

## AZORES 31.7.-11.8.2017

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This year, I spent part of the summer vacation with the family on the Azores, with the main aim being to see whales and dolphins, and for me especially to end the curse of repeatedly dipping on beaked whales. We spent two full days on Sao Miguel because we had to travel via this island anyway on our way to Pico, and eight full days on Pico. On Pico, we rented a small house (Casa das Pedras Altas, recommended, three bedrooms, perfect for a family or a small group of people) about 5 km from Lajes, which had wonderful terrace offering about 150° of ocean view and I spent quite a bit of time there looking for cetaceans (much more comfortable than the vigias). Unfortunately, we had lots of bad weather while on Pico, with rain, fog, and strongish winds. This not only made most boat trips uncomfortable (though the kids loved the rollercoaster rides) but more importantly hampered visibility from the vigias (two meter waves and lots of whitecaps don't help in spotting cetaceans). Accordingly, on the only boat tour with fair weather, we saw six species of cetaceans, while on the other four tours, we only saw two (three trips) to four (one trip). We had also hoped to be able to swim with the dolphins, but the sea was simply too rough for that. Still, we managed to see nine species of cetaceans and I bagged my first beaked whale.



## Species seen

Sei Whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*): One amazing encounter from the boat. This was very lucky, as the species is only seen once every two weeks or so.



Bryde's Whale (*Balaenoptera edeni*): A distant individual. Even more unusual than the Sei Whale, but there were a number of sightings while we were there.

Sperm Whale (*Physeter microcephalus*): Seen on three of the boat trips plus daily from shore, including two occasions of repeated breaching.



Sowerby's Beaked Whale (*Mesoplodon bidens*): Seen poorly on one of the boat trips plus twice from shore (breaching).

False Killer Whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*): A pod seen from shore.

Risso's Dolphin (*Grampus griseus*): Seen on four boat trips and repeatedly from shore.

Atlantic Spotted Dolphin (*Stenella frontalis*): Seen on four boat trips and repeatedly from shore.



Short-beaked Common Dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*): Seen on one boat trip and twice from shore.

Bottlenosed Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*): Seen on two boat trips and a couple of times from shore.

Azores Noctule (*Nyctalus azoricus*): Dozens daily on Pico.

Feral Ferret (*Mustela putorius*): One on Sao Miguel.

European Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*): Two on Sao Miguel.

### **Species missed**

While we were there, other boat trips had single encounters with Fin Whale and Cuvier's Beaked Whale. The week before our visit, Northern Bottlenose Whales hung around for several days, affording excellent views, but they were gone by the time we arrived. Similarly, Striped Dolphins and Blue Whales had left. True's and Gervaise's Beaked Whales are very rare and have not been seen recently.