



Field Guides Tour Report

Galapagos: An Intimate Look at Darwin's Islands II 2016

Jul 9, 2016 to Jul 19, 2016

Willy Perez

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).



*Galapagos is famous for its "finches" (now known to be tanagers); they helped to inspire Darwin's theory of evolution. This one is the endemic Small Ground-Finch.
Photo by participant Sid England.*

Whilst writing this trip list, a lot of stunning memories came to mind. I remember as a young person wondering what the Galapagos Islands were going to be like. After reading books, watching videos, and so forth, you feel like you'll go there once and that's it. Many years and many visits later, I still think that these islands are stuck in time. It's still true that this place is magic, weird, and bizarre -- as you can see when you're there, watching the incredible landscape and animals. Some places are covered with black lava, other places have giant daisies, or many different cacti; even the introduced species look strange there.

But when you see the combination of animals adapted to this environment, it's a bit crazy: giant tortoises that have different shells depending on which island they inhabit, iguanas that survive in salty water and dive several meters deep to eat, penguins in the Northern hemisphere, nocturnal gulls, cormorants that can't fly, and Darwin's "finches", with bills that are constantly evolving... All of this sounds like a fantasy, but the reality is that you were there and you witnessed it -- saw and visited one of the most spectacular places on the planet! As we whizzed around the islands, we saw an incredible number of the places and wildlife that the books and videos tell you about. Our group's list of favorites included Paint-billed Crane, Yellow Warbler, Nazca and Blue-footed boobies, Red-billed Tropicbirds, even a Brown Pelican. Finches were popular, with the Mangrove Finch providing a nice surprise. Swallow-tailed Gulls showed what they are capable of; the ones feeding their chicks with squid on Genovesa were admired by many of us. Inquisitive mockingbirds were incredible, especially the Espanola Mockingbirds that came to catch flies and check our group for water sources (with no luck). Many of you decided that the Waved Albatrosses were most impressive, simply because of their looks and behavior. For me, the biggest surprise was how calm the Pacific Ocean was. The Nemo III was comfortable, but even more importantly, it took us to the places to make our adventure a success. So thank you to our captain (Henry) and the crew, who all did a great job. Thanks also to William, our local guide, who helped us with a lot of information about the Galapagos.

And as you know, without you, this adventure would not have happened at all, so the biggest thank you goes to all of you for deciding to visit the Islas Encantadas (Enchanted Islands) and for joining us on this trip. I had a great time and hope that you did too. I am sure that you will remember those Darwin's "finches" for a long time!

A big hug,

-- Willy

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

WHITE-CHEEKED PINTAIL (GALAPAGOS) (*Anas bahamensis galapagensis*) – We saw this duck nicely a few times along the way.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – One seen at Humedales on Isabela.

Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

AMERICAN FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) – We saw a pair when we visited Bachas beach on the first afternoon, and 12 more on Isabela.

Spheniscidae (Penguins)

GALAPAGOS PENGUIN (*Spheniscus mendiculus*) – At least 18 were present at Puerto Villamil, and we saw others in Punta Moreno on Isabela. [E]

Diomedidae (Albatrosses)

WAVED ALBATROSS (*Phoebastria irrorata*) – Great sightings of many of them, plus eggs, chicks, many adults taking off, etc, etc. We saw all of this while visiting Espanola.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

GALAPAGOS PETREL (*Pterodroma phaeopygia*) – A few seen from the boat as we were sailing. Unfortunately, we also saw some dead ones in Media Luna which may have been eaten by rats or cats.

GALAPAGOS SHEARWATER (*Puffinus subalaris*) – Very numerous throughout the trip.

Hydrobatidae (Storm-Petrels)

ELLIOT'S STORM-PETREL (*Oceanites gracilis galapagoensis*) – This handsome bird was very common throughout the trip.

WEDGE-RUMPED STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma tethys tethys*) – Few seen during our sailing, but the big colony on Genovesa was very impressive; there were thousands and thousands of them!

Phaethontidae (Tropicbirds)

RED-BILLED TROPICBIRD (*Phaethon aethereus mesonauta*) – It was fantastic to see the streamers of this long-tailed bird -- wow!

Fregatidae (Frigatebirds)

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata magnificens*) – More numerous than the next species, with a purple sheen to the plumage of the males.

GREAT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata minor ridgwayi*) – The young ones of this species were very attractive, with ginger heads.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

NAZCA BOOBY (*Sula granti*) – We saw plenty, but the one that got our attention the most was the parent feeding a big flying fish to its chick; that fish was far too big for that baby!

BLUE-FOOTED BOOBY (*Sula nebouxii excisa*) – Not many were dancing but there were plenty to see. The best show was in Santa Fe, where a single bird dived just beside the boat; he got a few black-striped salemas for dinner!

RED-FOOTED BOOBY (EASTERN PACIFIC) (*Sula sula websteri*) – Fantastic close-ups of this species; we saw both the brown morph and the white morph on Genovesa. Very impressive feet and facial "makeup"!

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

FLIGHTLESS CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax harrisi*) – They arrived, eons ago, by flying to the islands, but evolution has backpedaled and they are now adapted for swimming than for flying. [E]

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

BROWN PELICAN (SOUTHERN) (*Pelecanus occidentalis urinator*)

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (BLUE FORM) (*Ardea herodias cognata*)

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*)

STRIATED HERON (GALAPAGOS) (*Butorides striata sundevalli*) [E]

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

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*) – Seen in Quito.

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – At least on 3 pair was seen in Guayaquil.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GALAPAGOS HAWK (*Buteo galapagoensis*) – We had fantastic views of this unique hawk, including a young one on Isabela, but the one on Espanola was the best. [E]

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

GALAPAGOS RAIL (*Laterallus spilonota*) – We had a hard time seeing this species this year; it was just too dry. We heard a lot of them, but saw only one, as it flew across the road. [E]

PAINT-BILLED CRAKE (*Mustelirallus erythroptus*) – This bird gave us a show on Floreana, but also at Rancho Primicias on Santa Cruz.

PURPLE GALLINULE (*Porphyrio martinicus*) – We found a young bird at Rancho Primicias.

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*)

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus palliatus galapagensis*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

WANDERING TATTLER (*Tringa incana*)

WHIMBREL (AMERICAN) (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

SWALLOW-TAILED GULL (*Creagrus furcatus*) – People really enjoyed watching this magnificent gull. We saw them in different stages of life, and some of the group saw them following the boat at night.

LAVA GULL (*Leucophaeus fuliginosus*) – Though this is a very rare bird, we saw them almost every day -- not many, but frequently. [E]

BROWN NODDY (*Anous stolidus galapagensis*)

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*) – A pair was seen in Puerto Villamil.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

GALAPAGOS DOVE (*Zenaida galapagoensis*) – Many seen along the way. [E]

EARED DOVE (*Zenaida auriculata*) – In Quito.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

DARK-BILLED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus melacoryphus*) – Great looks on San Cristobal.

SMOOTH-BILLED ANI (*Crotophaga ani*) – This introduced species is almost everywhere now. [I]

Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)

BARN OWL (GALAPAGOS) (*Tyto alba punctatissima*) – It was a great catch up with this nice owl on our last day, when the owner of the restaurant where we had our lunch told us that there was one roosting near the store.

Strigidae (Owls)

SHORT-EARED OWL (GALAPAGOS) (*Asio flammeus galapagoensis*) – They were very active the day we visited Genovesa.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

SPARKLING VIOLETEAR (*Colibri coruscans*) – A few in Quito.

BLACK-TAILED TRAINBEARER (*Lesbia victoriae*) – In the garden at Hotel San Jose.

WESTERN EMERALD (*Chlorostilbon melanorhynchus*) – Also in the garden at Hotel San Jose.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – A pair in the garden at Hotel San Jose.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

SOUTHERN BEARDLESS-TYRANULET (*Camptostoma obsoletum*) – Heard-only in Quito. [*]

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (OBSCURUS GROUP) (*Pyrocephalus rubinus piurae*) – This is the one we saw in the gardens of Hotel San Jose.

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (GALAPAGOS) (*Pyrocephalus rubinus nanus*) – This is the subspecies we saw on Isabela.

GALAPAGOS FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus magnirostris*) [E]

TROPICAL KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) – In Quito.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

BLUE-AND-WHITE SWALLOW (*Pygochelidon cyanoleuca*) – In Quito.

GRAY-BREASTED MARTIN (*Progne chalybea*) – A pair at the Guayaquil airport.

GALAPAGOS MARTIN (*Progne modesta*) – We had great looks at a male after we saw the Mangrove Finch on Isabela. [E]

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

GREAT THRUSH (*Turdus fuscater*) – In Quito.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GALAPAGOS MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus parvulus*) – The most widespread of the four mockingbirds, seen on several islands. [E]

FLOREANA MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus trifasciatus*) – Do you remember the one that almost landed on the boat? That was a very cool encounter with such a rare bird. [E]

ESPAÑOLA MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus macdonaldi*) – They were very curious about our water bottles when we went to Gardener Beach on Espanola. [E]

SAN CRISTOBAL MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus melanotis*) – This species is only found on San Cristobal, where we had wonderful looks at several. [E]

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

YELLOW WARBLER (GALAPAGOS) (*Setophaga petechia aureola*) – The most common bird of the trip but also very pretty.

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)

BLUE-AND-YELLOW TANAGER (*Pipraeidea bonariensis*) – In Quito.

SCRUB TANAGER (*Tangara vitriolina*) – Also in Quito.

RUSTY FLOWERPIERCER (*Diglossa sittoides*) – Another one seen only in Quito.

SAFFRON FINCH (SAFFRON) (*Sicalis flaveola valida*) – Some at the Guayaquil airport.

GREEN WARBLER-FINCH (*Certhidea olivacea*) – We saw them on Isabela and Santa Cruz. [E]

GRAY WARBLER-FINCH (*Certhidea fusca mentalis*) – We saw this one on Genovesa. [E]

GRAY WARBLER-FINCH (*Certhidea fusca luteola*) – This subspecies was seen on San Cristobal. [E]

GRAY WARBLER-FINCH (*Certhidea fusca cinerascens*) – And this is the subspecies that occurs on Espanola. [E]

VEGETARIAN FINCH (*Platypiza crassirostris*) – This big finch was seen on San Cristobal and at Rancho Primicias on Santa Cruz. [E]

WOODPECKER FINCH (*Camarhynchus pallidus pallidus*) – We had a great encounter with this subspecies in the highlands of Santa Cruz. [E]

WOODPECKER FINCH (*Camarhynchus pallidus productus*) – Nice views of one in the same tree where the young Galapagos Hawk was perched, in the highlands of Isabela. [E]

WOODPECKER FINCH (*Camarhynchus pallidus striatipectus*) – This is the subspecies found on San Cristobal. [E]

LARGE TREE-FINCH (*Camarhynchus psittacula psittacula*) – Seen at least a couple of times in the highlands of Santa Cruz. [E]

MEDIUM TREE-FINCH (*Camarhynchus pauper*) – We had great looks at this species when we went to Asilo de la Paz on Floreana. [E]

SMALL TREE-FINCH (*Camarhynchus parvulus parvulus*) – A common bird, especially on the islands of Isabela, Floreana and Santa Cruz. [E]

SMALL TREE-FINCH (*Camarhynchus parvulus salvini*) – We had several females on San Cristobal. [E]

MANGROVE FINCH (*Camarhynchus heliobates*) – We were very lucky to see this very, very rare bird, especially the second one which was so close. Great!

SMALL GROUND-FINCH (*Geospiza fuliginosa*) – They were all over the place! [E]

LARGE GROUND-FINCH (*Geospiza magnirostris*) – Fantastic sightings of this very bizarre-looking bird. It has a disproportionately large bill, used to crack hard seeds. [E]

SHARP-BEAKED GROUND-FINCH (*Geospiza difficilis difficilis*) – The only place we saw this species was on Genovesa. [E]

COMMON CACTUS-FINCH (*Geospiza scandens intermedia*) – My favorite bird! It was going to be embarrassing if we missed this common species. I'm so glad that he was there! [E]

MEDIUM GROUND-FINCH (*Geospiza fortis*) – Very numerous along the way. [E]

LARGE CACTUS-FINCH (*Geospiza conirostris conirostris*) – This is the subspecies that we saw on Espanola. [E]

LARGE CACTUS-FINCH (*Geospiza conirostris propinqua*) – Seen nicely on Genovesa. [E]

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

RUFOUS-COLLARED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia capensis*) – In Quito.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

SCRUB BLACKBIRD (*Dives warszewiczi warszewiczi*) – At Guayaquil airport.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Also in Guayaquil.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

GOLDEN-RUMPED EUPHONIA (*Euphonia cyanocephala*) – Heard-only in Quito. [*]

HOODED SISKIN (*Spinus magellanicus*) – A male was seen nicely in the gardens of Hotel San Jose.

MAMMALS

HUMPBACK WHALE (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – Very briefly seen by some people.

"GALAPAGOS" SEA LION (*Zalophus californianus wollebacki*)

GALAPAGOS FUR SEAL (*Arctocephalus galapagoensis*) [E]

Herps

MARINE IGUANA (*Amblyrhynchus cristatus*) [E]

LAND IGUANA (*Conolophus subcristatus*) [E]

GALAPAGOS LAVA LIZARD (*Microlophus albemarlensis*) [E]

ESPANOLA LAVA LIZARD (*Microlophus delanonis*) [E]

SAN CRISTOBAL LAVA LIZARD (*Microlophus bivattatus*) [E]

GALAPAGOS (GIANT) TORTOISE (*Geochelone elephantopus*) [E]

GREEN SEA TURTLE (*Chelonia mydas*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The birds were not the only amazing things that we saw. The water gave us the opportunity to see other stunning creatures too. Here are some that deserve to be mentioned and I'm sure you will remember:

King Angelfish

Panamic sergeant major

Rainbow wrasse

Bullseye puffer

Yellow-tailed damsel fish

Bumphead parrotfish

Bicolor parrotfish

Bluechin parrotfish

Azure parrotfish

Yellow-tailed surgeonfish

Moorish idol

Yellow-tailed mullet

Black-striped salema

Yellow-finned tuna

Blacktip shark

Manta ray

Sting ray

Finally a fantastic group of Spotted eagle ray

Totals for the tour: 92 bird taxa and 3 mammal taxa