

## Some notes on the Azores Noctule (*Nyctalus azoreum*)

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In August 2024, Rūta Vaicekauskaitė and myself headed to the Azores for a whale watching week with Jon and Katy Hall. Jon himself has reported elsewhere about our amazing cetaceans' sightings with Espaço Talassa on Pico Island (see <https://www.mammalwatching.com/community-post/pico-island-the-azores-august-2024/>).

One of the other reasons to visit the Azores was the opportunity to observe the locally endemic **Azores Noctule!**

The Azores Noctule (*Nyctalus azoreum*) is restricted to the Azores Archipelago, where it occurs on all islands except Flores and Corvo. Its range is relatively small and fragmented, and its total population is estimated at fewer than 5,000 individuals. The Azores Noctule hunts in practically all habitats, but roosts are mainly found in trees, rock crevices, and buildings. Like most other bats, the Azores Noctule is active at night, but this species also forage in the daytime, which is extremely peculiar within the Microbat group! Day flying is a trait that have probably evolved thanks to the absence of diurnal avian bat predator on the Azores.

Unfortunately, Azores Noctule's populations are considered to be declining because of habitat degradation and disturbance. The species is currently classified as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List (2023). Considering the range limitation of this species, its restricted dispersal between islands, and the fragmentation of its habitat, the Azores Noctule may actually be even considered Endangered!



### Sources:

Russo, D. & Cistrone, L. (2023) *Nyctalus azoreum*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2023*.

Lefevre, A. & Barataud, M. (2020) *Comportement acoustique de Nyctalus azoreum sur l'île de São Miguel (archipel des Açores)*. *Plume de Naturalistes* 4: 27-42.

Leonardo, M. & Medeiros F. M. (2011) *Preliminary data about the breeding cycle and diurnal activity of the Azorean bat (Nyctalus azoreum)*. *Açoreana*, 2011, Suplemento 7: 139-148.

### Reported sightings (Jonas Livet & Rūta Vaicekauskaitė, August 2024):

While in the Azores, we visited three islands: São Miguel Island (2 days), Pico Island (4 days) and Faial Island (1 day). On Pico Island, we were at sea most of the time searching for whales and dolphins. On São Miguel Island, our target was to find various birds, but we spent also some time specifically looking for the Azores Noctule.

Our first Azores Noctule sighting happened on **Pico Bartolomeu** (approximately at 37°46'44.31"N 25°10'17.06"O) in a bright and sunny afternoon while looking for the Azores Bullfinch. That sighting of a flying bat was brief and we only saw one animal.

We found a maternity roost at **Jardim Botânico António Borges** which was easily accessible and situated within walking distance from the main touristic center of Ponta Delgada. We had no time to visit the second botanical garden found in Ponta Delgada, named Jardim Botânico José do Canto, but this location has been reported by others as a possible good spot to look for the Azores Noctule.

Still on São Miguel Island, we looked for the Noctule within the Mata Jardim José do Canto near the Lagoa das Furnas but without success. It was a windy and grey afternoon which may have deterred bats from emerging from their roosts, and some areas of the garden were closed due to tree work.

On Pico Island, our base for whale watching was in **Lajes do Pico**. We observed Azores Noctules while strolling around Lajes do Pico most of the mornings and evenings we were there, the best timing been around sunrise and before sunset. We found a small roost on **R. Manuel Vieira Soares** (one of the small streets within Lajes do Pico, at 38°23'42.40"N 28°15'8.07"O).

One early morning **bus ride from Lajes do Pico to Madalena** along the ER1 (departure from Lajes do Pico at 6.45am just before sunrise) brought many Noctule's sightings along the way. There were a couple of areas where bat activity was very high with numerous animals flying around, and it would have been easy just to jump out of the bus at the next stop and walk to these particular areas (and then wait for the next bus to get back to Lajes do Pico, or get a taxi to go further). We were heading to Madalena to catch a ferry to Faial and therefore didn't alight from the bus.

Along that same section of the ER1, Reserva Florestal de Recreio do Mistério de São João in São João was also pointed out to us as a possible good spot for Azores Noctules. We visited in a sunny and warm afternoon for a short stop, and didn't find any bat, but I expect early morning and/or late afternoon may be a more rewarding timing to visit!

