Dutch Spoonbills *platalea leucorodia* and a Finnish Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* on tropical islands: counts of shorebirds in the Cape Verdes in March 1996

Klaas van Dijk & Theo Bakker

Dijk, K. van & Bakker, T. 1998. Dutch Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* and a Finnish Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* on tropical islands: counts of shorebirds in the Cape Verdes in March 1996. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 86: 40 - 43

This paper presents the results of a survey of wintering waders and other waterbirds at the Cape Verde Islands. In total, 1,702 waders of 19 species were counted. Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* was the most abundant species. Our results confirm earlier studies showing that the Cape Verdes do not support large numbers of wintering waders.

Klaas van Dijk, Vermeerstraat 48, 9718 SN Groningen, The Netherlands.
Theo Bakker, Javalaan 53A, 9715 GS Groningen, The Netherlands.

INTRODUCTION

Almost 7.5 million waders use the East Atlantic Flyway. The majority of these winter in wetlands along the Atlantic coast of Africa, mainly at the Banc d'Arguin in Mauritania and in the Arguipélago dos Bijagós in Guinea-Bissau (Smit & Piersma 1989). When Hazevoet (1992, 1995) summarised all available information on waders of the Cape Verde Islands, he concluded that limited numbers winter there. In addition, only three wader species breed on the Cape Verdes: Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor* and Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*.

The República de Cabo Verde is an oceanic archipelago of volcanic origin situated in the eastern Atlantic (14-17°N 22-25°W), 500-800 km west of Sénégal. There are nine inhabited islands and several uninhabited islets. The total land area is 4,033 km^2. Large areas are extremely arid and therefore unfavourable for waders and other waterbirds. There are no sites with permanent fresh water and no intertidal mudflats. Most islands have large stretches of steep rocky shores; some islands have long stretches of sandy beaches and some semi-permanent lagoons. There are some salt-pans on the eastern islands. The island São Vicente has a sewage farm. Between 3 and 30 March 1996, we visited the Cape Verdes on a private birdwatching trip, primarily to study endemics and seabirds (Bakker & Van Dijk 1996). Waders were by far the most numerous Palearctic migrants observed during our trip. We carried out counts of waders at the major sites and the results are presented in this article.

METHODS

All counts were carried out on foot, using 10x binoculars and a 20-45x telescope. All sites visited were rather small and open and easy to survey. Most counts were carried out without regard to the tide. During our trip we visited seven islands: Santiago, São Vicente, Santo Antão, São Nicolau, Boavista, Sal and the uninhabited islet of Raso. The sites visited are listed in Table 1 shows the maximum numbers recorded at each site during any one visit. The sewage farm near Mindelo (São Vicente) was visited on 9 March (between 16:30 and 18:30) and on 10 March (throughout the day). The coastline of Porto Grande (west of Mindelo) was visited on 10 March at low tide, but the waders present here roost at the sewage ponds during high tide. Counts were made at the lagoon near São Pedro (São Vicente) on 11 March and at the lagoon near Santa Monica beach (Boavista) on 19 March. Rabil lagoon (Boavista) was counted on 18, 20, 21 and 22 March and the surroundings of Sal Rei (Boavista) on 19, 21 and 22 March. We saw no exchange between these two areas. The lagoons near Pedra Badejo (Santiago) were visited twice (23 and 26 March) and the Pedra de Lume salt-pans (Sal) and the salt-pans and the beach near Santa Maria (Sal) on 29 March. Observations elsewhere included birds seen around Praia (Santiago), Palmeira (Sal), Tarrafal (São Nicolau), Porto Novo (Santo Antão) and on Raso. Although we were concerned mainly with waders, other waterbirds were counted as well. For further details and details about other birds observed see Bakker & Van Dijk (1996). Descriptions of vagrants were submitted to Dr C.J. Hazevoet (Cape Verde Rarities Committee) and accepted on the Cape Verdian list (Hazevoet 1997).

RESULTS

Waders

In total, 1,702 waders of 19 different species were counted (Table 1). Most birds (542 individuals) and most species (14) were counted at the sewage farm near Mindelo, followed by the surroundings of Sal Rei and the Rabil lagoon which together held 561 waders of 11 species.

The most numerous and widespread species were Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* and Sanderling *Calidris alba*, both long-

Table 1. Summarised maximum of waders counted on the Cape Verde Islands in March 1996. **Key to sites:** 1. sewage farm near Mindelo (São Vicente), 2 lagoon near São Pedro (São Vicente), 3. beach and harbour near Tarrafal (São Nicolau), 4. Rabil lagoon (Boavista), 5. surroundings of Sal Rei (Boavista), 6. lagoon near Santa Monica beach (Boavista), 7. Pedra Badejo lagoons (Santiago), 8. Pedra de Lume salt-pans (Sal), 9. salt-pans and beach at Santa Maria (Sal), 10. observations elsewhere.

	SITES										
SPECIES	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**TOTAL**
Himantopus himantopus	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	28	-	-	30
Cursorius cursor	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	14	16
Charadrius dubius	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Charadrius hiaticula	40	5	-	8	9	-	6	8	3	-	79
Charadrius alexandrinus	60	17	-	45	20	7	3	19	21	1	193
Pluvialis squatarola	12	1	-	12	4	4	-	3	3	-	39
Calidris alba	80	31	3	45	11	1	7	66	28	38	310
Calidris minuta	35	-	-	5	2	-	-	18	5	-	65
Calidris minutilla	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Calidris ferruginea	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100	1	-	101
Philomachus pugnax	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Gallinago gallinago	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Limosa lapponica	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	2
Numenius phaeopus	14	-	1	2	5	9	-	-	2	5	38
Tringa totanus	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	3
Tringa nebularia	40	-	-	1	2	1	1	3	2	-	50
Tringa glareola	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
Actitis hypoleucos	20	-	2	4	-	-	4	-	-	5	35
Arenaria interpres	225	-	30	47	335	5	1	8	34	40	725
TOTALS	**542**	**54**	**36**	**173**	**388**	**29**	**22**	**256**	**99**	**103**	**1702**

distance Palearctic migrants. These were followed numerically by the resident Kentish Plover; breeding birds were recorded at the sewage farm near Mindelo (one pair with two pulli of about one week), at Rabil lagoon (one pair with three pulli) and at a lagoon near Santa Monica beach (one pullus of about two weeks old). Breeding behaviour of Cream-coloured Courser was recorded near Praia (one pair displaying on 4 March). Breeding behaviour of Black-winged Stilt was not recorded.

We recorded two wader species previously unknown from the Cape Verdes (Hazevoet 1995; Hazevoet *et al.* 1996). A Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla* was observed on 9 and 10 March at the sewage farm near Mindelo, and a Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* flushed from this site on 9 March.

Two Turnstones with metal rings were seen around Sal Rei. On 22 March, we were able to read with a telescope the complete inscription on the metal ring of one bird while it was foraging on fish offal in the harbour. This Turnstone (HELSINKI AT 067432) was caught on 9 July 1990 at Säppi, Luvia in Finland [61°29N 21°21E] as a full-grown bird (born before 1990) with a wing length of 157 mm and a weight of 104.5 g. The bird was caught again at the same place on 11 July 1990. The distance between the ringing site and Sal Rei is 6,136 km.

Other waterbirds

Among the other waterbirds, Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* was by far the most abundant species (Table 2). The highest number of this Afrotropical visitor was 540 at a roost at the sewage farm near Mindelo, and at least 90 were at a roost in Praia. Smaller numbers were observed on Santo Antão, São Nicolau and Boavista.

Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* were observed on all seven islands visited. The highest number was 15 at the sewage ponds of Mindelo and at least 10 were at a roost in Praia. On 21 and 22 March, a Little Egret with orange wing marks (black inscription "SFR") was seen at the Rabil lagoon. This bird was ringed as a chick on 6 July 1995 near Aigues-Mortes (Camargue) in France [43°34N 04°11E] and was sighted on 19 August 1995 some 100 km west of Aigues-Mortes, near the coast. The distance between the Camargue and the Rabil lagoon is approximately 4,000 km.

Western Reef Herons *Egretta gularis* were seen in Praia (up to two on 4, 5, 25 and 26 March) and at the Pedra Badejo lagoons (one on 26 March). Between 20 and 22 March, up to two Intermediate Egrets *Egretta intermedia* were present at Rabil lagoon [photograph in Dutch Birding 18 (1996): 95]. The very rare endemic Cape Verde Purple Heron *Ardea bournei* was observed breeding in the known colony at Boa Entrada (Santiago) [photograph in *Dutch Birding* 18 (1996): 93]. There

Table 2. Summarised maximum of other waterbird species observed on the Cape Verde Islands in March 1996.

SPECIES	NUMBER
Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*	741
Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis*	3
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*	40
Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*	2
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*	18
Cape Verde Purple Heron *Ardea bournei*	7
Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*	3
Duck *Anas sp.*	1
Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*	3

were four occupied nests; on 24 March chicks were seen in three nests. For further details see Bakker & Van Dijk (1996).

Three immature Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* arrived on 9 March at the sewage farm near Mindelo. Two birds were unringed, one was colour-ringed with a black colour-ring (inscription "E") on the left tarsus and two colour-rings without inscription (green above white) on the right tarsus. All three birds were also present on 10 March and they were observed again at the same site on 24 April (Hazevoet 1997). The colour-marked Spoonbill was ringed as a chick on 26 May 1994 on Terschelling [53°25'N 05°29'E], one of the Dutch Wadden Sea islands. Between 16 July and 10 September 1994, this bird was observed regularly at the nearby Wadden Sea island Ameland. Thereafter there were no observations until our record. Up to May 1998, there had been no further records of this individual. The distance between the Wadden Sea and Mindelo is 4,882 km. According to their bill pattern, both the other birds also belonged to *P.l. leucorodia*.

An unidentified duck was seen on 8 March, flying east at sea off Vila da Ribeira Grande (Santo Antão). Presumably this bird was a Pintail *Anas acuta*, but it was seen too late for a proper identification. Little Terns *Sterna albifrons* (two adults, one first-winter) were observed along the shore of Boavista, near the Rabil lagoon.

DISCUSSION

Waders

Hazevoet (1992) stated that numbers at various sites on the Cape Verdes remain rather stable from late August until April. Direct observations of spring migration of waders leaving the Banc dArguin support this: most of the long-distance migrants wintering on the Banc d'Arguin do not leave the area before April (Piersma *et al.* 1990). It is reasonable, therefore, to consider our results as a census of wintering waders.

Data summarised from the counts of Hazevoet (1992) indicate a total of 900-1,200 waders wintering at the major locations. Our total of 1,702 was mainly due to higher numbers on Boavista and at the sewage ponds near Mindelo. On the other hand, our counts at the Pedra Badejo lagoons (almost dried out) and at the Pedra de Lume salt-pans were lower. Nevertheless, our figures support the conclusion of Hazevoet (1992) that only limited numbers of migrant waders winter on the Cape Verdes. Fluctuations in numbers at various sites are clearly due to local conditions such as water level.

We agree with Hazevoet (1992) that Turnstone was by far the commonest species. This is not suprising in view of the many rocky shores. In addition, the species is often found around coastal villages, foraging at rubbish dumps and on fish offal. Our total of 725 is the highest number ever recorded. It is certain, however, that total numbers at the Cape Verdes are considerably higher as Turnstones are widespread along rocky shores throughout the archipelago (Hazevoet 1995). This is also likely for some other species, particularly Kentish Plover (also present at Maio and on sites not visited on Boavista and Santiago), Sanderling (present on sandy beaches of Maio, Boavista, Sal and São Vicente) and Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* (widespread in small numbers throughout the archipelago).

At least 35 wader species occur in the Cape Verdes (Hazevoet 1995, 1997; Hazevoet *et al.* 1996). Two species, Least Sandpiper and Snipe, have not been recorded previously. Least Sandpiper is a rare Nearctic vagrant to the Western Palearctic with some records from other East Atlantic Island groups (Azores and Canary Islands, Lewington *et al.* 1991; Gantlett 1995). Snipe is a rather common Palearctic winter visitor to wetlands in West Africa south of the Sahara (Cramp & Simmons 1983). Up to the present, there has only been one record of an unidentified snipe *Gallinago gallinago/media* from the Cape Verdes (Hazevoet 1995).

Wymenga *et al.* (1990) provide good evidence that the majority of Turnstones wintering in West Africa belong to the Fenno-Scandian/West Russian breeding population. Our observation of a Finnish Turnstone supports this. It would appear (Hazevoet 1995) that our sighting of a ringed Turnstone is the first recovery of a wader from the Cape Verdes.

Other waterbirds

The number of waterbirds and the number of species were very low. This is caused mainly by lack of suitable habitat. Compared with many European and African coasts, the complete absence of gulls during our visit was surprising.

Western Reef Heron appears to be a regular Afrotropical visitor in small numbers: five of the seven earlier records have been since 1986 (Hazevoet *et al.* 1996). Intermediate Egret is an Afrotropical vagrant with four earlier records. Little Egrets are supposed to be breeding residents (Hazevoet 1995). Our observation of a marked bird from the Camargue is the first proof that Palearctic migrants also visit the Cape Verdes. Other West African recoveries of Little Egrets breeding in the Camargue have been reported from the Gambia, Mali and Ghana (Voisin 1991).

Spoonbills are probably annual Palearctic visitors in small numbers (Hazevoet *et al.* 1996). The colour-marked individual was the first recovery of a Dutch Spoonbill at the Cape Verdes (Working Group Spoonbill International). In winter, most Dutch Spoonbills stay at the Banc d'Arguin in Mauritania and

in the delta of the Sénégal river along the border of Mauritania and Sénégal. There has only been one recovery further south: an immature bird which landed on a ship off Sierra Leone [09°30'N 16°20'W] (Poorter 1982).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to H. Horn and O. Overdijk (Working Group Spoonbill International, The Netherlands) for additional information about the colour-marked Spoonbill, to Dr H. Hafner (Station Biologique Tour du Valat, Camargue, France) for his quick reply concerning the wing-marked Little Egret and to the Ringing Centre of Finland for their detailed information about the ringed Turnstone. Finally, we thank M. Engelmoer and Dr C.J. Hazevoet for valuable comments on a draft of this manuscript, and two anonymous referees who commented on the final version of the manuscript.

REFERENCES

Bakker, T. & Dijk, K. van. 1996. *CABO VERDE MARCH 1996: report of a 4-week birdwatching trip to the Cape Verdes in March 1996*. Privately published report, Groningen.

Cramp, S. & Simmons, K.E.L. (eds.). 1983. *Handbook of the birds of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East: the birds of the Western Palearctic. Vol. III.* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Gantlett, S. 1995. 1994: the Western Palearctic year. *Birding World* 8: 22-39.

Hazevoet, C.J. 1992. Migrant and resident waders in the Cape Verde Islands. *Wader Study Group Bull. 64: 46-50.*

Hazevoet, C.J. 1995. *The Birds of the Cape Verde Islands*. BOU-checklist 13. BOU, Tring.

Hazevoet, C.J. 1997. Notes on distribution, conservation, and taxonomy of birds from the Cape Verde Islands, including records of six species new to the archipelago. *Bull. Zool. Mus. Univ. Amsterdam 15: 89-100.*

Hazevoet, C.J., Fischer, S. & Deloison, G. 1996. Ornithological news from the Cape Verde Islands in 1995, including records of species new to the archipelago. *Bull. Zool. Mus. Univ. Amsterdam* 15: 21-27.

Lewington, I., Alström, P. & Colston, P. 1991. *A field guide to the rare birds of Britain and Europe*. Domino Books, Jersey.

Piersma, T., Klaassen, M., Bruggemann, J.H., Blomert, A.-M., Gueye, A., Ntiamoa-Baidu, Y. & Brederode, N.E. van. 1990. Seasonal timing of the spring departure of waders from the Banc dArguin, Mauritania. *Ardea* 78: 123-134.

Poorter, E.P.R. 1982. Migration et dispersion des Spatules néerlandaises. *L'Oiseau et R.F.O.* 52: 305-334.

Smit, C.J. & Piersma, T. 1989. Numbers, midwinter distribution and migration of wader populations using the East Atlantic Flyway. *In*: Boyd, H. & Pirot, J.-Y. (eds.) Flyways and reserve networks for water birds. *IWRB Special Publication* No 9: 24-63.

Voisin, C. 1991. *The Herons of Europe*. Poyser, London.

Wymenga, E., Engelmoer, M., Smit, C.J. & Spanje, T.M. van. 1990. Geographical breeding origin and migration of waders wintering in West Africa. *Ardea* 78: 83-112.