



Student Field Course

Report
2023
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Maio
Shorebird
Project

Table of Contents

The Team	3
Importance of Outreach	4
Why Maio?	5
Daily Schedule	6-9
V. Day 1	6
VI. Day 2	7
VII. Day 3	8
VIII. Day 4	9
Overall Conclusions	10

In collaboration with:

- UniCV
- Maio Biodiversity Foundation (FMB)
- University of Bath
- University of Veterinary Medicine Budapest
- University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna



The Team



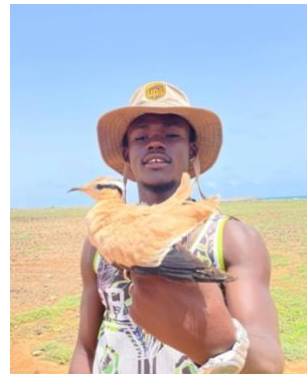
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Introduction

Why is outreach and education important?

Importance

Education and outreach are highly important parts of science, however they are often overlooked due to lack of resources and pressure to deliver research objectives. However, without outreach activities, scientific communities run the risk of becoming closed off from the general public, therefore reducing public trust, engagement, and understanding of science. In order to bridge the gap between science and public, education and outreach is key, and activities such as educational visits, community projects, and media appearances help to deliver accessible science to the non-scientific community.

From the 8th - 12th November 2023, the Maio Shorebird Team welcomed four students from UniCV to attend a 4 day “Avian Ecology and Conservation Field Course” in Maio. The objectives of this field course were to introduce students to shorebird conservation on Maio, and expose the students to a range of different techniques used to identify and survey biodiversity, and measure and monitor breeding ecology



Introduction

Why Maio?



Study site

The semi-desert island of Maio, is one of the smaller islands of the Cabo Verde archipelago. This island is rural, and yet to receive the same touristic attention as other popular Cabo Verde tourist destinations such as Sal and Boa Vista. However, this quiet island is thriving with birdlife, home to a RAMSAR wetland (the Salinas do Porto Inglês), 7 protected areas, and multiple bird conservation projects in collaboration with the local conservation NGO, Maio Biodiversity Foundation (FMB) and the University of Bath. These conservation projects include the longest running bird monitoring

programme in Cabo Verde, monitoring the breeding ecology of the resident population of Kentish plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) since 2007, and the endemic subspecies of Cream-coloured courser (*Cursorius cursor*) since 2015, known as the Maio Shorebird Project. Since September 2023, the Maio Shorebird Project has been run in collaboration by the University of Bath, UniVet, Budapest and UniVet Vienna, in partnership with FMB.



Field course

8th – 12th November

Daily schedule

Day 1 - Wednesday 8th November

The students arrived from Praia to Maio via ferry at 9AM. They were picked up by Grant and taken to their respective FMB Homestays. The Homestays are local family's houses that provide accommodation and food for FMB volunteers and tourists, as part of a sustainable tourist initiative. This way, an income is generated for the local women of Maio, and visitors receive an authentic experience of living in Maio. Once the students had settled into their homestays and had lunch, they were split into two pairs (Group 1 & 2). From 15:00-18:00, group 1 was taken by Noemie and Elvis to the Salinas do Porto Inglês to be introduced to the Kentish plover project, and group 2 was taken by Romy and Claudino to Lagoa Cimidor, to be introduced to the Cream-coloured courser project. Both groups were introduced to the areas, and received a short explanation of the project's background, and a summary of our daily work. They were then shown how to find and measure nests, how to identify species, how to use material such as telescopes and binoculars, and also caught chicks, therefore were able to experience live the process of ringing and measuring chicks.



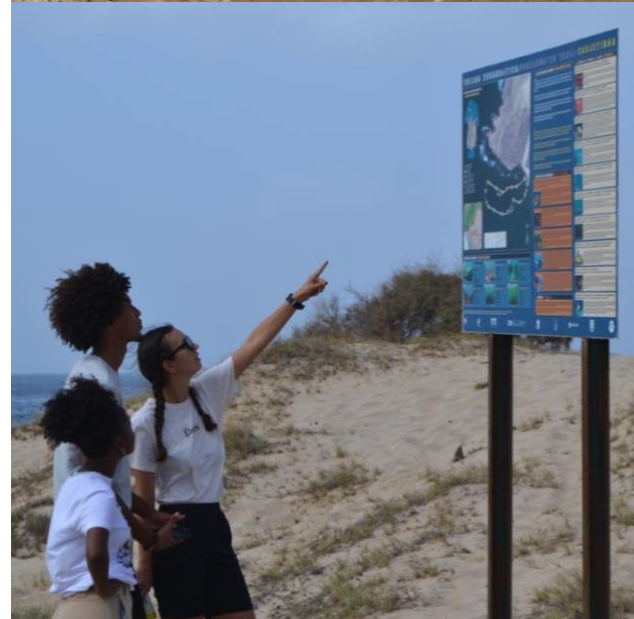
Day 2 - Thursday 9th November

On day 2, from 7:00 - 12:00, the students repeated the afternoon activity of day 1, however this time group 1 was taken by Claudino and Susie to Lagoa Cimidor, and group 2 was taken to the Salinas do Porto Inglês by Grant and Elvis, to ensure that all students received introductions to BOTH shorebird species monitoring work. They then went back to their homestays for lunch. During the afternoon session (15:00-18:00), Noemie and Elvis took group 1 and Romy and Claudino took group 2 to the Salinas to practice data collection techniques recording Kentish plover behavioural observations, called “snapshots”. The students took it in turns to record 10-minute behavioural observations of a focal plover, with one student using a telescope to record the exact behaviour every 20 seconds, and the other student writing and filling out the datasheet. After the snapshots, both teams went on to capture some more chicks, and visit active nests of the team’s species.



Day 3 - Friday 10th November

On day 3, Romy and Claudino took group 1 on the “East Coast Island Tour”, consisting of 2 protected area lagoons (Casas Velhas & Boca Lagoa), and cultural experiences such as tasting traditional local cuisine, such as the locally made goats cheese, and visiting remote villages, such as Pilao Cão and Alcatraz. The team also went to remote beaches that are of critical importance for turtle nesting, such as Praia Gonçalves. The students practiced their bird identification skills and learnt about the culture of Maio and community conservation efforts. Simultaneously, Noemie and Elvis took group 2 on the “West Coast Island Tour”. This tour consisted of visiting key shorebird breeding sites, such as Morro and Calheta, and continuing onto the protected area of the North Park of Maio. In the North park the team visited the spectacular sand Dunes of Morrinho, including the plant nursery created by FMB. Additionally, they visited the highly protected beach of Praia Real, which is key for breeding populations of sharks and rays. The teams were able to spot juvenile sharks with binoculars. In the afternoon, all students went to FMB and attended presentations from FMB on conservation in Maio, and work done by various teams.



Day 4 - Saturday 11th November

On day 4, the teams did the island tours again, however group 1 did the “West Coast Island Tour”, with Romy, Claudino and Susie, and group 2 did the “East Coast Island Tour”, with Noemie and Grant. We then all met up for a group lunch, and in the afternoon the students had some free time to explore the town, before heading back to Praia on day 5.



Overall Conclusions

What worked? What could be improved?

Overall, the field course was a success. Students learned bird species identification, population monitoring techniques including measuring nests, measuring and ringing birds, observing bird behaviours and data collection techniques. They had a rounded exposure to fieldwork, research, and conservation. We fully recommend continuing this incentive and organising another field course in 2024. Originally, the plan was to do a 7-day field course, but unfortunately, due to changes in student schedules, the plan was cut to just 5 days in Maio. To improve, we suggest extending the course to a full week, to make time for some data analysis, as although students had a full field experience and data collection, they were not subjected to any detailed data manipulation or presentation.

Strengths

- Fieldwork experience
- Aware of opportunities
- Data collection

Weakness

- Little time
- No data analysis

