

My Trip to the Galapagos Islands

Galapagos Islands June of 1974, Joanne and I joined a trip to the Galapagos Islands, during which we had a firsthand view of Charles Darwin's "showcase of evolution." In exchange for recruiting several people from Glassboro State College, we had a discount and only paid \$300 for the entire trip. The Glassboro State people, in addition to ourselves, consisted of Professor Andrew Prieto and several biology majors who had raised money for the trip by selling donuts on campus.

We were to visit 11 of these islands which lie approximately 700 miles off the coast of Ecuador. It would take us two days at sea to get there, and we would have the opportunity to look for birds in the Pacific Ocean.

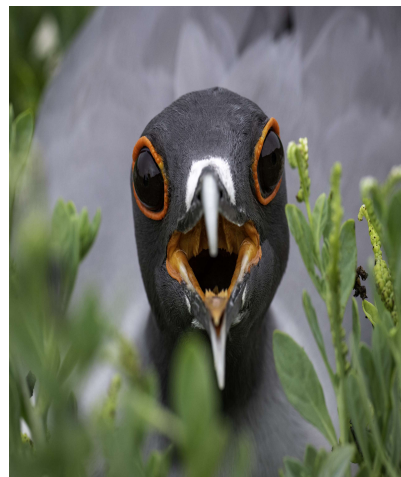
On June 7, we boarded the flight in Miami and landed in Guayaquil Ecuador after a stop in Cali, Columbia. In Guayaquil, we were transported to the harbor area where we boarded an Ecuadorian Navy ship with the colorful name "Calicuchima," Our room on board was incredibly narrow and had three bunks on the wall. Our cabin mate was an interesting older gentleman named Señor Maldonado. That night we departed up the river for the open ocean.

On June 8, we entered the Pacific Ocean and began seeing some interesting birds such as Black-browed albatross, Pale-footed Shearwater, White-bellied Storm Petrel and Wilson's Petrel. Also we observed several Blue-footed Boobies and one Red-footed Booby. Hour after hour passed, and we saw no other ships, not even airplane contrails in the sky. We were really alone on the Pacific Ocean in the middle of nowhere. What if something went wrong? When would help arrive? Thank goodness we had birds to observe!

On June 10, we finally saw land. It was the island of San Cristobal. It appeared to be very desolate! We could hardly wait to land! After breakfast, we were ferried to the island in a small boat and immediately saw there were yellow warblers everywhere. Some of the finches discovered by Darwin were there as well: Small Ground Finch, Medium Ground Finch, Chatham Island Mockingbird, Woodpecker Finch and many more. These are all finches which have descended from a common ancestor and branched off to fill the niches available on the island. They exist nowhere else in the world. This was exciting!

After returning to the ship, we departed for Santa Cruz where we visited the Darwin Research Station which conducts scientific research and promotes environmental education. On the way to the station we saw a Cactus Ground Finch. There was a Lava Gull waiting for us on the dock. Many boats had docked here, including a spectacular three masted schooner and a few smaller pleasure craft.

On June 11, after a good night's sleep, while waiting for the boat we saw a Swallow-tailed Gull and several other species. We then took the boat to Plaza Island where we saw an incredible sight -- sea lions on the pier, and both

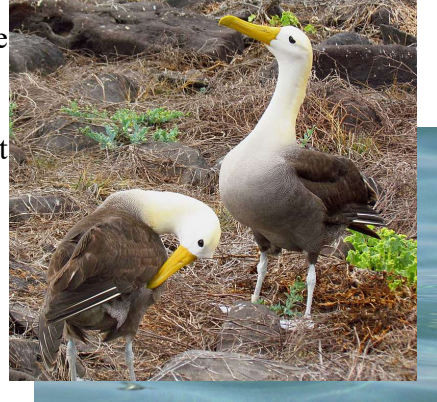


Land and Marine Iguanas on the shore. The Swallow-tailed Gull has an interesting bright orange gape. Later we arrived at Bartholome Island, a relatively recent volcanic island where we observed a Galapagos Hawk. There was a beautiful beach where we could swim. With goggles on we saw an amazing variety of fish including iridescent Blue Groupers and flat fish of three different types. We

watched a sea lion from underwater. What a great swimmer it was, twisting and turning as it chased fish! On the way back, we saw more sea lions, one Blue-footed Booby, and eight Galapagos Penguins. It was interesting to see a penguin this close to the equator!

Back on board Calicuchima that evening we had a great meal of soup, meat, fried eggplant, rice, beans, and apple pie.

On June 15, the ship arrived at Hood Island. We were the first on the boat and got to see the Galapagos (Waved) Albatross before anyone else. They were still there even though the nesting season was almost over. It was a great sight. We also saw several Masked and Blue-footed Boobies, a Red-billed Tropicbird, Large Cactus Finch, Hood Mockingbird and a Warbler Finch. There were Marine Iguanas, a Lava Lizard and a sea lion.



Finally, we set sail for Guayaquil at 11:45PM for a 90 hour journey. On the way, we observed many birds, including Waved Albatross, several species of shearwaters and storm petrels, as well as Masked and Blue-footed Boobies. Until we were close to land, we did not see a single ship. Again, we were alone in the open ocean. He finally arrived back at the port of Guayaquil. This ended incredible trip. I will most likely never have the opportunity to go back there but I won't forget this trip to the Galapagos Islands!

