

GALAPAGOS

June 19, 2010 to June 29, 2010

Guided by
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This first Field Guide's cruise of the season around the Galapagos Islands was as successful as any to date: logistics were as smooth as silk, the weather was as nice as I've ever had it (with moderate temperatures throughout and dry highland hiking), our group was simply a blast to be with and got along like old mates (a little lingo plug there for our three Aussie companions!), and... we saw all of the possible bird endemics well with relative ease. Pretty seamless, I'd say!

A trip to Galapagos really is like stepping back in time; very few places on earth can you still stroll by colonies of seabirds, sea lions, marine iguanas (well, nowhere else for this one really), and other fascinating creatures, and feel like you are all on the same level, or even team, in a way. Cast a shadow on a Booby, Albatross, or lava lizard, and they would barely even blink; I'd say the same for the Galapagos Snake we saw, except that it doesn't have eyelids, so he gets promptly ushered out of this poetic example. But back to my original point though: the animals are all still tame, as they were before human arrival to the islands, and we are all so lucky to have such an enchanted place like this - Las Islas Encantadas (Enchanted Islands) - to visit in an age that forces animals to retreat as a result of the destructive wake caused by humanity.

Our eight-day cruise, that sets foot on seven key islands (three places on Isabela Island alone!), is a pretty ambitious one, but necessary in order to get us to all of the critical 'ports' for a chance at all of Galapagos' endemic bird species... it would be pretty hard to do it much faster, but who would want to? We all know why, of course. There is so much to see and soak in with respect to the beauty and uniqueness of each island and its surrounding waters, that they all deserve special attention... and we took the time to do just this: get there fast and take it slow. We were left with many unforgettable experiences, from specific bird endemics and other fauna, to breath-taking vistas. Some of the memories that I still feel embodied our trip follow, but I'll bet you have a few of your own: Mangrove Finches (certainly one of the world's rarest birds) sitting right in front of us at Black Beach; mind-boggling seabird colonies (with thousands of boobies and storm-petrels) on Genovesa Island; the elegant Waved Albatross in full display during our private performance on Española; Galapagos Rails sneaking about almost underfoot; Fin Whales surfacing at close range; Sea Lions startling the snorkelers as they zoomed about underwater; male Great Frigatebirds with their red sacks inflated; Paint-billed Crakes at close range for awesome studies; our final bird endemic of the trip - the Large Tree-Finch - for a home-run!; and all of those panoramic views of the islands, and their surroundings seas, that make Galapagos so unique.

Just as a refresher, here is a quick review of what we did:

Day 1 - Arrival to Baltra. Afternoon cruise around Daphne Major (where we actually saw our first Large Ground-Finches) and then a stroll along Bachas Beach on the north coast of Santa Cruz, where we had our first looks at Caribbean (American) Flamingo. Overnight cruise to Genovesa Island.

Day 2 - Morning hike, at the site known as Prince Phillip's Steps, for such things as Sharp-beaked Ground-Finch (and other finches) and the breath-taking colony of Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrels! In the afternoon it was snorkeling in Darwin Bay, and then mid-afternoon exit (for an overnight cruise) to the

west side of Isabela Island to Black Beach.

Day 3 - Morning search (with great success, I might add) for the rare Mangrove Finch at Black Beach. Afternoon walk on lava fields at Punta Moreno after a midday pelagic cruise with whale sightings. Overnight cruise around south side of Isabela to Puerto Villamil, located on the south coast of Isabela.

Day 4 - Full morning spent in the highlands above Puerto Villamil on Isabela, looking for some of the highland finches and the Vermilion Flycatcher (at one of its last strongholds on the islands). Afternoon cruise - after lunch - to Floreana for a calm dinner before an overnight cruise to Española Island.

Day 5 - Morning stroll on a beautiful white, sandy beach full of sea lions (where we saw our first of the Española race of Large Cactus-Finch) and snorkeling at Gardner Bay on north side of Española. Afternoon walk through Waved Albatross and Blue-footed Booby colonies at Punta Suarez. Night cruise back to Floreana.

Day 6 - Early morning arrival to Enderby Island, and then Champion Island for the Floreana Mockingbird (great looks from the boat!). Snorkeling then followed, and after this, a late morning walk through coastal habitats at Punta Cormorant on the north-west side of Floreana, where we stood ankle deep in waters 'infested' with Diamond Sting Rays that glided by our sandals. Afternoon birding the highlands of Floreana, mainly in search of the highland island-endemic, Medium Tree-Finch, of which we found many nice examples. All night cruise to San Cristobal Island.

Day 7 - A busy day! First we jumped ship onto San Cristobal Island for a look at the endemic San Cristobal Mockingbird. Then back on board for a cruise to Santa Fe Island for about an hour walk to see the endemic Land Iguanas here. It was then off to Santa Cruz island for a tour of the Darwin Research Station, led by Peter. After a farewell dinner on the boat, and cocktail with the crew, we enjoyed a calm night, with no motoring, in the harbor at Puerto Ayora.

Day 8 - A full morning of birding the highlands of Santa Cruz for rails, crakes and our last needed finch (the Large Tree-Finch, which we saw splendidly), not to mention those wild Giant Tortoises! On this day we clinched all of the island's endemic birds, and enjoyed visits to Media Luna (rails), Primicias (crakes galore!), and the Gemelos craters. We finished up the day with some badly needed free time for shopping and island relaxation, reveling in our conquering of the bird endemics!

Day 9 - Not much birding today as we had to transfer to the airport on Baltra. Fortunately, all ran smoothly and we were back in Quito in the early afternoon for a rest before the final dinner and farewells!

As a final wrap-up, we have to applaud our wonderful boat crew (Henry, Antonio, Francisco, Raul, Alex, and Felipe), and naturalist guide, Peter Freire. They all bent over backwards to see that our experience on the islands was top-notch. But what tour is a complete success without a fun bunch of eager participants... you guys!? Thanks a million to all of you for making this Galapagos trip such a pleasure to lead... and I hope to see each and every one of you sometime soon. Mitch

List total: 63 bird taxa and 8 mammal taxa

*If marked to left of list, * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic,
N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant*

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Spheniscidae

E GALAPAGOS PENGUIN (*Spheniscus mendiculus*)

We saw this charming endemic in the western islands - this species' breeding stronghold. We all had wonderful close studies of at least 10 birds on land at Puerto Villamil right in the harbor one beautiful morning. They seemed to be less common this year at Punta Moreno, where they often litter the rocks in the late afternoon, but we did see a few there.

Diomedidae

WAVED ALBATROSS (*Phoebastria irrorata*)

While not a true Galapagos endemic - a few pairs are known to nest on Isla de la Plata just off of mainland Ecuador - this is one of the big reasons to visit the islands, from a birder's standpoint, as the breeding spectacle on Espanola is something to behold. After the adults come back in April, after a pelagic stint away from the archipelago for a few months, they launch into their fascinating dance displays to re-establish lifelong pair bonds. We were treated to a private show right along the trail, only feet away from a few folks, from beginning to end, and were left speechless! The intricate choreography - full of bill rattles, head bows, and groans - is the primary way that pairs recognize each other after months apart. We were even lucky enough to see one of the first chicks to hatch out near the cliff where they take flight. Simply awesome! It took up until our penultimate day, during the cruise between San Cristobal and Santa Fe, before we found them out at sea.

Procellariidae

GALAPAGOS PETREL (*Pterodroma phaeopygia*)

One of the island's most endangered breeders due to the nest predation by the introduced Black Rat and other feral animals. Populations seem to be sliding, but we did have what seemed to be healthy numbers of them during some of our cruises between the southern islands.

GALAPAGOS (AUDUBON'S) SHEARWATER (*Puffinus lherminieri subalaris*)

The Galapagos 'subalaris' subspecies has been split out by many authorities, now being called Galapagos Shearwater. This one is an abundant seabird here and we saw them commonly on almost all of our cruises. Our most spectacular encounter with them came when we witnessed what must have been thousands of birds all converging in a feeding frenzy just off-shore from Floreana Island... it was as if they formed a roving cloud of birds.

Hydrobatidae

WHITE-VENTED STORM-PETREL (*Oceanites gracilis galapagoensis*)

The smallest of Galapagos's storm-petrels and the most common close into shore. Remember that this was the one with the daintier flight and white belly. I find it fascinating that this species' breeding grounds here are still unknown!

WEDGE-RUMPED STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma tethys tethys*)

Seen by the tens of thousands at one of their main breeding colonies on Genovesa Island, as well as commonly at sea. This one has the large white patch on the rump, extending to almost the tip of the tail, and has a more powerful flight style than the White-vented.

BAND-RUMPED STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma castro*)

Seen pelagically only, which is usually the case since they tend to visit their nesting grounds at night. This was the largest of the storm-petrels that we saw, with the more powerful and driving flight... sometimes even appearing shearwater-like at a distance.

Phaethontidae

RED-BILLED TROPICBIRD (*Phaethon aethereus mesonauta*)

A common and graceful seabird that we saw many times flying in formation - especially at Genovesa. We caught some nice looks at them sitting on the water during our cruise to Santa Fe Island.

Pelecanidae

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis urinator*)

Common in smaller numbers than many of the other seabirds, and seen on almost everyday of the trip. The trinomial, 'urinator', refers to its diving habits... and nothing else.

Sulidae

BLUE-FOOTED BOOBY (*Sula nebouxii excisa*)

The common booby species near shore since this species is best adapted for feeding in shallower waters. We had our most intimate encounters with them on Espanola Island at Punta Suarez, where a few pairs engaged in their famous courtship display of lifting those large blue feet into the air.

NAZCA BOOBY (*Sula granti*)

*A fairly recent split from the Masked Booby (*S. dactylatra*); this one has the more orange bill. We saw them repeatedly during our pelagic cruises as well as nesting on numerous islands.*

RED-FOOTED BOOBY (*Sula sula websteri*)

The most pelagic of the booby species in the Galapagos, which isn't much of a surprise since their breeding grounds are on the islands furthest out to sea... a deep water feeder. While this one is usually the least seen booby by visitors, its populations outnumber the other two; the colony on Genovesa is the largest in the world.

Phalacrocoracidae

E FLIGHTLESS CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax harrisi*)

This large (and only) flightless cormorant, with the aqua-colored eye, is almost wholly restricted to the coasts of Fernandina and the west side of Isabela; they seem to be tied to the colder waters of the food-rich Humboldt Current that bathes the islands here. We had wonderful studies of them on their breeding grounds at Punta Moreno.

Fregatidae

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata magnificens magnificens*)

The more common of the two species of frigates in the islands. The males of the two frigatebird species here can be tricky to tell apart - this one with the more purple sheen - but the females are more straight forward; this species having the all black head and gray eyering.

GREAT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata minor ridgwayi*)

We had our best close studies of this species on Genovesa Island, where we saw numerous males with their throat sacs inflated. Here too, a few males were even displaying in front of females, in heated competitions for attention and breeding rights!

Ardeidae

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias cognata*)

Common in small numbers in the islands.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)

One seen by some folks when it flew by at Punta Moreno.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*)

Most common in the highlands.

E LAVA (STRIATED) HERON (*Butorides striata sundevalli*)

A recent study has apparently shown that there are no true, mainland-type Striated Herons in Galapagos at all, which is somewhat of a relief since some of the birds sure seem intermediate and even closer to true Striated; a few of which we saw. What we seem to be dealing with here are morphs of one species. I'm not yet clear on details, but the birds here all have measurements consistent with each other, and not with birds on the mainland. Whatever ends up happening, we had some very nice studies on several of the islands. It should be noted that the South American Classification Committee (SACC) considers these Galapagos birds to represent only a subspecies of the mainland birds.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea pauper*)

Fairly common in the coastal areas of almost all of the islands. We saw some nice adults and young.

Phoenicopteridae

CARIBBEAN FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)

Very nice and close studies at an individual of this elegant species on our first afternoon at Bachas Beach on the N. coast of Santa Cruz... and in a perfectly picturesque location; also seen well in the brackish ponds at Punta Moreno and Puerto Villamil on Isabela Island. This form is sometimes given subspecific status. Also goes by Greater or American Flamingo.

Anatidae

WHITE-CHEEKED PINTAIL (*Anas bahamensis galapagensis*)

Seen well in the brackish ponds of Santa Cruz and Isabela Islands. This Galapagos race is smaller and much duller than mainland birds, and seems to sound a bit different as well.

Accipitridae

E GALAPAGOS HAWK (*Buteo galapagoensis*)

Excellent views of this Galapagos endemic on Espanola Island, in flight and perched. It is believed that this species' closest relative is the Red-backed Hawk of the mainland.

Rallidae

E GALAPAGOS RAIL (*Laterallus spilonotus*)

Awe, and you guys were worried we wouldn't see it! It takes a little effort sometimes, but these little guys usually produce after a bit of persistence. We were treated to some very nice looks through holes in the vegetation up in the highlands of Santa Cruz on our last full day. Very satisfying and a nice one to have in our pockets, leaving us with only one endemic left at that point: the Large Tree-Finch. This species is obviously a very close relative of the mainland Black Rail, and has some calls that are very similar.

PAINT-BILLED CRAKE (*Neocrex erythrops*)

Mel spotted our first one out on the edge of a brackish lagoon at Punta Moreno, where we carefully navigated the jagged lava fields. Peter and I had never seen it here, so it was an interesting record indeed. The looks were ok, but a tad distance. Not to worry though, because we really did them up right in the highlands when we called in a couple of birds for terrific studies as they crept about in the undergrowth. This species was first detected on the islands back in the 1950's, and seems to be steadily increasing.

COMMON MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus*)

Common in the the brackish and salt ponds on Isabela.

Haematopodidae

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus palliatus galapagensis*)

The resident, breeding race. We had pretty decent views of them a few times, such as along the sandy beaches of Baltra and Espanola Islands.

Recurvirostridae

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

Common in small numbers in the salt water and brackish lagoons of several islands we visited.

Charadriidae

SEMI-PALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

Common in small numbers in tide pool areas.

Scolopacidae

WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*)

One of the most common and conspicuous shorebirds in the Galapagos, occurring up into the highlands.

WANDERING TATTLER (*Tringa incana*)

Fairly good looks at small numbers of them in coastal areas.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

A few here and there along sandy beaches, such as at Bachas Beach and Espanola.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*)

We ran into a small group of them during our cruise through the Bolivar Channel as they fed about amongst the storm-petrels

Laridae

E LAVA GULL (*Larus fuliginosus*)

There are apparently only about 400 pairs of this Galapagos endemic, but it is widespread throughout the islands and pretty easy to find in many coastal areas. We had numerous nice studies of this grayish gull on numerous islands.

SWALLOW-TAILED GULL (*Creagrus furcatus*)

One of the most beautiful and distinctive gulls in the world, don't you think? This nocturnal hunter is mostly a Galapagos endemic but it has been known to breed on some islands off of the coast of Colombia. We saw them on almost everyday of the trip and even saw some downy young.

Sternidae

BROWN NODDY (*Anous stolidus galapagensis*)

Common throughout the islands.

Columbidae

E GALAPAGOS DOVE (*Zenaida galapagoensis*)

Seen right at the Baltra airport upon arrival, but we had better and better looks during our many island visits for staggering views of this gorgeous Galapagos endemic.

Cuculidae

DARK-BILLED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus melacoryphus*)

I guess we have to consider ourselves lucky to have connected with one of this sneaky species in the highlands of Isabela above Puerto Villamil. Even though it did its best to stay out of sight, as they usually do, the looks weren't bad. There was no hint of them in the highlands of Santa Cruz this trip where they are sometimes not uncommon.

SMOOTH-BILLED ANI (*Crotophaga ani*)

A common and destructive, introduced species in the archipelago, especially in the highlands, where they seem to be taking their toll on the Vermilion Flycatcher on a few islands.

Tytonidae

BARN OWL (GALAPAGOS) (*Tyto alba punctatissima*)

Point-blank views at a nest with two adults and three young in the highlands of Isabela above Puerto Villamil. This Galapagos race is a bit darker, with more splotching.

Strigidae

SHORT-EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus galapagoensis*)

One bird out on the lava fields on Genovesa Island where they actively hunt for unsuspecting storm-petrels coming in to attend their nests. This Galapagos race is quite dark.

Tyrannidae

GALAPAGOS VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus nanus*)

Still common in the highlands of Isabela above Puerto Villamil, but they seemed to have (at least almost) completely vanished from the islands of Floreana and Santa Cruz where I remember them being quite common not too long ago. Apparently the Smooth-billed Ani is regular pirate of their nests.

E GALAPAGOS FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus magnirostris*)

We had our first looks at this endemic flycatcher on Espanola Island when one came in and landed right in front of us; this is often a very curious species. Later on, we ran into them on numerous occasions for excellent, repeated studies. Also has been called Large-billed Flycatcher.

Hirundinidae

E GALAPAGOS MARTIN (*Progne modesta*)

The best showing of this sometimes hard to find Galapagos endemic that I have had in years. First we took a spin on the big boat by the cliffs at Tagus Cove and scored a few of them flying about and even perching for relatively close views. Later on in the day at Punta Moreno, the spot where I usually count on getting them, we had a pair come down to sip (on the wing) water at a brackish pond for awesome views in perfect afternoon light.

Mimidae

E GALAPAGOS MOCKINGBIRD (*Nesomimus parvulus*)

The most wide-ranging of the mockingbirds here, occupying most of the northern islands. There are some recent genetic studies however that strongly suggest that this may be more than one species.

E FLOREANA (CHARLES) MOCKINGBIRD (*Nesomimus trifasciatus*)

Very nice looks at them as they perched up on prickly-pear cactus trees during our cruise around Champion island. This species once occurred commonly on Floreana Island, but they were soon extirpated when cats and Black Rats arrived. Luckily, they found refuge on two satellite islands - Champion and Gardner - where about 100 birds persist. Attempts were made to re-establish them on Floreana, but they all flew back to the safe haven of Champion! Guess they know a good thing when they've got it...

- E **ESPANOLA (HOOD) MOCKINGBIRD** (*Nesomimus macdonaldi*)
These guys are always among the official welcoming committee at Espanola where it is endemic. Recent genetic studies suggest that this species may better be lumped with the San Cristobal Mockingbird... hope not!
- E **SAN CRISTOBAL MOCKINGBIRD** (*Nesomimus melanotis*)
An easy grab just a short drive up from the town of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno on San Cristobal Island. We had many fine looks at them around the cemetery where they came in and landed in nearby trees. An endemic to this island.

Parulidae

"MANGROVE" YELLOW WARBLER (*Dendroica petechia aureolla*)
Abundant in the lowlands and highlands in every imaginable habitat!

Emberizidae

- E **LARGE GROUND-FINCH** (*Geospiza magnirostris*)
As common as I remember this species being in a long time; we had fabulous studies of this chunkiest of finches during a cruise around Daphne Major on and Genovesa early on in the trip, and them again at the Darwin Station on Santa Cruz. We like to call it, Megamouth!
- E **MEDIUM GROUND-FINCH** (*Geospiza fortis*)
One of the most common finches. We had them on many days of the trip in various habitat types. It was interesting to see how the bills varied from one island to the next, and some we just had to write off as possible hybrids with the Large or Small Ground-Finches, which is apparently not an uncommon occurrence.
- E **SMALL GROUND-FINCH** (*Geospiza fuliginosa*)
The other most common Galapagos finch; we saw them well on almost every island we visited.
- E **SHARP-BEAKED GROUND-FINCH** (*Geospiza difficilis*)
Common on Genovesa Island where there are only four species. On a couple of the islands far to the NW part of the archipelago, they are known to peck at the base of booby feathers and sip on blood, earning them the name, 'Vampire' Finch.
- E **COMMON CACTUS-FINCH** (*Geospiza scandens*)
Easily seen in the transitional zone above Puerto Villamil at the large Bombax (Kapok) Tree; at one point we found one trying to figure out how to crack that passion fruit shell. This one has a longer beak that it uses to probe into cactus flowers and fruits.
- E **LARGE CACTUS-FINCH** (*Geospiza conirostris*)
The easiest trip I have ever had for this species; their populations were particularly impressive on Genovesa where I have missed them of late. While still pretty thick, the northern birds have a thinner bill than the southern birds on Espanola Island, where some sport a bill approaching the size of a Large Ground-Finch.
- E **VEGETARIAN FINCH** (*Camarhynchus crassirostris*)
It was neat to see them in the highlands above Puerto Villamil nibbling on fresh leaves and living up to their name! One of the heftiest of the Galapagos finches. We also found them in the highlands of San Cristobal and Santa Cruz for repeat studies.
- E **MANGROVE FINCH** (*Camarhynchus heliobates*)
We could not have had much better luck with this extremely localized bird that specializes feeding on grubs to be found in old, dead mangrove trunks. A short walk up Black Beach to the mature mangrove forests, set back from the shore (the habitat they need), produced a nice male bird within minutes, for excellent studies; a bit further down, we had another female singing at eye level. A real bonanza, I'd say! This species is one of Galapagos' most endangered birds and is restricted to only a few large mangrove forests on the coast of Isabela and. Recent attempts to relocate birds from Black Beach to Urbina Bay, in order to establish new colonies in areas of potentially suitable habitat, may help increase the species' sliding numbers; so far the researchers know for sure that one bird made it all the way back to Black Beach! More time is needed to see if the remaining 'planted' birds at Urbina will indeed breed. Keep your fingers crossed, but the Darwin Station seems to be doing all possible to eradicate the Black Rats, that ravage the finch's nests.
- E **LARGE TREE-FINCH** (*Camarhynchus psittacula*)
With this species, we clinched the clean sweep of the island's endemics! We turned a female of this highland species up at the tortoise farm on Santa Cruz when we called in a female into a tree right overhead. Good thing we found it there, because there was no sign of them anywhere else on the island!

- E SMALL TREE-FINCH (*Camarhynchus parvulus*)
The most common and wide-ranging of the tree-finches, and one we saw well on all of our highland excursions.
- E MEDIUM TREE-FINCH (*Camarhynchus pauper*)
An endemic to the highlands of Floreana Island, where turned up several males and females around Asilo de la Paz... the pirate cave area.
- E WOODPECKER FINCH (*Camarhynchus pallidus*)
We had our first encounters with this mostly highland species of wetter forests above the town of Puerto Villamil on Isabela. I couldn't believe our luck when we located not just one, but two different individuals actively foraging with sticks (tools) to try and pry out grubs from dead branches. While this species is famous for this behavior, it is actually not that common an event, so we were very fortunate indeed!
- E "HIGHLAND" WARBLER FINCH (*Certhidea olivacea olivacea*)
What was known as the Warbler Finch, and historically always treated as a highly variable species made of many different forms, is now considered two distinct species now according to the SACC. This highland form, found in wetter areas of the larger islands often with some altitude, is now referred to as the Green Warbler-Finch. The two species essentially displace each other, so are never found on the same island; they also have different song-types and demonstrate some plumage differences. We had many of them in the mossy highlands above Puerto Villamil on Isabela.
- E "LOWLAND" WARBLER FINCH (*Certhidea olivacea fusca*)
This lowland form of the Warbler Finch, called 'Gray Warbler-Finch' tends to be found on older islands with less altitude, often on scrubby lowland habitats. We saw a number of the forms of this species, such as on Genovesa, Espanola, and San Cristobal for many fine, point-blank studies.

MAMMALS

- I HOUSE MOUSE (*Mus musculus*)
It was an exciting moment (not really) when we spotted a few of this introduced species in the Land Iguana pens at the Darwin Station.
- BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*)
Dolphins were scarce this, but we still pulled a few of these out of the hat during our cruise to Santa Fe Island when they came quite close to the boat for a brief encounter.
- SHORT-BEAKED COMMON DOLPHIN (*Delphinus delphis*)
Peter identified a small pod of this species during the cruise to Santa Fe, but they never came close enough for solid views.
- BRYDE'S WHALE (*Balaenoptera edeni*)
I'm convinced that the first whale we saw in the Bolivar Channel must have been this species; it was much smaller than the Fin Whales we saw later and had a different dorsal fin shape.
- FIN WHALE (*Balaenoptera physalus*)
Very nice looks at few in the Bolivar Channel as they surfaced nearby. One of the largest of the great whales.
- HUMPBACK WHALE (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)
We chased one down for quick but identifiable views just off of the coast of Espanola Island. This one had the darker gray back color and much less pronounced dorsal fin.
- E "GALAPAGOS" SEA LION (*Zalophus californianus wollebacki*)
Abundant in the islands!!! We had lots of fun watching them frolic about on the beaches, while some even had some nice close encounters with them while snorkeling. Now considered a species distinct from the California Sea Lion.
- E GALAPAGOS FUR SEAL (*Arctocephalus galapagoensis*)
We had them right at our reliable old spot in Darwin Bay near the climb up to our morning trail at Prince Phillip's Steps, and got close enough to see the pug-nose and plump body shape. This species was hunted to near extinction in the islands due to the desire for their pelts, but with proper protection, their populations have really bounced back. A nocturnal hunter, this one is often found resting during the day. While often called a 'seal' this animal really is more closely allied to the sea lions as it has strong fore-limbs for climbing and external ears.

Additional Comments

Our list of organisms would not be complete on this tour without mention of some of the non-avian/mammal highlights.

REPTILES

Galapagos (Giant) Tortoise - *Geochelone elephantopus*. Close encounters with wild tortoises in the highlands of Santa Cruz. Race, *porteri*.

Pacific Green (Black) Turtle - *Chelonia mydas*. The common sea turtle in the islands, that many even saw while snorkeling - Ron counted seventeen one outing. The Galapagos population is often split out as the "Black Turtle."

Marine Iguana - *Amblyrhynchus cristatus*. Common on just about all of the islands where we encountered some distinct subspecies. The red and black ones on Espanola were *venustissimus*. Then there was the form often called commonly the "Christmas Iguana" of Genovesa; these were *nanus*. *Mertensi*, was on San Cristobal, and the large black ones on Isabela were *albermalensis*. We also had medium-sized animals on Santa Cruz of the subspecies, *hassi*. And as I've said before: I don't care what subspecies we are talking about, they all look like the Creature from the Black Lagoon to me!

Land Iguana - *Conolophus subcristatus*. This large terrestrial speceis of iguana was seen upon arrival to the islands right at the Baltra airport.

Santa Fe Land Iguana - *Conolophus pallidus*. This land iguana is endemic to the relatively small Santa Fe Island... the main reason we stopped here, by the way! These guys can apparently grow up to 20 cms longer than the previous species.

Galapagos Lava Lizard - *Microlophus albermarlensis*. This most widespread of the Lava Lizards; we saw on most of the central and northern islands.

Espanola Lava Lizard - *Microlophus delanonis*. Endemic to Espanola (Hood) Island. The largest of the Lava Lizards.

Floreana Lava Lizard - *Microlophus grayi*. Found only on Floreana where we encountered them lurking about on the rocks at Punta Cormorant. The smallest of the Lava Lizards.

Galapagos Snake - . Nice find there, Erika! We had really close looks at one along the trail on Espanola Island at Punta Suarez.

Some other organisms of note: White-tip Reef Shark, Spotted Eagle Ray, Diamond Sting Ray (floating about near the shore on Floreana), Manta Ray (swimming and breaching), Sally Lightfoot Crab, Ghost Crab, Red and Chocolatechip Sunstars, Galapagos Star Spider, and Painted Locust.

I'll leave the fish seen up to each of you!

gal10a-m/