 28 September 1996 are still under consideration by the PRC (Clarke 2006)

number of birds present at any time on the island.

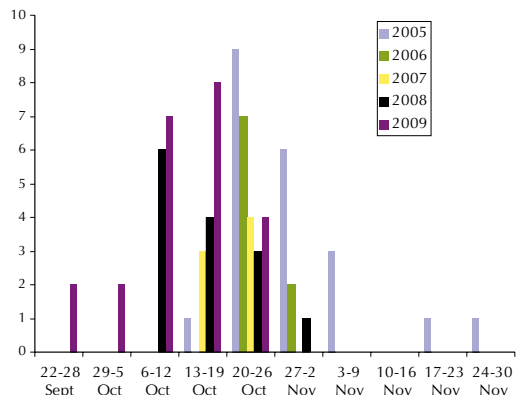
The median dates of arrival are given in table 3. These dates are different from each other (an analysis of variance would give a highly significant result), but more interestingly there is an apparent trend, ie, the median date is earlier in the most recent years (see also figure 1). The amplitude of the difference is two weeks (2005 and 2009), and this advancement has been progressive over the study period. This trend may be partly explained by annual changes in the timing of migration of the suite of species involved. However, weather patterns and observer behaviour are presumably the key factors: **1** Weather in the Atlantic. There is perhaps a tendency for the peak activity of depressions to be earlier over the study period, and this point warrants further analysis. At least, the latest median date found in 2005 should be connected to late autumn weather events, such as the passage of Hurricane Wilma, which brought in large numbers of Nearctic landbirds in late October and early November (including 27 Chimney Swifts on 28 October). **2** Observer activity on Corvo. As birders have experimented with various timings of their visits to Corvo over the last five years, the number of vagrant species observed is obviously related to the numbers and bird-finding skills of the observers present. For instance, the lack of vagrants in the late October-early November periods of 2006, 2007 and 2008 may perhaps be connected to poor birding activity. On the other hand, it can be seen that despite intense coverage of Corvo by Olof Jönsson and others during the early part of autumn 2009, the median date of recorded species for this year was the same as in 2008, when there was no intense coverage early in the season (see table 3). Hence, observer activity alone cannot explain the

pattern of bird discoveries. More birders are encouraged to get involved in order to help 'standardise' the effort in the next 10 years by systematically covering the period from September to November each year. With such a perspective in mind, it is our hope that interesting patterns, together with new rare birds, will be found.

**Low latitude depressions and tropical storms**

Weather plays a major contributory factor in vagrancy but the association between vagrancy and weather is complex and certainly not always the primary cause: Nearctic vagrants can arrive in a wide range of meteorological conditions. There are many factors at work, for example 'reverse' and random migration, disease, ship assistance and observer behaviour (including the delay between the arrival of a vagrant and its discovery).

FIGURE 1 Number of Nearctic landbirds discovered on Corvo, Azores, on a weekly basis in 2005-09





**426** Northern Parula / Brilparulazanger *Parula americana*, first-winter male, power station, Corvo, Azores, 20 October 2009 (David Monticelli)

**427** Ovenbird / Ovensvogel *Seiurus auricapilla*, first-winter, Fojo, Corvo, Azores, 15 October 2009 (Vincent Legrand)





428 Black-throated Green Warbler / Gele Zwartkeelzanger *Dendroica virens*, first-winter male, Ribeira da Ponte, Corvo, Azores, 10 October 2009 (Vincent Legrand)

429 Common Yellowthroat / Gewone Maskerzanger *Geothlypis trichas*, first-winter male, middle fields, Corvo, Azores, 30 October 2008 (David Monticelli)



TABLE 2 Number of American landbird species discovered weekly on Corvo, Azores, over a five-year period (2005-09). For each species, only first date of each record is taken into account.

Week	Year					Number of species/week
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	
22-28 Sep					2	2
29-5 Oct					2	2
6-12 Oct				6	7	13
13-19 Oct	1		3	4	8	16
20-26 Oct	9	7	4	3	4	27
27-2 Nov	6	2		1		9
3-9 Nov	3					3
10-16 Nov						0
17-23 Nov	1					1
24-30 Nov	1					1
<b>Number of species/year</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>74</b>

In an Azorean context, Norman Elkins (pers comm) has identified ‘low latitude depressions’ as one of the key meteorological features associated with Nearctic vagrancy. Disturbances along the eastern seaboard of America by tropical storm activity can also lead to increased vagrancy potential. These tropical storms can displace vagrants into the path of depressions. Often, the tropical storms may weaken affected birds, increasing their susceptibility to further displacement. Commenting on the major influx of Nearctic vagrants in autumn 2005, NE (in litt) stated: ‘The anomalous North Atlantic pressure pattern placed the Azores in an unusually strong and cool westerly airflow (cf figure 2). As the distances involved from source ar-

FIGURE 2 Atlantic weather map of 28 October 2005 (00:00). Note low latitude depression centred north-west of the Azores. This was the second Atlantic depression (L984) within four days, bringing large numbers of Chimney Swifts *Chaetura pelagica* to the Azores (source: [www.wetterzentrale.de/topkarten/tkfaxbraar.htm](http://www.wetterzentrale.de/topkarten/tkfaxbraar.htm))

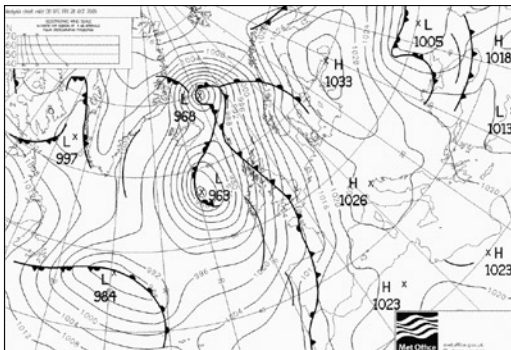


TABLE 3 Median dates of arrival of Nearctic landbird vagrants on Corvo, Azores, in 2005-09

Year	Median point (n=sample size)	Corresponding median date (22 September = 1)
2005	37 (n=21)	28 October
2006	33 (n=9)	24 October
2007	29 (n=7)	20 October
2008	22 (n=14)	13 October
2009	22 (n=23)	13 October

ea and the Azores are relatively short (in transatlantic terms) vagrant mortality can reasonably be assumed to be lower than traditional more northerly and distant transatlantic fall areas, thus resulting in larger numbers of vagrants surviving to landfall. During the past 30 years, there have been no antecedents to this anomalous weather pattern, although the period 1996-2005 has seen a small increase in the number of low latitude extra-tropical depressions that have affected the Azores during the second half of October. Furthermore, when combined with the effects of Hurricane Wilma, this pattern was even more unprecedented.’

### Birding locations

Corvo is c 6 km long and up to 4 km wide. It is fundamentally the cone and crater of an extinct volcano. The village of Corvo is built on a wave-cut platform at the south end which provides the main flat area suitable for settlement. The extensive and varied farmland, freshwater lakes in the crater, open hillsides, wooded sheltered valleys, cliffs and rocky shoreline form a mosaic of habitats for a range of birds. The main birding areas are described below (see figure 3).

#### Vila do Corvo (village)

The area around the village, which includes the lower and middle fields, has played host to many vagrants, including Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*, several Yellow-billed Cuckoos *Coccyzus americanus*, Red-eyed Vireo, Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*, Summer Tanager and Scarlet Tanager, Indigo Bunting, Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*, White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*, Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*, Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula*, Myrtle Warbler and several Common Yellowthroats.

The airfield, comprising a short runway bordered by rough grass, is good for waders and gulls, while the surrounding fields to the north and south are particularly good areas to look for vagrants.

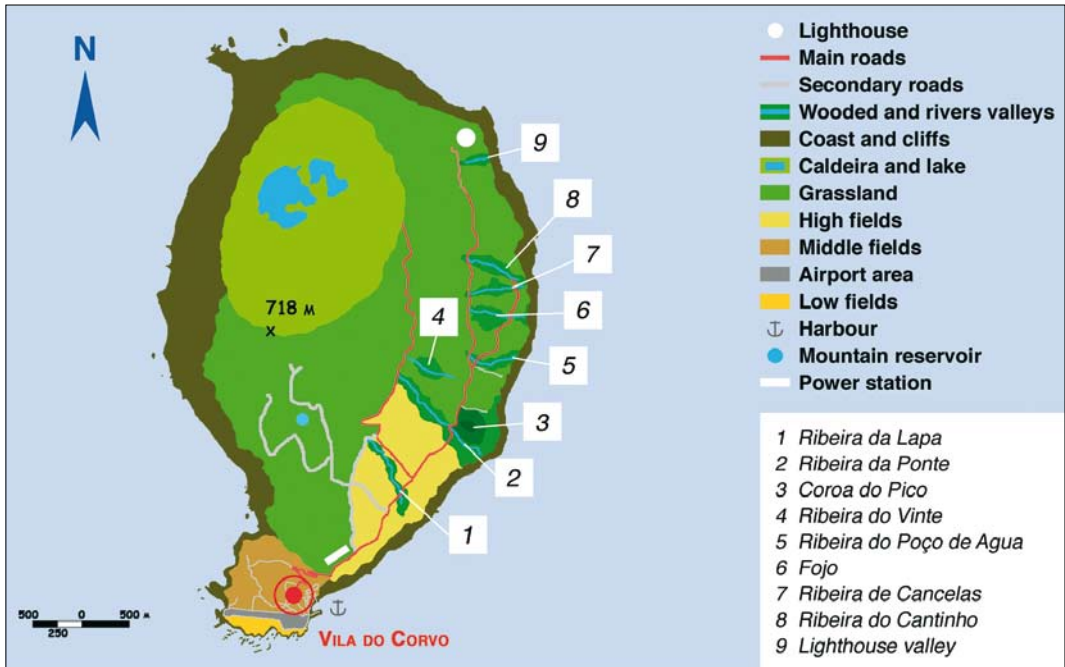


FIGURE 3 Map of Corvo, Azores, with main birding areas

Clumps of tamarisk in this part of the island have hosted various Nearctic landbirds.

The village itself attracts the occasional vagrant, including a Pied-billed Grebe *Podyilymbus podiceps* in October 2006 found by mayor Manuel Rita grounded on the tarmac of the 'high street'. The guesthouse garden bird list includes Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Chimney Swift and Tree Swallow. In 2005, a Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* (known as 'Marie') was the guesthouse 'pet' after being taken into care with a broken wing.

The village is also a good place for seawatching, with good numbers of Cory's Shearwaters often offshore and other seabirds occasionally seen. In October 2006, a dark-morph *Pterodroma* petrel seen offshore at close range by several observers was identified and submitted as Trindade Petrel, the second for the Azores, if accepted.

### High fields (or bean fields)

This is an area of dry-stone walls, small farm buildings, fields and hedges. It attracts good numbers of local birds and has also hosted American Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica erythrogaster*, Tree Swallow, American Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens rubescens*, Indigo Bunting, Bobolink and

Common Yellowthroat. The area has been given several names and is also known as the Pig Fields.

### Mountain reservoir

The common land above the village consists of open steep grassland which attracts an interesting suite of passerines and wetland birds. This upland area is regularly used by the island's Ruddy Turnstone flock, which commutes between the village coastline and the 'mountain'. It is also a good place to look for vagrant waders, with past records of Eurasian Dotterel *C morinellus*, American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, Semipalmated *C pusilla*, Least *C minutilla*, White-rumped *C fuscicollis* and Pectoral Sandpiper *C melanotos*, Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* and Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda*. The area looks perfect for Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*, which has yet to be recorded on the mountain, and has also attracted Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*. In 2009, Red-throated Pipit *A cervinus*, American Buff-bellied Pipit, Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis* and Myrtle Warbler, as well as the first Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus* for the Azores, were all found, revealing the potential of this area for passerine vagrants.



**430** White-eyed Vireo / Witoogvireo *Vireo griseus*, Ribeira da Lapa, Corvo, Azores, 24 October 2008 (Edward Verduyze) **431** Hooded Warbler / Monnikszanger *Wilsonia citrina*, male, Cancelas, Corvo, Azores, 11 October 2008 (Dominic Mitchell) **432** American Redstart / Amerikaanse Roodstaart *Setophaga ruticilla*, Ribeira da Ponte, Corvo, Azores, 17 October 2009 (David Monticelli) **433** Canada Warbler / Canadazanger *Wilsonia canadensis*, Fojo, Corvo, Azores, 12 October 2009 (Olof Jönsson)

### Caldera

The caldera is visually stunning, representing the collapsed remains of a once-active volcanic cone. The crater has now accumulated fresh water, and these lakes provide a perfect environment for waterbirds. Nearctic ducks, herons and waders are regularly recorded, as are Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting and even the occasional American passerine, including American Buff-bellied Pipit, Bobolink and Myrtle Warbler. In 2008, a dead Scarlet Tanager was found in the crater.

### Eastern valleys

There are nine eastern valleys (or *ribeiras*) on the island which are essentially wooded streams running west to east from higher ground towards the

coast, and which cut gorges through the volcanic cone sides and end abruptly at steep cliffs. The valleys are all linked by the lower and upper roads passing through dry-stone-walled fields and hydrangeas between the valleys. The eastern valleys are sheltered from the prevailing winds and the worst of the autumn storms. Most of the vagrant landbirds, and especially hirundines, find their way to this sheltered side of the island.

The vegetation here is mainly dense woodland, with glades, pools, relicts of former field systems, citrus groves and native vegetation. The taller trees are laurels and introduced Japanese Cedars *Cryptomeria japonica*, with an understorey of endemic laurels, yams, elder, ferns and brackens. From

south to north these valleys and wooded areas are named as follows (see figure 3).

*Ribeira da Lapa*

This is a shallow valley lined mostly with hydrangeas and low shrubs. Host to a White-eyed Vireo in 2008, it has also produced Red-eyed Vireo. Several very small ponds have held the occasional water-bird, including Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*, Wilson's Snipe *G. delicata* and Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*. Situated between this valley and the next is also a small area of juniper bushes just north of Ribeira do Cerrado das Vacas which has hosted both Myrtle Warbler and Blackpoll Warbler.

*Ribeira da Ponte*

This deep valley has tall laurel woodlands with a yam or fern understory in the lower and less dense areas and densely wooded dark upper slopes with areas of Japanese Cedar. The bridge in the middle of the valley has an open area which has a history of attracting Indigo Bunting. This valley has proved to be one of the best for Nearctic passerines, with White-eyed Vireo and Red-eyed Vireo, Black-and-white, Tennessee, American Yellow, Black-throated Blue and Black-throated Green Warbler, American Redstarts and Ovenbird all recorded.

*Coroa do Pico (Pico)*

Pico is a wooded hill with areas of fields surrounded by hydrangea hedges. Vagrants have included Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Common Nighthawk *Chordeiles minor*, Chimney Swift, White-eyed Vireo and Red-eyed Vireo.

*Ribeira do Vinte*

Do Vinte is situated mid slope on the cone sides and comprises tall trees and stands of conifer. Vagrants here have included Philadelphia Vireo and Black-throated Green Warbler.

*Ribeira do Poço de Agua*

This valley has a series of small feeding pools by the road and the lower parts have denser and tall vegetation. Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus*, Chestnut-sided Warbler and Black-throated Blue Warbler have been recorded here. Indigo Bunting and Bobolink have also been found in the vicinity of this ribeira.

*Fojo*

This ribeira actually comprises two valleys linked by a wooded ridge, forming a continuous large block of tall, dense woodland. The picnic area is a

good resting place for birders, and there are citrus groves and small farm buildings in the woodland which create more open areas. Among the vagrants found here are Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, several Red-eyed Vireos, Hermit Thrush *C. guttatus*, Black-throated Green Warbler, Ovenbird and Canada Warbler.

*Ribeira de entre as Cancelas (Cancelas)*

This is a smaller area of woodland and, in addition to American Redstart and Hooded Warbler, it hosted the first White-eyed Vireo for the WP. Cancelas has completed a vireo hat-trick, with Yellow-throated Vireo and Red-eyed Vireo also recorded.

*Ribeira do Cantinho*

Characterised by a low open glade of yam and boulders, Cantinho becomes a steep gorge towards its upper reaches. It too has hosted three vireo species – Yellow-throated, Philadelphia and Red-eyed Vireo – and also Black-throated Blue and Hooded Warbler, Northern Parula and Ovenbird.

*Lighthouse valley*

The lighthouse valley is more of a true (open) valley, rather than a ribeira. Areas of juniper seem to be particularly attractive, with Red-eyed Vireo, Myrtle Warbler and American Redstart all recorded in this small area, as well as Common Yellowthroat.

## Logistics

### Getting to Corvo

Visitors from outside the Azores must first fly in to one of the two international airports in the Azores archipelago, which at present is served by two airlines, TAP (Transfer Area Portugal) and SATA (Service Azorean Transport Airlines). The largest airports are Lages (on Terceira) and João Paulo at Ponta Delgada (on São Miguel). These can be reached via Lisbon (Lisboa) in mainland Portugal, or sometimes direct according to seasonal and international schedules. SATA is also the islands' sole internal airline. It is advisable when booking with SATA to ensure that all flights and prices are confirmed via email. The airline operates a scheduled service to Corvo three times a week, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Flights to Corvo are often routed via Faial and Flores on inward and outward journeys, though some are direct flights – it is advisable to check routings on your travel dates if you wish to visit or stay on other islands. In adverse conditions flights are oc-

asionally delayed or cancelled, meaning it can be difficult to reach or leave the island on schedule.

There is now an inter-island ferry service between Corvo and Flores. This is a new initiative which started in the winter of 2008. The boat, *Ariel*, is part of Atlântico Line, the official ferry company operating throughout the Azores. In October 2009, it ran a scheduled service three times a week, on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Boats depart from Corvo at 08:00 and 17:00 and return from Flores at 09:00 and 18:00. The journey takes c 30-40 min one way and again is very weather dependent, so services may be delayed and cancelled. The boat takes 12 passengers per trip and costs EUR 10 each way. It is advisable to book well in advance through the Atlântico Line website or at the RIAC office on Corvo, which is situated just opposite the first bank next to the Town Hall. With this new service it is now possible to arrange a trip with flights to Flores, and then take the ferry to Corvo. This new service has also made it possible for birders on either island to 'twitch' the other one and return on the same day, again if weather conditions permit.

All arrangements for travel and accommodation can be made at competitive rates by contacting the Azores specialist travel agency Archipelago Azores ([www.azoreschoice.com](http://www.azoreschoice.com)). Several specialist birding tours also include Corvo in their autumn itineraries.

### Accommodation

All the localities featured here are within the village area of Vila do Corvo, unless otherwise stated. The only purpose-built tourist accommodation is the Comodoro Guest House, which has seven twin rooms with all modern facilities. Room rates include breakfast, and guests are able to make a small packed lunch to take out while birding on the island during the day. The guest house also has four small apartments for rental, though these may be booked up well in advance and for longer periods of time by non-resident contractors working on the island, such as school teachers and government staff. In autumn 2009, the cost was EUR 27.50 per person per night. In recent years, it has become fully booked by birders during October, and the only alternative accommodation available is four private houses renting up to 10 rooms for EUR 20-30 per person per night. Birders should aim to make reservations well in advance. 2009 saw a marked increase in the numbers visiting the island, with even some turning up without reservations and being left with no accommodation. Just in case, there is also a free campsite which has a shower and toilet block.

### Infrastructure

With just over 400 inhabitants, amenities are somewhat limited. A cargo ship delivers supplies twice a week but this can be cancelled due to bad weather, resulting in temporary shortages of goods. Vila do Corvo has four places to eat, with two main restaurants and two snack bars. For vegetarians, the menu is very limited. All the restaurants serve alcoholic beverages such as beer, wine and spirits, and there are two purpose-built bars. The island has three shops including a new store opened last winter that sells basic supplies, food and drink, open Monday-Saturday. There are also a pharmacy/chemist, a post office, a bakery and two banks. The island has a doctor's surgery with one doctor, open Monday to Friday plus emergencies. The surgery also acts as a mini hospital at times for minor injuries, although in the event of serious accidents and injuries patients have to be airlifted to the nearest hospital in Horta, Faial.

Most European mobile networks have an international roaming facility, and on Corvo most mobile telephones work under Vodafone Portugal. The signal can be patchy and limited on certain parts of the island but as a whole works reasonably well. Birders also use portable radios which work well in most locations on the island, enabling information to be passed on in areas such as the lighthouse valley and inside the crater.

### Staying on Flores and visiting Corvo – the future?

With Corvo's accommodation limited to only 30 or so people but Flores just a 30-minute boat journey away on regular sailings, birders can now stay in the more plentiful accommodation available on Flores and travel to Corvo as required. Flores is a larger island and no doubt hosts more Nearctic vagrants than Corvo but larger numbers of observers are required to cover the area thoroughly. In October 2009, Flores hosted two Dickcissels *Spiza americana* (second WP record) and a Slate-coloured Junco *Junco hyemalis* (Nico de Vries in litt; Dutch Birding 382, plate 520, 2009), and also Magnolia Warbler *D magnolia* – the star birds of the Azores that autumn.

As it is apparent that many Nearctic landbirds on Corvo generally stay for prolonged periods, a well-timed one- or two-day visit (or twitch) from Flores could result in encountering several of Corvo's autumn vagrants.

### Useful websites and e-mail addresses

Birding Azores ([www.birdingazores.com](http://www.birdingazores.com)); Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves (SPEA) ([www.spea.pt](http://www.spea.pt)); Archipelago Azores ([www.azoreschoice.com](http://www.azoreschoice.com)).

com); Atlanticoline ([www.atlanticoline.pt](http://www.atlanticoline.pt)); Azores weather (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/weather/forecast/192>); Comodoro Guest House ([katt2699@yahoo.com](mailto:katt2699@yahoo.com)); SATA ([www.sata.pt/EUA/en/Home](http://www.sata.pt/EUA/en/Home)); TAP ([www.flytap.com/UK/en/Homepage](http://www.flytap.com/UK/en/Homepage)); Azores Birding enquiries ([Gerbrand.AM.Michielsen@azores.gov.pt](mailto:Gerbrand.AM.Michielsen@azores.gov.pt)).

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### Samenvatting

VOGELN OP CORVO, AZOREN, EN NEARCTISCHE DWAALGASTEN IN 2005-09 Door de ligging vrijwel halverwege tussen Europa en Noord-Amerika zijn de Azoren een uitstekende plek om binnen het West-Palearctische (WP) gebied Nearctische dwaalgasten te vinden. Het meest noordwestelijke van de negen hoofdeilanden van de archipel, Corvo, ligt ideaal voor de 'eerste opvang', is relatief klein (4-6 km doorsnede) en is in tegenstelling tot de andere eilanden spaarzaam begroeid, wat het vinden van dwaalgasten vergemakkelijkt. Sinds enkele jaren wordt dit eiland in het najaar door een groeiend aantal vogelaars bezocht. In dit artikel worden belangrijke vogelplekken beschreven en praktische informatie gepresenteerd over reis en verblijf. Ook wordt kort ingegaan op de mogelijkheid te verblijven op het grotere buureiland Flores (waar meer accommodaties zijn) om vandaar dagtochten naar Corvo te maken.

In het artikel wordt een overzicht gegeven van de avifauna van Corvo, met de nadruk op dwaalgasten. Ook wordt aandacht besteed aan de kans om nauw verwante taxa aan te treffen die zowel van Palearctische als Nearctische oorsprong zijn; een aantal heeft recent soortstatus gekregen of komt daarvoor in aanmerking. Het voorkomen van Nearctische soorten in 2005-09 wordt nauwkeurig weergegeven (zie tabel 1). In deze periode werden bijvoorbeeld 37 Nearctische zangvogelsoorten en andere 'landbirds' vastgesteld, waaronder 14 Amerikaanse zangers (met in totaal 35 exemplaren) en vier soorten vireo's (inclusief de tot nu toe enige drie WP-

gevallen van Witoogvireo *Vireo griseus*). De andere Nearctische soorten betreffen vooral eenden en steltlopers. De topweken blijken rond half oktober te liggen, hoewel de mediaan van de waarnemingen in de afgelopen vijf jaar twee weken naar voren is komen te liggen, mogelijk als gevolg van verschillen in de 'timing' van tropische stormen.

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