

Obituary

Luis Monteiro (1962-99)

Shortly before Christmas, a routine scheduled inter-island flight in the Azores crashed, killing 35 people. Among the passengers was Dr Luis Rocha Monteiro, who despite his young age had already become one of Portugal's leading scientists. Luis developed research interests in mercury in marine fish, working at the University of the Azores. During the 1980s he was introduced to seabird studies by Adrian del Nevo and soon became the local link person for RSPB and others visiting the Azores to census and study roseate terns, petrels and shearwaters. Luis had a particular facility for making friends with influential people and soon developed an impressive infrastructure around the Azores archipelago to assist visiting ornithologists. I particularly remember once being met by Luis in the chauffeur-driven mayoral limousine and taken across the island via a particularly good cake shop to a waiting coastguard vessel in the harbour to be ferried to census petrels on an uninhabited islet; logistic arrangements he had set up with his broad smiles.

It is a lasting tribute to Luis that he played the lead role in determining accurately the status of seabirds in the Azores. In so doing he found the first breeding tropicbirds in Europe, breeding sooty terns, several Fea's petrels (though breeding is yet to be confirmed), several new colonies of Madeiran storm petrels, little shearwaters, and Manx shearwaters. Perhaps the most intriguing discovery has been that spring and autumn breeding populations of Madeiran storm petrels in the Azores almost certainly represent sibling species, differing in morphometrics, vocalisations and DNA, but time-sharing the same nest sites at some colonies. This ongoing research is yet to be fully published, but has reached the stage where exciting genetic results are emerging.

From 1992-96 Luis joined the Ornithology Group at Glasgow University, obtaining his Ph.D. on mercury dynamics in Azores seabirds. A paper from his work on mercury in marine food chains was awarded a prize for the outstanding paper in Marine Science by a young Portuguese scientist in 1998. In the last few years Luis was outstandingly successful in obtaining large grants to support research into the ecology of seabirds in the Azores and the structure and functioning of marine food chains, and his prolific publication record helped to put his department high in the research rankings of Portuguese biology departments. His tragic death is a terrible loss to his friends and family, especially Ana and their young daughter Eva. It will inevitably also impact on the development of seabird studies in Portugal, but it is good to see that his dedicated group of research assistants and colleagues are determined to continue the studies he has established.

Bob Furness