

AMAZING AZORES: THE SEQUEL, or IN THE WAKE OF THE GIANTS

By Seva Rudyi and Kristin Van Gaever



Introduction:

Some people on the site might be familiar with Alex Meyer's trip report called [Amazing Azores](#), which won the NUTTER AWARDS 2025 in the "Best Photography" nomination. I had the pleasure to be a part of the group responsible for it... and had absolutely fallen in love with Pico and the Azores ever since. For many months after, I was dreaming of glassy waters, colossal outline of Pico Mountain on the horizon and numerous whale backs around. So, when Kristin Van Gaever, - a brilliant and energetic mammal watcher, who was on that trip as well, - reached out to me and asked, if I'd like to join her upcoming trip for Blue Whale, I could already feel the money leaving my bank account! Initially, my fiancée Katya was supposed to join us too, but that didn't happen for a number of reasons. We decided that I will still go, but agreed, that the two of us have to come back to the Azores again later on. Anyhow, me and Kristin booked the flights - and the trip was happening!

We quickly decided on the dates – days between March 28th and April 3rd seemed perfect. In the last 3 years, this week had the highest number of sightings for the migratory baleen whale species. Those included Blue Whales, Fin Whales and Humpbacks. Sei Whales seemed to only arrive at the end of the months and therefore were off limits – or so we thought at the time... There were also a slim chance of Minke and a supporting cast of various dolphins and Sperm Whales, but our main targets were the baleen giants anyway.

Our main "base" was Pico island, and we booked 9 trips with the amazing Espaço Talassa. I cannot recommend them enough for their efficient, educational and respectful approach to whale watching. Also, in spring they start going out well before all the other companies in Lajes do Pico, and that means we had many brilliant sightings all to ourselves! No other boats around, just endless ocean and beautiful animals. For a change, we also booked 3 trips in Sao Miguel – one with Futurismo, and two with TERRAZUL. And now – enough for the plans, and let's start with the trip chronicles!

March 28th.

We met up with Kristin in the airport of Lisbon, early in the morning. Despite the lack of sleep for both of us, it felt great to be back on track! All we could talk about were the whales waiting ahead. Then, usual airport routine of luggage drops and safety check, one short flight – and we were feeling the air of Pico once more! Only this time, instead of never-ending heat and sunshine, there was a fresh breeze and overcast sky.

Kristin arranged a taxi in advance, so we were at Espaco Talassa's headquarters in no time. We checked in at their property, Hotel Whale 'come Au Pico, which was a bit more spacious and comfortable, than Casa do Flores where we stayed in summer, ate our lunch, etc. – and barely ever stopped talking about mammals, travel and wildlife during all that. This felt wonderful!

Dropping by Espaco Talassa's shop, we asked the staff about the trip... only to learn, that the wind is picking up, spotters are having a hard time finding animals, and the tour might actually be cancelled! On the bright side, we got to meet our amazing guides from the July trip! Ines, Becky and Filippa were all here, as well as the skippers – only Frida has left, swapping Pico for Seychelles. And they recognized us too - although I'm not entirely sure, if they were happy to see the crazy beaked whale lunatics again...



After a tantalizing wait, the news came through: the spotters actually had something, most likely a baleen whale! The weather was manageable, and the first trip was greenlit! Feeling the excitement rising, we marched to the boat. I chose a seat in front for better views, while Kristin opted for the back. Well, maybe that was a wise decision... Right after we left the harbour, I started to realise, how different the weather was from July. Back then, the boat elegantly traversed the calm glassy waters; today, I felt like I was trying to wrangle a meth-addicted wild horse. Our RIB was thrown from wave to wave like a skimming stone. Sometimes, the swell delivered spine-shattering blows to the vessel's bottom, and if I wasn't quick enough to use my legs and rise from the seat, I could feel my organs swapping places inside the body. As if that wasn't enough, I was constantly showered in salt water from the ocean, too! Talk about a bumpy ride.

As the boat pushed on and on into the endless waves, we wondered, what the ocean has in store for us... *Cory's Shearwaters* were gliding around effortlessly, when, suddenly, a tall blow erupted in the air ahead of us. Everyone on the boat gasped, and the RIB rushed in hot pursuit. The next thing I remember was an enormous bluish-grey back with a tiny dorsal. It seemed to go on forever but eventually disappeared beneath the waves. I

was speechless, as was Kristin. We just saw our first ever **Blue Whale** – on the first day of the trip! The species I've read in my childhood books, and the biggest animal that ever lived on the planet! Total insanity!



Now, the waiting game begun. Blue Whales don't usually dive too deep for too long, and we managed to approach and get better views, when it resurfaced. We also could see, where it got the common name – above water Blue Whales are grey, but they do look bright blue when staying under the surface! A curious *Blue Shark* by the boat entertained us in the meantime. Soon, wind picked up, and, after saying goodbye to the whale, we were pushed closer to the coast. A group of energetic **Bottlenose Dolphins** entertained us with high jumps and followed the boat for some time, and right after we've got to meet another resident species – the **Sperm Whale**.

Now, I have a love-hate relationship with this whale. It's an amazing species in many ways, but: 1) is relatively boring to observe from the surface and 2) the whale watching vessels always stop for it, even if my target species are nearby, since it's looks impressive for “normal” people. Also, I had worked as a whale watching guide in Andenes, where Sperm Whales are extremely common, and have seen enough of them even before the July trip last year.

However, this time we saw something different: a mom and a baby! I really enjoyed that sighting. It was interesting to see the baby diving down to reach the mammary slits, while its mom arched the tail for easier access. Also, we found a huge chunk of mom's prey floating at the surface - probably a pelagic octopus *Haliphron atlanticus*, - which was sampled for an ongoing research project. Satisfied, we had a de-briefing and went back to the hotel for lunch, yet unaware of what tomorrow holds...









March 29th.

We woke up feeling slightly anxious – yesterday, we were told, that tomorrow’s trips might be cancelled, since the wind was expected to pick up overnight. However, we got lucky again – after an anticipation-filled breakfast, Filippa confirmed that the morning trip was happening. Even better, the spotters had something in store for us! We were on a boat in no time, and, despite rising waves and constant splashes to the front, our RIB made a beeline for the horizon. I was clinging to my seat and trying not to get my spine broken but still could feel the excitement. The boat was going so far out, that it could only mean one thing – **Blue Whales!**

But, as we approached, I realised something was off. Every blow we were seeing in the distance was followed by a huge, more horizontal splash – as if an angry giant standing on Pico’s shore was throwing boulders at the sea around us. The boat made a sharp turn, trying to keep in parallel with the animal... when suddenly, an enormous head of a Blue Whale completely emerged from the water at three o’ clock! It plunged back with a loud splash, in a flurry of white foam. Then we got to see the “endless” spine with a tiny dorsal fin, and then... As soon as the first animal disappeared, a second head broke the ocean’s surface right behind it! Then, the whole sequence repeated again, and again... We had a male Blue Whale chasing a female in a courtship display!

I really cannot describe the rush of emotions we all felt at that moment. Even Filippa was completely stunned – in her 6 years of guiding, she has never seen anything like that! The whales paid no attention to us, and kept emerging from the swell, like mythical sea serpents, as our RIB was desperately trying to keep up. This was a sighting we didn’t even dare to dream of before. And yet, here we were – witnessing the male’s strength, endurance and determination, as the female challenged him to prove himself worthy. Long lens, my shaky hands and a rocking boat proved to be a bad combo for photography, but at least I managed to get a nice video with my iPhone. But, more importantly, I had this moment burned into my memory – and I don’t think I will ever forget this day.



But it was not over yet. Mesmerized by the two animals, we missed the moment when a THIRD giant joined the chase! Most likely, it was a rival male, attempting to mate with the female as well. However, he failed to keep up, always lagging just a bit behind the pair. Eventually, male #1 convinced the female to slow down, and now they were slowly swimming very close to each other. The “loser” stuck to our boat, allowing us to have great views at incredibly close distance! Sometimes, it’s not about the rarity of the species or it being a lifer but about the quality of the observation. Getting a glimpse into the animal’s life is what it’s all about!

To be honest, I completely lost track of time at that moment, but eventually it was time to go. On the way back, we added a new species to our trip list – first pod of **Common Dolphins** for the week. As usual, they came very close, bow-riding and frolicking around our boat. This is a species I’ll probably never get tired of seeing.



Back on the shore, we couldn't stop smiling and had a de-brief by a very happy Filippa. The second trip was cancelled, because the weather worsened and there was only two of us registered for it, but we couldn't care less. In the hotel's restaurant, we decided to celebrate with a cake, which would later become our tradition. And this was the day, when Kristin first said a phrase, which would later become our trip's mantra: "After this sighting, everything else is just a bonus!". Remember it, dear reader – it'll pop up quite a few more times in this report...



March 30th.

Thankfully, no more cancellation scares were in store! The weather began to improve overnight, and we finally had a full day of trips ahead. As usual, our RIB pushed forward into the rough sea, when suddenly, the boat stopped. In front of us, I could see some backs with relatively small triangular dorsals, popping out of the water for a split second and then disappearing again. Dolphins? No – the combination of appearance and behaviour didn't fit any of the species around here. And yet, the animals seemed strangely familiar... It finally clicked in my head, when Becky, our guide on that trip, announced "We have Beaked Whales!".



Only at this moment I realised, what we were actually seeing. To be honest, I felt a bit ashamed – I was staring at these creatures for a whole week in July and still didn't recognize them now! In my defence, sightings of Beaked Whales in springtime are extremely rare in the Azores – most likely, because of the rough sea conditions. Spotting them from the towers in that weather is outright impossible. We have literally stumbled upon a needle in a haystack! Unfortunately, they almost immediately dove down, and I could not identify the species. Becky was sure that these were **Sowerby's Beaked Whales**, and I prefer to stick to that – Blainville's or any other species would have been my lifer! Sadly, instead of waiting for them to come up, the RIB rushed towards some Common Dolphins, and then **Sperm Whales**... Ahh, the torture of being surrounded by sane people and not mammal watchers! In that regard, I liked July much more. We observed the two resident species for a while – a *Loggerhead Turtle* showed up for a split second, and then a lone *Portuguese Man-of-War* drifted by.

But good things come to those, who wait. Eventually, we heard the four magic worlds from Becky – “we have something else!”. Once again, the RIB rushed in hot pursuit, like a hound following a trail of blood. From the distance, three other boats could be seen – mostly companies operating from Madalena and Horta, since we were around halfway to Faial. The whale dove down, when we arrived, but were relatively close to the coast, so I was sure it was not a Blue Whale. With that many boats around, probably not a dolphin, too... My suspicions were confirmed, when a heart-shaped blow appeared nearby with a loud exhale. Sun came out, and through the water, I could see a flash of white on the side of a uniformly black body. We had a **Humpback Whale!** Kristin was happy, as it is one of her favourite species, and she really hoped we would see one. I also like humpbacks a lot, so this was a nice observation. Judging by its size, the animal was a juvenile. It dove down, and then showed a couple more times, but eventually disappeared. We decided not to stress it too much and headed to the harbour. The way back to Pico was extremely bumpy, and I was very relieved to get out on dry land in one piece.



On the second trip, however, we only had **Sperm Whale** and **Common Dolphin** – for some reason, the latter took a lot of effort to find. A mysterious blow was seen only once in the horizon but was never re-found when we arrived at the area. I had to entertain myself with seabirds, and the diversity was actually not bad. A *Wilson's Storm-Petrel* darted by the boat, and close to the dolphins I picked up a *Sooty Shearwater* in a flock of *Cory's*, which was a good record for N Atlantic in spring. In addition, I saw a couple small, black and white shearwaters on the way back, which might have been my lifer *Manx*, but I had yet to confirm my suspicions with a photo. However, the mammalwatching gods decided to punish me for watching the birds – when I was looking at the shearwaters, the boat suddenly braked and Becky shouted, “Beaked Whale!”. I don't think anyone on the boat saw it apart from her, but she told us, that one surfaced very close to the boat and dove down immediately afterwards. Two times we were so close to a proper ID-able sighting – and yet it remained out of reach... Anyhow, more cake was eaten on land in celebration of the Humpback sighting. As Kristin said again, after that everything else was surely just a bonus!



March 31st.

The next day started with overcast weather, but finally much less wind – and, of course, some **Sperm Whales**. While we were around them, I tried to photograph every fluke I saw for photo-ID later and continued to scan for seabirds. A small shearwater stayed long enough for pics, and, indeed, turned out to be a *Manx Shearwater* – lifer! But eventually, the news came through – the towers had “something else”! We continued our journey in the direction of Faial, eventually stopping around the area where we saw Humpback yesterday. This time, there was no Humpback, but, as we approached, I started to notice tall, shark-like fins cutting through the water here and there. **Risso’s Dolphins!** A large group of this elusive species, approximately 25-30 individuals, was scattered through the area. They weren’t particularly friendly this time either, but some younger animals did put on a show – throughout the encounter, we had multiple breaching animals around the boat! Kristin managed to get one of the high-flying dolphins on video, too. This was a treat – always cool to see a cetacean fully above water!



After a while, the group dispersed so much, that there was no point in further observation – and we used the available time with them anyway. To my surprise, we pressed further towards Faial – and I was starting to think, that I know what we have... Upon arrival, we only saw a group of **Common Dolphins** and a huge flock of *Cory’s Shearwaters* feeding together with them. Ines, however, confirmed, that we had a baleen whale in the area. Minutes later, a large **Humpback** surfaced in the middle of the feeding frenzy! Just what I was thinking!

Four or five boats were already hanging out in the area, so our RIB stayed relatively far from the whale to give it space. This was great to hear. An example of Espaco Talassa's ethics in action - I really think they deserve high praise for that!

Again, the waiting game begun. Distracted with the jumping dolphins and shearwaters, I was trying to get a pic of them feeding together, when... A loud "WOAH!" (or a similar cry of joy) from everyone on our boat broke the silence. I immediately turned around, but was too late for whatever happened. Or so I thought – because right away, I saw the whale breaching in front of one of the other ribs! A black torpedo broke the surface, snow-white fins flying through the air like oversized wings. It flopped on its back in a flurry of white, and a second wave of "WOAH!" washed over our boats. Everyone was overjoyed – including me! This was one of the best views of a breaching Humpback I've ever gotten in my life. Unfortunately, I don't think anyone got it on video or photo... The whale did briefly surface again, and then dove down for more feeding, showing its beautifully patterned tail. Completely satisfied, we rushed back to the harbour. On the shore, Ines was smiling wide and popped the champagne for us – Espaco Talassa has a tradition to do that whenever they see a breaching large whale. It was a large group this time, so there was just enough for everyone to celebrate. A four-species trip and a breach, too – what a way to start the day!









What we didn't know is that it was going to only get better from here. As usual, we had **Sperm Whales** for the first course, but it was quite an interesting sighting again – three animals of the surface, a baby, its mom and, probably, some other female relative. It was fun to see mom and baby diving in synchrony, with the “cousin” or maybe “aunt” following right after.



Then things got even more exciting – we rushed to another **Blue Whale** quite far offshore! This animal was relatively elusive at first, only popping up for a couple breaths and then going back down again. Eventually, though, it seemed to have finished its business and allowed for a closer and longer observation. This time, sun was shining, and the whale was actually kind of blue...



But it was *another*, second Blue Whale that turned to be the star of the show that day. The sun once again hid behind a cloud – sometimes, it feels like you have all 4 seasons in one day in the Azores! – and we took off to another **Blue Whale**, which was spotted even further offshore. The boat kept swerving and turning, and we arrived just in time to see the giant going down... with an unusually arched back. I guess some primal instincts kicked in, and I already knew, what was going to happen, as I raised my camera. And right at that moment, a thick, robust tail flung up from the ocean, like a majestic sausage, stream of water dripping of it like a waterfall. The whale has FLUKED!

More screams of joy came from the awestruck people on the boat, and my display of excitement might have been the loudest... But once again, we had all the rights to be overjoyed. As we were told during our briefings, some unknown reason, different Blue Whale populations have different fluking rates. For example, the giants in the waters off Sri Lanka show the tail around 55% of the time, while in the North Atlantic only 18-20% of all encountered animals fluke. We just saw another extremely rare, - and extremely awesome, - behaviour!

And here, I have to once again praise the skills of Espaco Talassa's crew. Instead of heading off, we waited patiently, staying in the area and scanning for a blue spot or a tall blow. The sun came out again, and dissipating clouds revealed the entirety of mighty mount Pico. Just like that, the whale came back again, and we swam in parallel for a while... But you have all seen the cover of that report, so you already know what happened then. Once again, the mighty whale's fluke has risen from the depth – and this time, the two giants of Portugal were right against each other! I don't think words can express our feelings at that moment. So far, the trip was surpassing all expectations– even though both me and Kristin had only gotten one lifer! We saw one more **Sperm Whale** after that, but to be honest, I couldn't care less. Sorry, big guy, but today you were outmatched!

Needless to say, back on shore more celebratory cake was eaten during dinner. At this point, I was seriously worried that I wasn't going to fit in my pants after the trip! And yet, we still had three more days to go... But, as the famous words go, after THAT many great encounters everything else surely was just a bonus!







April 1st.

On that day I woke up with no expectations at all. We've seen most of the species we could realistically expect, except Fin Whale (and Minke, which is extremely elusive due to whaling pressure in N Atlantic, and therefore hard to spot). The sea was somewhat rough, and for a while, we were again stuck in a **Sperm Whale** limbo. There was one very distinct individual with a beautiful set of scars and spots on the fluke among the animals we saw, and I have gotten some nice pics of him/her, as the animal went for a deep dive.



It was so empty, apart from the **Sperm Whales**, that we actually stuck with them and waited for them to come up after 30-40 minutes of diving. If only we saw beaked whales that day instead! But then, to my surprise, the guide and skipper's radio came alive. "Something else" was spotted closer to the shore! I was extremely intrigued, since in this weather, it was hard to spot dolphins and smaller species of baleen whale. Blue and Fin Whales are usually found further offshore... what could it be?! For some reason, we still stopped and tried to see one more Sperm Whale fluking, but thankfully, the right decision was made, and the boat darted towards the shore. Another one of Espaco's boats was already in the area, and, as we approached, I saw an extremely weird fin. A large, falcate black dorsal looked almost unnatural – like a fake plastic shark fin strapped to a whale's back. It was a bit similar to Risso's, but not quite enough. As the first animal disappeared, a second one popped nearby. This time, I could clearly see a dark, coal-coloured whale with two blowholes and the same "shark" fin towards the tail end. Just as it dawned on me, Filippa confirmed my suspicions. We had not one, not two, and not three, but four **Sei Whales** in the area!!!

I'm very sorry to other passengers on the front rows of the RIB, because at that moment I threw my hands up in the air and loudly exclaimed "YES, FUCK YES!". Do I need to say, that I was ecstatic and in complete shock at that moment? In the Azores, Sei Whale sightings are much more common between last days of April and the end of September – I don't think a single one appeared *that* early in the statistics for the last 3 years. And yet, here they were– the fastest baleen whales in the ocean, and absolutely majestic animals. Their sleek bodies with pointy jaws, built like race cars, cut through the waves with ease, as we tried to keep up. Again, my phone did much better job capturing them, than my camera, so I'll put some screenshots from a video below. But seeing four individuals of this endangered species with unclear population dynamics out of season was beyond amazing! This was a lifer for both me and Kristin, too, so double the joy!

When the crew felt that the whales were growing tired of our attention, we shifted our focus to **Common Dolphins**. This time, I was watching their acrobatic shenanigans with even more joy than usual.



On the second trip, it was only four of us – me, Kristin and a father with a very young son. Sadly, I don't remember the names – but we did talk a bit, and the son seemed very enthusiastic about seeing some whales, especially Blues. I couldn't help but remember myself, when I was a kid – I would give away anything to see a Blue Whale back then! So, this time both me and Kristin were also really hoping for a Blue – maybe even more, than when we wanted to put it in our own lists!

However, for now even Sperm Whales were proving difficult. The towers weren't seeing anything, and Becky turned to a hydrophone in an attempt to find something for us and the young whale watcher. This did work – in no time, we were seeing some **Sperm Whales!** Again, it was a group of three animals – mom, baby, and some other female relative. And, just as last time, they all dove in almost perfect synchrony! A triple deep dive looked quite impressive, and our young “colleague” seemed happy, but we were still quietly hoping for a blue. Thankfully, the radio came alive again. The boat rushed towards an area, where we had our first **Blue Whale** on the 31st – and I'm pretty sure, that it we found the same shy individual again. The dive pattern was extremely similar – three breaths, then it went down, popped in a random area for another three breaths, and so on. But our skilful crew won this game of “hide and seek” this time. Just like before, the animal initially allowed for closer views. I think, everyone was extremely happy now.



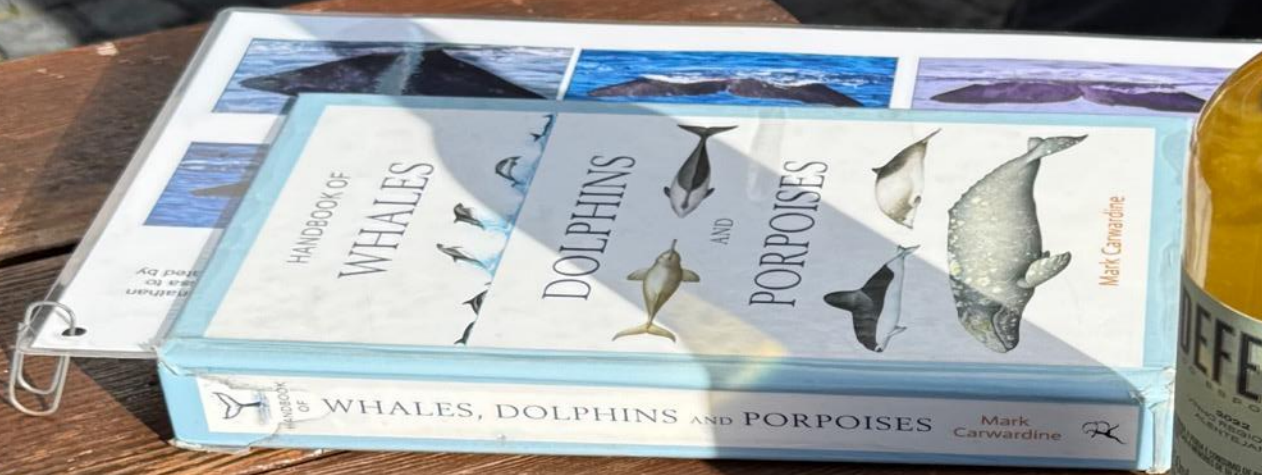




On our way back, we got more species again! **Common Dolphins** and a brief, but close encounter with **Risso's Dolphins** rounded up our final Pico trip. And I'm sure you guys are extremely excited to hear that, but there were seabirds around, too! A *Northern Gannet* briefly showed up, and more Manx Shearwaters were seen among the endless *Cory's*. But the best part? Earlier, the father of the boy told us, that they were planning to scale mount Pico. However, back on land Kristin overheard him asking, if his son wants to do the hike or go for another whale watch. And you probably guessed right, what the answer was! Maybe we just witnessed a future mammal watcher being born! This was an amazing finish to the Pico leg of our adventure.

After the final de-brief, we exchanged gifts: me and Kristin got our certificates, and the guides, skippers and spotters got two wine bottles in return! We bought one for the crew and one for the spotters. After all, we still owed the spotters one for *Kogia sima* back in July (see Alex's report for explanation), and the guides probably needed something to feel better after dealing with mammal watchers... We went to bed early that day after more celebratory cakes. After all, we still had more trips from Sao Miguel! And on this very day, the boats there saw both Fin Whales and Orcas...





April 2nd.

This report is already 35 pages long, so I won't bore you with our routine and just get straight to the point. As soon as we dropped our stuff at the hotel in Ponta Delgada, we went to a nearby Antonio Borges Botanical Gardens to see **Azores Noctules**. At some point of the trip, Kristin told me a shocking fact: she missed this bat last time we were on Pico and didn't have it on her list! I wanted to see it up close anyway, since I'm a big fan of bats, and we decided to try and find a roost in Ponta Delgada. I was a bit worried, though: I haven't seen any Noctules flying around while we were in Pico and therefore doubted our success.

The first few caves and grottos we checked were completely empty, and I began to think, that the bats are probably still hibernating elsewhere. Without much hope, I entered another grotto - a pass-through tunnel. Three other tourists went through it right before us. If there were any bats inside, surely, they would have noticed? Still, I stepped inside... and my ears caught a familiar ultrasonic screeching above my head. I froze in my tracks and managed to locate the sounds' source somewhere behind an old and dilapidated spider's web. I moved it aside and saw only a giant and quite disgusting *American Cockroach*... at first. A pair of tiny eyes on a grumpy face was peeking at me from a hole between the rocks, and I could see more bats moving inside. Adorable! I quickly called Kristin over, and we



managed to take some nice pics. Then, we retreated, not wanting to stress the bats too much. Another species for the trip and lifer for Kristin – and a very cute one, at that! A showy *Atlantic Canary* was feeding in the grass outside the grotto, together with *Blackbirds* and *European Collared Doves*.

We went down to the Futurismo office in the marina, wondering, what we will see today. Orcas? Fin Whales? Both? But what we saw instead was a staggering display of incompetence and probably the worst whale watching operation we've ever seen... First of all, it turned out, that our booking was made for the catamaran tour, even though I could have sworn I have booked the RIB tour for us. Thankfully, this was solved, as they had places on the big RIB and transferred us there. But the misadventures were far from over. After a somewhat rushed briefing, the guides announced, that the big RIB's motor is broken and they are trying to get a mechanic to fix it. They have probably known about that in advance - we saw a guy from the boat talking to our guide before the briefing, most likely about this engine problem, - and still decided to do nothing. Oookay...



Then things got weirder. The boat could not be fixed, and they had to split us up. Some people went in the smaller RIB, but it had only 16 seats, so others had to go to the catamaran or get a refund, even though they paid for the RIB tour! Most of the people agreed to the replacement, but still, we were left with 16 spots and 18 people. None of them wanted to go, and I could understand why. From my previous experience, catamarans, like the one Futurismo operates, are vomit-inducing chariots of hell, producing bad views and not really suitable for whale watching. After that, the guides solved the problem by... randomly picking two people, that won't go on tour and would get a refund instead. Somehow, it was not us, even though we re-booked for the RIB tour 2 hrs ago... I cannot imagine what these guys have felt – in addition, the guides were, for some reason, giggling about it the whole time, which felt really inappropriate.

All this delayed the departure by around an hour, and when we departed, things didn't get any better. The RIB we were on was more suited for fishing on the lake, than for going to the sea. Half of the boat was constantly splashed – in 20 min, I got completely soaked, and it was way worse than on Espaco's boats. At least we found some **Bottlenose Dolphins** straight away. After staying with them for some time (although I feel, like even here the boat overstayed its welcome and the animals started to get annoyed), we switched to aimless driving around, since the vigias couldn't find anything. The boat stopped only once, - when a loosely secured rope in the front almost got caught in a motor, - so by the end of the trip, most of us were quite miserable. We couldn't even stretch our legs the whole time, and the RIB was tiny! The only animal worth noting during the trip was a single **Atlantic Puffin**, but even this cutie couldn't beat the sour feeling after that trainwreck of a trip. Maybe this was just a very unlucky day at Futurismo, but the contrast to the flawless operations of Espaco Talassa was mind-blowing. We went to bed disappointed, hoping, that tomorrow will be better...

April 3rd.

In the morning, we drove to the neighbouring town, from which TERRA AZUL operates. This time, the briefings, boarding and other parts of the operation were smooth and well-organised, so if you are on Sao

Miguel, I advise you to book trips with them. However, our luck had ran out. On both trips of the day, we saw only **Common Dolphins**, even though the guides and spotters were trying their best. A tour around a beautiful volcanic island filled with *Red Rock Crabs* and a brief view of a *Loggerhead* somewhat made up for it, but no more whale species for us! Some trips don't have a grand ending with a last-minute sighting of the trip's rarest species – sometimes, it's about the memories and impression that happen along the way. And, just like that, it was over. We had a last nice talk and said goodbye to each other in the evening – Kristin was going home, and I was travelling to Serbia to meet Katya and look for more mammals, birds and herps together. However, that's a story for another upcoming report...

Stuff we missed:

I cannot complain about our results, but we could have added more species, if we haven't fallen in the gap between the sightings on Sao Miguel. **Orcas** were seen again by Futurismo on April 3rd while we were with Terra Azul, and Espaco Talassa had both **Fin Whale** and **Minke Whale** that day! The Fin Whale were also seen in Pico just before our arrival, but the time we spent there turned out to be fin-less. Another company operating from Faial got Minke and **Striped Dolphins** during our time on Pico but at this time of year they are a big hit or miss.

Acknowledgements:

We thank the spotters, guides and skippers of Espaco Talassa (especially those guys!) and TERRA AZUL! And I, of course, have to thank Kristin for making this trip happen. Also, shoutout to our group from the 2025's July trip – I can tell they got quite tired of our sightings eventually, but somehow we are still not kicked out of the WhatsApp Chat!



Mammal trip list (lifers for both of us in bold):

Species
Bottlenose Dolphin (<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>)
Common Dolphin (<i>Delphinus delphis</i>)
Risso's Dolphin (<i>Grampus griseus</i>)
Sperm Whale (<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>)
Beaked whale sp. (<i>Mesoplodon cf. bidens</i>)
Blue Whale (<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>)
Sei Whale (<i>Balaenoptera borealis</i>)
Humpback Whale (<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>)
Azores Noctule (<i>Nyctalus azoreum</i>)