

# THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

ABOARD THE M/V EVOLUTION

OCTOBER 19-26, 2013



Española Mockingbird

© Paul J. Greenfield

**LEADER: PAUL GREENFIELD**  
**COMPILED BY: PAUL GREENFIELD**

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.**  
**2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003**  
**AUSTIN, TX 78746**  
**WWW.VENTBIRD.COM**

**TOUR REPORT**  
**THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS**  
**October 18–27, 2013**

**By Paul Greenfield**

What can be said about the Galapagos that hasn't already been said at some point, by somebody? Even sailors, whalers, and buccaneers expressed their impressions of these “Enchanted Isles” in their time, and of course Herman Melville and even Kurt Vonnegut dedicated chapters to this archipelago. But it was certainly Charles Darwin who was most responsible for engraving a lasting impression on mankind of just what secrets this strange assortment of isolated islands holds, and how its unique life forms tell a tale of serendipity, survival, adaptation, and evolution.

It was with all of this in mind that we “deplaned” and set foot on Baltra Islet, a relatively small, flat slab of uplifted lava set basically in the middle of this wondrous place. Words really don't come to my mind when experiencing and thinking about the Galapagos, yet sensations and mental images do. I have found, over the years, that as many times as I have visited these islands, and as I accompany new visitors who have perhaps read about them or seen TV documentary images of what's to be found here, nothing can describe or prepare us for what we actually see, hear, or sense once we embark on this fascinating journey. Yes, our main goal was straightforward—to see as many of the archipelago's bird species as possible. Many of them are endemic: unique to this particular place on earth, but many others are more or less familiar and perhaps innocently perceived as less interesting. But as I enjoy observing any specific Galapagos plant or animal (and especially a bird) here, I can't help but ask myself, what's its story? How and when did it get here? How did it survive? Even a Great Blue Heron, a Vermilion Flycatcher, or a Mangrove/ Yellow Warbler—here belonging to endemic populations (as unafraid of man as a “log”!)—had to arrive on these islands in large enough numbers in order to be able to survive, locate a mate, reproduce, and thrive. And then come all the endemic species...those found nowhere else on Earth, whose distant relatives are anybody's guess.

We spent the entire week engulfed in this world of broad expanses of ocean and its underwater realm, rocky shorelines, pastel beaches, lush mangroves, sprawling lava fields with complex relief, arid coastlines with scrub, Palo Santo trees and *Apuntia* cacti, highland *Scalesia* woodland and farmland, and the wet, foggy, elfin *Miconia* and fern-sedge shrubland. How to describe watching a naturally curious Española Mockingbird while dozens of lethargic Marine Iguanas lay motionless at our feet (well, not quite motionless; every now and then one would snort salt spray into the air), or sorting out tree-finches from the ubiquitous ground-finches while a Giant Land Tortoise lumbers by, or stepping out on deck one night to find oneself face-to-face with a Swallow-tailed Gull as it glides alongside our ship with the ease of a floating helium balloon? How does one put into words the sensation of swimming with playful Galapagos Penguins, or sharing an underwater feeding frenzy with Flightless Cormorants and diving Blue-footed Boobies? Or watching three Galapagos Rails foraging along the roadside like chickens? These are just a fraction of the experiences that will be savored by each and every one of us, maybe never to be put into words.

#### ITINERARY

October 19—Flight Quito-Guayaquil—Baltra Island (Galapagos): board The M/S Evolution then afternoon visit to El Eden (Santa Cruz Island)

- October 20—Sail to North coast of Isabela Island, crossing the Equator, passing Volcán Ecuador; Punta Vicente Roca (kayaking, snorkelling, panga); sail along Bolívar Channel; afternoon Fernandina Island at Punta Espinoza (Pahoehoe lava, mangroves, and sandy beach)
- October 21—Central-west Isabela Island; Bolívar Channel to Urbina Bay, morning walk along trail in this uplifted area below Alcedo Volcano; afternoon sail to Tagus Cove; walk to Laguna Darwin, kayaking, panga, etc.
- October 22—Sail to Bartolomé; morning hike up to summit of Pinnacle Rock by part of our group (tuff cones and lava tubes, spectacular view) or walk over dunes to south beach; snorkeling around north beach; afternoon around Sullivan Bay, Santiago (James)
- October 23—Morning to Santa Cruz Island, Bachas Beach and lagoon; Afternoon at Cerro Dragón
- October 24—All day on Santa Cruz Island; morning visit to highlands—Los Gemelos pit craters, Steve Devine's Farm and El Manzanillo (lunch); afternoon bus-trip to back to Puerto Ayora, visit to Darwin Station
- October 25—All day at Española (Hood) Island: morning hike at Punta Suarez; afternoon sail to Gardner Bay (kayaking, brief snorkeling, panga and beach-bumming);
- October 26—Morning in highlands of San Cristóbal (El Progreso area). Departure for Mainland (via Guayaquil) to Quito

## THE GALAPAGOS BIRD SPECIES LIST

- E—Endemic species  
 E—Endemic subspecies

### DUCKS, GEESE & SWANS: ANATIDAE

White-cheeked Pintail (*Anas bahamensis galapagensis*) E—4 were seen at Bachas Lagoon; at least 16 were encountered in the highlands of Santa Cruz

### FLAMINGOS: PHOENICOPTERIDAE

American Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)—2 were seen at salt lagoons; 1 at Bachas, a second at Cerro Dragón

### PENGUINS: SPHENISCIDAE

**Galapagos Penguin** (*Spheniscus mendiculus*) E—This small, equatorial penguin was seen on three days; 8 or so were seen along the shoreline at Isabela and Fernandina islands; at least 20 at Urbina Bay and Tagus Cove; 10 or so at Bartolomé. A threatened and range restricted species

### ALBATROSS: DIOMEDEIDAE

**Waved Albatross** (*Phoebastria irrorata*)—This near-endemic species was observed at sea along the coast of Isabela on our first two days (5 in all), Hundreds were seen at sea as we approached Española (Hood) Island, We then saw many adults and comical nestlings (remember Big-Bird?) and a few dueling adults were seen at their nesting sites

#### PETRELS & SHEARWATERS: PROCELLARIIDAE

**Galapagos Petrel** (*Pterodroma phaeopygia*) E—30 or so were seen off the coast of Isabela Island on our second day. This species has made a tremendous comeback from near-extinction. This population, which breeds exclusively in the Galapagos Archipelago, is now considered a separate species from Dark-rumped or Hawaiian Petrel (*Pterodroma sandwichensis*).

**Galapagos Shearwater** (*Puffinus subalaris*) E—Generally abundant throughout the Archipelago; hundreds were seen daily. This Pacific Ocean population is now considered a separate species from Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*) with which it was lumped for years.

#### STORM-PETRELS: HYDROBATIDAE

**Elliot's [White-vented] Storm-Petrel** (*Oceanites gracilis galapagoensis*) E—By far, the most commonly encountered storm-petrel; this, an endemic subspecies, was seen daily throughout the Archipelago, where often observed very closely, “dancing” on the water's surface alongside our ship and pangas. Often at ports and landings

**Band-rumped Storm-Petrel** (*Oceanodroma castro*)—Quite a few of this basically nocturnal-feeding species were seen along the Bolivar Channel west of Isabela; some 23 or so in all; mostly early mornings though close views at Tagus Cove during mid-morning

Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma tethys tethys*) E—Only small numbers were seen this trip off the northwestern coast of Isabela (also Bolivar Channel) off Isabela. Often called Galapagos Storm-Petrel

#### TROPICBIRDS: PHAETHONTIDAE

Red-billed Tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus mesonauta*) E—30-50 of this beautiful species were seen at and off Española Island, at Punta Suarez; several were seen visiting their nests

#### FRIGATEBIRDS: FREGATIDAE

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*)—The most common and widespread of the frigatebirds in the Archipelago; large numbers seen daily, mostly in flight (we did not visit nesting sites on this trip; also often perching on the Evolution at sea

**Great Frigatebird** (*Fregata minor ridgewayi*) E—Only a few were seen at sea this trip, mostly females were identified off Española Island and possibly one at San Cristóbal. A very aggressive kleptoparasitic species, more pelagic than Magnificent, which is generally found closer to land

#### BOOBIES & GANNETS: SULIDAE

Nazca Booby (*Sula granti*)—Quite numerous (large numbers seen daily) though less common than Blue-footed; close encounters at nesting site on Española. Now considered as a distinct species from the smaller Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*)

Blue-footed Booby (*Sula nebouxii excisa*)—E The most commonly seen and widespread booby (a favorite) on the Archipelago; seen on all but our last day. Numerous at sea and along shorelines throughout

#### CORMORANTS: PHALACROCORACIDAE

**Flightless Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax harrisi*) E—This species, the World's largest and only flightless member of the cormorant family, was seen well at Punta Vicente

Roca and again at Urbina Bay and Tagus Cove on the west coast of Isabela (over 40 seen in all)

#### PELICANS: PELICANIDAE

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis urinator*) E —A common species—seen daily throughout the Archipelago; close to shore and along shorelines; also in mangroves and at ports

#### HERONS & BITTERNES: ARDEIDAE

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias cognata*) E —1-2 were seen at various sites on five days; El Edén, Urbina Bay, Bartolomé, Cerro Dragón and Puerto Ayora

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)—Singles were seen at El Edén and Cerro Dragón

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)—Singles were seen at various sites, some 30 or were seen on Santa Cruz, mostly in the highlands

Striated Heron (*Butorides striata*)—1 was seen well and close at Cerro Dragón

**Lava Heron** (*Butorides sundevalli*) E—From 1 to 8 or so were seen on most days (all but two) along rocky shorelines and in mangroves. Now, considered a race of Striated Heron (*B. striatus*) by some authors; this keeps changing.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea pauper*) E —1 adult bird was seen at Española (Hood) Island

#### KITES, EAGLES & HAWKS: ACCIPITRIDAE

**Galapagos Hawk** (*Buteo galapagoensis*) E—Many sightings of this species on several Islands, including super close views at Punta Espinoza, Fernandina and especially at Urbina Bay; a total of 13 or so individuals recorded

#### RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS: RALLIDAE

**Galapagos Rail** (*Laterallus spilonotus*)—Great looks at 3 individuals at the same time along the roadside at El Manzanillo in the highlands of Santa Cruz

Common [Moorhen] Gallinule (*Gallinula chloropus*)—About 8 were seen at El Manzanillo in the highlands of Santa Cruz

#### PLOVERS & LAPWINGS: CHARADRIIDAE

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)—Between 1-3 were seen on beaches and lagoons on various islands; 15 or so were seen along the rocky shores at Cerro Dragón

#### OYSTERCATCHERS: HAEMATOPODIDAE

American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus galapagensis*) E —Mostly pairs were seen on Fernandina, Bartolomé (with a fledgeling) and Santa Cruz (Bachas and Cerro Dragón); 15 or so in all

#### STILTS AND AVOCETS: RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus palliatus*)—6 were seen at Bachas Lagoon and Cerro Dragón

#### SANDPIPERS & ALLIES: SCOLOPACIDAE

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*)—1 was seen at south beach, Bartolomé

Wandering Tattler (*Heterosceles incanus*)—Common on rocky shorelines throughout

- the Archipelago, with from 1-10 or so seen daily on all but our last day
- Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)—Only a few were seen this trip; 2 at Bartolomé, 2 at Bachas, 2 on Santa Cruz and 2 more on Española
- Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)—Fairly common; small bands were seen on five days
- Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)—4 were seen on Bartolomé (south beach) and at least 3 more were seen at Cerro Dragón beach
- Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*)—1 was seen at Bartolomé and 10 were encountered at Cerro Dragón beach
- Sempalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*)—1 was observed closely at Cerro Dragón Lagoon with other ‘peeps’
- Western Sandpiper (*Calidris mauri*)—2 were seen closely at Cerro Dragón Lagoon, with the previous two species
- Dowitcher sp. (*Limnodromus sp.*)—1 basic-plumaged adult, most likely Short-billed Dowitcher (*L. griseus*) which is recorded on Galapagos occasionally, was seen and photographed on Cerro Dragón beach. The bird flew off, giving a rapid “keeh-keeh-keeh-keeh-keeh” call, and not the typical call of Short-billed, suggesting the similar Long-billed Dowitcher (*L. scolopaceus*).. The photos will be reviewed
- Wilson’s Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*)—2 feeding birds were seen swimming on the salt lagoon at Cerro Dragón
- Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*)—Rafts of up to several 100 were seen at sea on two days along the northwest coast of Isabela; also a small number were seen off Santa Cruz Island on our first afternoon

#### GULLS & TERNS: LARIDAE

- Swallow-tailed Gull** (*Creagrus furcatus*)—This, surely the World’s most stunning gull, was encountered on three days, on Isabela, Bartolomé (also one was seen flying close, at night, alongside our ship), and then in large numbers at Española (Hood) Island (Punta Suarez and Gardener Bay)
- Lava Gull** (*Larus fuliginosus*) **E**—The rarest gull in the World; critically threatened. 2 were seen at Urvina Bay, another 1 showed up at Cerro Dragón beach and at least 10 were seen at Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz
- Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus galapagensis*) **E** —Large numbers were seen daily, mostly flying along the coast and out at sea, though many were roosting and at their nesting sites (some juveniles were seen)

#### PIGEONS & DOVES: COLUMBIDAE

- Galapagos Dove** (*Zenaida galapagoensis*) **E**—Between 1-10 or so of this unique little dove were seen on five days on various islands, literally at our feet on Española

#### CUCKOOS: CUCULIDAE

- Dark-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus melacoryphus*)—2 were seen (thanks to Judy’s sharp eyes)—eventually responded to tape and showed themselves nicely for some photos—in the highlands of Santa Cruz
- Smooth-billed Ani (*Crotophaga ani*)—This species began its aggressive colonization of the Archipelago sometime in the 1950’s-1960s between 3-8 were seen at Urvina Bay, Bachas Beach/Cerro Dragón, highlands of Santa Cruz and San Cristóbal

#### TYRANT FLYCATCHERS: TYRANNIDAE

**Vermilion Flycatcher** (*Pyrocephalus rubinus nanus*) E —1 spiffy male was found at El Manzanillo in the highlands of Santa Cruz (thanks to a local worker). Galapagos Vermilions may well be a distinct, endemic species, but the populations here are declining drastically

**Galapagos Flycatcher** (*Myiarchus magnirostris*) E—Generally small numbers of this adorable and curious flycatcher were seen at Tagus Cove, Cerro Dragón, in the highlands of Santa Cruz (common), Española and San Cristóbal

#### SWALLOWS: HIRUNDINIDAE

**Galapagos Martin** (*Progne modesta*) E—At least 2 were seen in rapid flight in the lava fields at Sullivan Bay, by Moe and Carrie. Possibly another was seen briefly at Española, by Judy

#### MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS: MIMIDAE

**Galapagos Mockingbird** (*Mimus parvulus*) E—The most widespread of the island's mockingbirds (visible differences between island populations are noteworthy);. Seen well and closely; recorded on the islands of Fernandina, Isabela, Santa Cruz, where the most numerous. Formally placed in the genus *Nesomimus*, but now included in *Mimus*

**Española [Hood] Mockingbird** (*Mimus macdonaldi*) E—This entertaining species is common on Española Island. Formally placed in the genus *Nesomimus*, but now included in *Mimus*

**San Cristóbal Mockingbird** (*Mimus melanotis*) E—10 or so were seen on our brief jaunt to the San Cristóbal highlands on our last morning. Formally placed in the genus *Nesomimus*, but now included in *Mimus*

#### NEW WORLD WARBLERS: PARULIDAE

**Mangrove Warbler** (*Dendroica [petechia] aureolla*) E —Omnipresent throughout the Archipelago where found in a variety of habitats from the coast to the highlands. Seen daily and often quite common and totally oblivious to our presence. Lumped with and called Yellow Warbler by many authors, also Galapagos Yellow Warbler by others.

#### BUNTINGS, SPARROWS & ALLIES: EMBERIZIDAE

**Green Warbler Finch** (*Certhidea olivacea*) E—This and the following species have been split from what was formally known as Warbler Finch, the smallest of the Darwin finches, and is more a highland species. The two species are not found on the same islands. 6 were seen in the highlands of San Cristóbal Island. Apparently the birds seen on Santa Cruz Island also belong to this species. I would prefer Olivaceous Warbler Finch as a name

**Gray Warbler Finch** (*Certhidea fusca*) E— This and the following species have been split from what was formally known as Warbler Finch, the smallest of the Darwin finches, and is more a lowland species. The two species are not found on the same islands. 1 was seen closely in low vegetation on Española Island at Punta Suarez, this being the *cinerascens* subspecies

**Vegetarian Finch** (*Camarhynchus crassirostris*) E—A rather frustrating species. 1 female was seen at El Manzanillo in the highlands of Santa Cruz. Try as we did, this

species did not show itself in the highlands of San Cristóbal

**Woodpecker Finch** (*Camarhynchus pallidus*) **E**—1-3 of this ‘tool-using’ finch were seen at Cerro Dragón, the highlands of Santa Cruz Island (Los Gemelos and El Manzanillo) and in the highlands of San Cristóbal

**Large Tree-Finch** (*Camarhynchus psittacula*) **E**—1 female was seen at El Manzanillo on Santa Cruz Island and 3 were seen in the highlands of San Cristóbal

**Small Tree-Finch** (*Camarhynchus parvulus*) **E**—The most common and widespread tree-finch; 3-4 were seen at Urbina Bay on Isabela, 10 or so were seen on Santa Cruz, and some 25 encountered in the highlands of San Cristóbal

**Small Ground-Finch** (*Geospiza fuliginosa*) **E**—By far the most common and widespread of the Darwin’s finches; seen on all islands visited, often abundant.

**Large Ground-Finch** (*Geospiza magnirostris*) **E**—Only 1 female was seen at Cerro Dragón

**Common Cactus-Finch** (*Geospiza scandens*) **E**—Only 2 were seen at Darwin Station on Santa Cruz Island; 1 foraging on an *Apuntia* cactus, the other sitting on a candy jar (!) and roof at the local refreshment stand

**Medium Ground-Finch** (*Geospiza fortis*) **E**—This, the real *trouble-maker* of the Darwin’s finches, was common on four days (on Isabela, Santa Cruz at Bachas/Cerro Dragón, highlands and Darwin Station/Puerto Ayora, and San Cristóbal) These birds have variable sized bills and cause much confusion!

**Large Cactus-Finch** (*Geospiza conirostris*) **E**—Very common (though it took a little while to find our first one) on Española, this the thick-billed population, *conirostris*, which acts like a ground finch (besides the fact that there are *No* cactus anywhere in sight at Punta Suárez

#### ADDITIONAL MAINLAND SPECIES FROM HOTEL QUITO GROUNDS

Eared Dove (*Zenaida auriculata*)—Common highland species

Sparkling Violetear (*colibri corucans*)—1 was seen

**Black-tailed Trainbearer** (*Lesbia vistoriae*)—2 were seen feeding mainly on ‘bottlebrush’ flowers

Blue-and-yellow Tanager (*Thraupis bonariensis*)—1 male was seen

Great Thrush (*Turdus fuscater*)—Common highland species

#### THE GALAPAGOS MAMMAL SPECIES LIST

**Galapagos Fur Sea-Lion** (*Arctocephalus galapagoensis*) **E**—This species is found locally along rocky coasts; 10 were seen along Punta Vivente Roca, on Isabela

**Galapagos Sea-Lion** (*Zalophus wollebacki*) **E**—This is the omnipresent creature that blocked trails, swam with some of us, and literally littered the beaches throughout the Archipelago; seen daily with lots of pups present

#### THE REPTILE SPECIES LIST

**Galapagos Giant-Tortoise** (*Geochelone elephantopus*) **E**—About 6 were seen ‘in the wild’ at Urbina Bay, Isabela and many dozen more were encountered in the highlands of Santa Cruz, especially at rancho El Manzanillo

**Pacific Green Sea-Turtle** (*Chelonia agassizii*)—Apparently at the beginning of the breeding season, these wonderful creatures were seen daily, often in large



numbers, at sea and near sandy beaches where they lay their eggs. 1 hatched baby was encountered

**San Cristóbal Lava Lizard** (*Microlophus [Tropidurus] bivattatus*) **E**—A few were encountered (we only visited this island briefly) on San Cristóbal Island

**Española Lava Lizard** (*Microlophus [Tropidurus] delanonus*) **E**—Many were encountered at our feet on Española Island

**Galapagos Lava Lizard** (*Microlophus [Tropidurus] albermarlensis*) **E**—A widespread species: very common at Urbina Bay and Tagus Cove, Isabela Island and Punta Suárez, Fernandina Island as well as on our two days on Santa Cruz

**Galapagos Land Iguana** (*Conolophus subcristatus*) **E**—Becoming more widespread due to the Darwin Station's successful breeding program ! 2 were found at El Edén, 10 or so were seen at Urbina Bay, and others at Bachas beach/Cerro Dragón

**Marine Iguana** (*Amblyrhynchus cristatus*) **E**—Several very distinctive subspecies are involved; common to abundant along the shoreline on all islands

#### THE CRAB SPECIES LIST

Sally lightfoot Crab (*Grapsus grapsus*)—Common and widespread along rocky shores throughout the archipelago—the bright red one!

Hermit Crab (*Calcinus exporator*)—1 was seen along the beach at Bachas

Ghost Crab

#### GENERAL MARINE SPECIES LIST

Galapagos Shark

White-tipped Reef-Shark

Blacktip Shark

Mola Mola/Ocean Sunfish

Yellow-tailed Mullet

Barberfish

Butterfly Fish sp.

King Angelfish

Moorish Idol

Yellow-tailed Surgeonfish

Amberjack

Striped (flathead) Mullet

Rainbow (Sea) Chub

Dusky (Sea) Chub

Black-striped Salema

White Salema

Blackspot Porgy

Panamic Sargeant Major

White-tailed Damsel fish

Yellow-tailed Damsel fish

Flag Cabrilla

Giant Hawkfish

Leather Bass

Bicolor Parrotfish  
Azure Parrotfish  
Bluechin Parrotfish  
Bumphead Parrotfish  
Mexican Hogfish  
Streamer Hawkfish  
Chameleon Wrasse  
Rainbow Wrasse  
Sunset Wrasse  
Panamic Cardinalfish  
Large-banded Blenny  
Bravo Clinid  
Leopard Flounder  
Stone Scorpionfish  
Pacific Burrfish  
Balloon Fish  
Bullseye Puffer  
Pacific Boxfish  
Spotted Porcupinefish  
Yellowtail Triggerfish  
Reef Cornetfish  
Tiger Snake Eel

Manta Ray  
Spotted Eagle Ray  
Marbled Ray  
Golden Ray

For more information on Galapagos marine species:  
<http://www.starfish.ch/scubadiving/print/Galapagos-endemic-print.html>

#### THE BUTTERFLY SPECIES LIST

Cloudless Sulphur (*Phoebis sennae*)—singles were seen at Urbina bay, Isabela Island  
and on Santa Cruz (various sites)  
Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*)—1 was seen in the highlands of Santa Cruz