

Specialist Cape Verde activities

Bird watching

Cape Verde – a unique environment: There are a number of reasons why Cape Verde is an exceptional country in terms of certain faunal groups, particularly birds. Its geographic position in the subtropical and tropical eastern part of the Atlantic Ocean, allows it to harbour an exclusive combination of European and Afrotropical, marine and terrestrial species.

Furthermore, the Cape Verde archipelago is a great setting for the evolution of endemic species, mostly due to the physical barriers and the unique ecological niches that can be found throughout this island group.

Birds in Cape Verde

The Cape Verdean avifauna is not particularly diverse or abundant. It is, however, EXCEPTIONAL for the collection of species found on the archipelago that are not found elsewhere in the world. There are around 190 known bird species in Cape Verde, of which five are endemic, four are globally threatened and three have been introduced. Moreover, Cape Verde stands in the route of many migratory birds, so there is a large number of rare or accidental species, enriching the avifauna.

The most important birds seen in Cape Verde are:-

Cape Verde Shearwater (*Calonectris edwardsii*)

This is an endemic species to Cape Verde. It nests in deep holes along the rocky shores. 75% of the world's population can be found on Raso islet. Estimates are that the total population in Cape Verde does not exceed 10,000 pairs. This is a highly endangered species within a situation that requires immediate intervention. Fishermen hunt and then dry process the chicks to sell them as part of a tradition, mostly in Santo Antão.

Red-billed Tropicbird (*Phaeton aethereus*)

A stunning bird that is thought to be in severe decline. Last estimate for the total Cape Verde population was 140-160 pairs. Found in Sal, Santiago, Cima islet, Brava, Raso islet and probably Boavista. Raso islet harbours one of the largest colonies in the archipelago and they are very easy to spot, either by their contrast to the deep blue sea or by their distinguishing cry.

Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*)

The largest breeding colony of this marine bird can be found in Curral Velho, at Boavista. More than 100 birds nesting on the rocky cliffs set up an amazing scene for bird watchers. In mid-October when nests can be found with eggs, young-ones and first winter juveniles, all in the same colony. Also found in Raso islet, with two large breeding colonies.

Bourne's Heron (*Ardea bournei*)

This unique and critically endangered species can be seen on Santiago island, in the valley of Banana, Ribeira de Montanha. Considered the only breeding location in the world, harbouring around 40 birds.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

A breeding bird of the Cape Verde archipelago. Although widely distributed, only ever found in small numbers. Can be easily seen in the shores of the north island group (Barlavento), and quickly identified by their size, flying style and hunting activities.

Cape Verde Swift (*Apus alexandri*)

Another bird endemic to Cape Verde. Present in Ribeira de Montanha, Tarrafal and in the mountain areas of Santiago. Some individuals have also been spotted on São Nicolau and Boavista.

White-headed Kingfisher (*Halcyon leucocephala*)

A colorful bird than can be easily seen in Santiago, even within the limits of Praia (the capital). Usually found standing on poles near green areas.

Raso Lark (*Alauda razae*)

This bird is the pearl of the Cape Verdean avifauna. One of the most rare and endangered species in the world, there are 40 remaining individuals, which are restricted only to the three square miles of Raso islet. Since Raso islet is uninhabited and deserted water is scarce, the population tends to congregate near the area where fishermen camp. This species does not show any fear of humans, so it is very easy to spot and to register all of its interesting behavioural patterns, especially their elaborate display for mating purposes that can be observed in October.

Cape Verde Cane Warbler (*Acrocephalus brevipennis*)

Endemic to Santiago Island, its melodious sounds can usually be heard between sugar cane plantations, often with running water close by. Estimates point to no more than 600 pairs.

Iago Sparrow (*Passer iagoensis*)

Very similar to the common house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), this endemic bird to Cape Verde is very common and with a wide distribution, being present in all island except Fogo. On Raso islet, there are countless photo opportunities, as these sparrow's show no sign of fear and the lack of water encourages them to come near humans in search of that precious resource.

Raso & Branco

Although magnificent and unique birds can be seen all over the archipelago, between the islands of São Vicente and São Nicolau there are uninhabited desert islands, Santa Luzia (island) and Raso and Branco (islets) these bear matchless conditions for bird watching, especially the latter islets. The isolation and absence of human activities, allows colonies of marine birds to remain in a wild and untouched state. Additionally, these birds show almost no fear of man, thus allowing fabulous photo opportunities. Currently, Branco and Raso are considered integral nature reserves, the highest conservation status concerning protected areas in Cape Verde. Therefore, only with a permit from the environmental agency is it possible to visit the islets.

Bird watching excursions

Foreign groups organised by both friends or scientists make up the majority of bird watching excursions planned for Cape Verde. Currently, a project named Naturalia can offer excursions only to the bird watching hot spots located on Boavista Island.

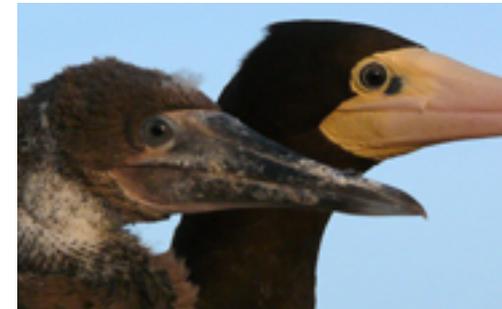
Ecodive Lda. however, can offer tours or expeditions to the integral nature reserves sites because it guarantees the safeguard of these ecosystems and is the only company certified by the Cape Verdean environmental agency to do so. This group is associated with Biosfera I and part of its revenue will be used to protect the natural habitats. For more information email, biosfera@biosferaum.org



Cape Verdean Shearwater chick.



White-headed Kingfisher.



Adult Brown Booby and its chick.



The endemic and very endangered Raso Lark.

Contact information:-

Contributor: Tiago Peixoto
biosfera@biosferaum.org
www.biosferaum.org
 (00238) 995 04 27
 (00238) 984 44 47

About Biosfera I

Biosfera I is a non-governmental environmental organisation. Founded in 2006 by two Cape Verdean environmentalists in Mindelo, São Vicente (Cape Verde), its main goal is to protect the unique ecosystems of Cape Verde. As well as focusing on finding solutions through solid approaches in the field, Biosfera I aims to draw attention to problems affecting the natural environment of Cape Verde, by communicating with the Cape Verdean people and through environmental education, especially in local schools.

Biosfera I is a non-for-profit organisation which is self-funded. Any donations or voluntary assistance are VERY warmly welcomed. We will let you know exactly what we do with any donated funds. We also sell our photos and have a Razo Lark 'adoption' scheme.

Please email any photos you have taken, which we can add to our portfolio (you will be credited).

Photos & copy © Tiago Peixoto/Biosfera I