

Galápagos Endemics Cruise

12 – 19 November 2010



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Photos: Andrés Vásquez & Sam Woods (The species in the photos are indicated in **RED**.)

ITINERARY

11 November:	Arrival/night Quito
12 November:	Baltra and Bachas beach
13 November:	Highlands of Santa Cruz and Charles Darwin Research Station
14 November:	San Cristobal and Española
15 November:	Floreana island
16 November:	Isabela Island and Bolivar Channel
17 November:	Fernandina Island
18 November:	Genovesa Island
19 November:	North Seymour & return to Quito
20 November:	Departure

DAILY SUMMARY:

12 November: Baltra and Santa Cruz

After a direct flight from Quito to Baltra we arrived to the Enchanted Islands and moved immediately to the Fragata Yacht which was to be our comfortable home for the next seven nights. Even though the first finches were seen flying away from us at the airport, the first one we saw well was a male **Medium Ground-Finch** at the pier while we were waiting to board our yacht. There we also got the first of several **Lava Gulls**, several sunbathing **Land Iguanas**, and our first **Galapagos Doves** (photo right).



The crew on the boat was waiting for us with a nice lunch, and shortly after we navigated south to **Bachas beach**. The afternoon walk along this beautiful sandy beach produced several wintering American shorebirds, like Least Sandpiper, and our first sightings of **Galapagos Flycatcher** (photo below) and **Galapagos Mockingbird**. The latter was not seen by all, although we were confident of changing that later on the tour...



A nice welcome cocktail offered by the crew of the yacht was the perfect closure to a relaxed first day on the Galapagos. At night we sailed southwards to the southern end of Santa Cruz, to the port of Puerto Ayora.

13 November: Santa Cruz

We began the day climbing up into the highlands with several very special targets in mind. We went after one of the most difficult of these straight off, the furtive Galapagos Rail, one of my personal favorites of all the endemics. As we had enjoyed success along one particular trail over the past two tours we went first to that spot, with light rain falling around us. Like many Galapagos animals, the rail is not typical, and does not always behave like other members of this shy family. This particular rail is often very curious and can react to a variety of sounds, and perhaps even to the

clicking of fingers. I decided to try this unconventional method and see if it works, as the ease and cooperation I had enjoyed the previous time I'd seen the rail implied it might just be possible. After a short walk a rail was heard from the side of the trail, and after a couple of finger clicks the bird reacted strongly, and came into view of a very stunned audience! Although all did not get satisfactory views at the first attempt, a more traditional method, playback was used to bring another bird in so that everyone could enjoy this tiny endemic rail. After the initial sighting, jokes about clicking fingers to attract albatrosses or petrels during later navigations became a daily comment!

Once we our main target bird we decided to walk the road down and search for the myriad of finches that occur up in Santa Cruz's highlands. It did not take long for us to find many of the finches we were searching for. Soon after we started downhill we picked up **Green Warbler Finch**, **Small and Large Tree-Finches**, a couple of **Woodpecker Finches** (*photo below*), and finally when hope was waning we finally found a **Vegetarian Finch** too.



Our main finch targets in the bag, we then visited a nearby farm, where after enjoying some local coffee we went on the hunt for the local (and fast-declining) race of **Vermilion Flycatcher**. Finally, we managed to locate the interesting female, which looks markedly different from the mainland forms, having much more yellow on the underparts. The flycatcher was not the only attraction though as we walked among numerous wild **Giant Tortoises** lumbering around the fields, and submerged in muddy wallows (*photo below*).

After lunch on board, we returned to Puerto Ayora to visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station where scientists are working on breeding and the reintroduction of various species of giant tortoise. The station is also good for the **Common Cactus-Finch**, as there are many prickly pear cacti along the trail. We found this bird with ease, with many people also getting good photos. We also achieved much better views of **Galapagos Mockingbirds** as they scampered around our feet by the gift shop, and got our first looks at **Large Ground-Finch**. We finished the day sight-seeing, shopping and relaxing in Puerto Ayora, the largest town in the Galapagos, before returning to our yacht late in the afternoon for our evening cruise to San Cristobal.

14 November: San Cristobal & Española

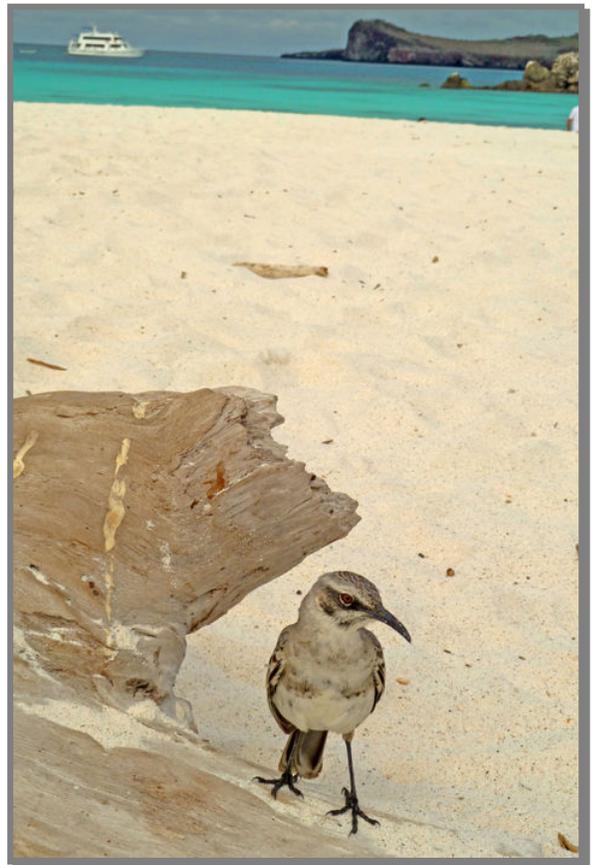
Having crossed during the night from Santa Cruz, we awoke in **San Cristobal**, the only place for the well-named **San Cristobal (Chatham) Mockingbird**. We took a bus up into the hills around town, where we soon found this island endemic perched on a telephone wire. The remainder of the morning was spent birding some other spots in the highlands, where we also picked up our first **Gray Warbler-Finch**.

On this day we all experienced our first daytime pelagic as we cruised from San Cristobal to Espanola. The promise of this brought all up on to the top deck of our yacht, and within the first hour of our cruise we had found all of our main targets. A massive flock of **Galapagos Shearwaters** were feeding over the sea, numbering some 600 individuals. Another highly desired Galapagos breeder, the graceful **Galapagos Petrel** was also soon found, and was also regular during all of our subsequent navigations. Another bird high on the wish lists of many was the **Waved Albatross**, which was first



found resting on the water, and soon took off as we passed by revealing its huge wingspan and skilful flight as it did so. Three species of **Storm Petrels** were also seen: **Elliot's (White-vented)**, **Wedge-rumped** and **Band-rumped**, as well as our first **Red-billed Tropicbird**.

After our five hour crossing we arrived at **Española**, where our third mockingbird awaited us on the beach. The **Española (Hood) Mockingbirds** there were unbelievably tame, following each of us around the beach, begging for food and fresh water as they did so (*photo right*). Although it was really tempting to feed these incredibly confiding birds, we abided by the stringent national park rules, and rejected their frequent overtures. Finding our other main target at Gardner Bay was also not too difficult, as several **Large Cactus-Finches** were also hopping around on the sand, centimeters away from us, right next to some more tame mockingbirds. We also wandered up the beach, past a number of loafing **Galapagos Sea Lions** (*photo below*), to an area for the different form of **Gray Warbler-Finch** than the one we had seen over on San Cristobal that morning. One was soon picked up foraging at the edge of the beach. While some enjoyed snorkeling with **Green Sea Turtles** the rest of us watched our first **Galapagos Martins** and **Galapagos Hawks** soaring above the hills behind the beach. These high-flying birds did not give us the best looks, although they were our first views, and we were to enjoy more later on the tour...



15 November: Floreana

After an overnight navigation from Española, we woke in **Floreana** ready to go after two of the most range-restricted birds in the world. First, we headed into the highlands of Floreana, where the **Medium Tree-Finch** proved not too difficult to find due to its distinctive, far-carrying song (*photo page 5*). We heard around ten different individuals and got some photos and sound recordings of a couple of them too. This critically-endangered finch only occurs above elevations of 250m on the tiny island of Floreana. After watching some wonderful **Marine Iguanas** on the beach with an attractive patchwork of red-patterning on their bodies we returned to the boat (*photo at end of summary*).

Having succeeded with our first target changed location to **Punta Cormorant**, a nice beach with a large saline lagoon behind it where shorebirds regularly come to feed. Unfortunately shorebird activity was low aside from a lone **Wilson's Phalarope**, although we did see a fine "**Lava**" **Heron** frozen amongst the volcanic rocks. The best find actually came over the hillside behind, where a **Chimney Swift** was found soaring above, a vagrant to the islands.

Before lunch some of us enjoyed a superb snorkeling experience around **Devil's Crown**, with **White-tipped Reef-Sharks**, several ray species, and a myriad technicolor tropical fish were the highlights. Just after lunch we went after our second main target in the Floreana area. For this one we needed to ride in dinghies (*photo below*) and travel around the tiny islet of **Champion**, just a kilometer or so away from the main island, and one of the last tiny strongholds for the last handful of **Floreana (Charles) Mockingbirds** in existence (*photo at end of summary*). As landings are not permitted on the islets we needed to search for them by cruising with our dinghies along the shoreline, and found three "cucubes" (as the mockingbirds are known by to locals), perched prominently on the cacti that dot the islet. We also enjoyed nesting colonies of **Swallow-tailed Gulls** that swooped over our boats regularly, and **Brown Noddies**, as well as numerous **Galapagos Shearwaters** that flew low past our small boats regularly. In the afternoon we returned to the yacht and began our cruise towards Isabela.



16 November: Isabela and the Bolivar Channel

Again we awoke beside another island, this time Isabela. The area we visited on Isabela, Punta Moreno, created much anticipation among the group, as it holds two of the tours most wanted birds: **Galapagos Penguin** and **Flightless Cormorant**. As we drove the dinghies towards the dramatic lava fields of Punta Moreno we picked up both of our target birds. We then walked amongst the fascinating black lava flows of



Punta Moreno, where it took just five minutes to find a healthy flock of **Galapagos Martins**, which held at least a dozen different birds, including males, females, and juvenile birds. Walking among the black flows we checked a number of hidden pools fringed by bright green vegetation that brightened the surrounding landscape, as did a pair of pretty pink **American Flamingoes** found on one of these hidden pools.

In the afternoon we navigated through the Bolivar channel, up the western side of Isabela, as we

made our way to the eastern side of Fernandina where we anchored for the night. The channel provides some of the best pelagic birding of the tour, with often inconceivable numbers of some of the Galapagos's most-prized seabirds. Highlights included a massive feeding flock of over three hundred Blue-footed Boobies acrobatically plunging into the ocean, and good numbers of Waved Albatrosses both perched on the sea and gliding gracefully over the surface, along with thousands upon thousands of shearwaters and storm-petrels.

17 November: Fernandina Island

This was to be an important day of the trip as it would decide whether we would see every Galapagos endemic for the fourth year in a row, as we were going after the toughest of all of them: the critically endangered **Mangrove Finch**. With access to the best area for them very tightly controlled it was not possible to visit their



stronghold over on western Isabela, although we checked an area where we had discovered a tiny new population a few years ago. Unfortunately, despite an extensive search of the mangroves where we had recorded it in the past few years no Mangrove Finch could be found. However, our time was not wasted as we had amazing views of **Galapagos Martin** regularly looping low overhead, great views of **Galapagos Hawk** repeatedly flying low over the island, more **Galapagos Penguin** dipping in the surrounding sea, and more **Flightless Cormorants** (*picture below*). Also there was another **Vermilion Flycatcher**, and more views of the endemic **Lava Cactus** for the botanically inclined.

After lunch back on board we set off on the longest navigation of the tour, where we passed across the equator, and enjoyed excellent views of the rocky

coastlines of northern Isabela, as we crossed over the northern tip and headed east to Genovesa. The most notable highlights this time highlights were not birds this time but 2 great Manta Rays and several Sunfish that showed up close to the boat on several occasions.

18 November: Genovesa

Our lengthy navigation to **Genovesa** continued after dawn, and some of us spent some time up on deck where we picked up our first **Red-footed Boobies** of the trip that followed our yacht for some time, and had a weird fascination for the antennae up on the top deck. The early risers also got great looks at a number of **Band-rumped Storm Petrels**, and **Swallow-tailed Gulls**.

The crossing may have taken some time although it was well worth it, and for good reason Genovesa is often picked as the favorite island of the trip by tour participants. Genovesa is loaded with photogenic seabirds, and even our long, slow walk along the beach did not feel like nearly enough. Our first walk along the beach was especially god for extreme close-ups of many different seabirds. We walked within inches of nests of both the brown and white forms of **Red-footed Boobies**, (*photo right*) in addition to **Nazca Boobies**, **Swallow-tailed Gulls** and **Great Frigatebirds**, the latter nests of which often contained the odd scruffy looking chick. It was overload for the photographers that probably shot more photos in this single morning than on the rest of the trip.



Besides the flagship seabirds the **Galapagos Doves** there were so tame there that I had to have my camera on macro mode to get some pictures! Aside from the aforementioned seabirds we also had some other less conspicuous targets on Genovesa including our last possible new finch, **Sharp-beaked Ground-Finch**, (*photo below*) and a distinctive subspecies of **Large Cactus-Finch**. We had barely taken a few steps on the beach after landing and Sharp-beaked Ground-Finch appeared, and near the end of our mornings walk the cactus-finch appeared and typically showed at extremely close quarters, like almost all of the finches on the Galapagos.

Our afternoon opened with another spectacular snorkeling session along the cliffs of Genovesa, where we sampled once again the rich marine life of the Galapagos. While snorkeling the skies above were filled with seabirds sweeping on and off the sheer cliffs: **Red-billed Tropicbirds** and **Swallow-tailed Gulls** being prominent among them. We then sampled a higher area of Genovesa, passing many more tree-nesting **Red-footed Boobies**, and ground-nesting **Nazca Boobies**, to an abandoned storm-petrel colony that was attended by a **Short-eared Owl**. The owls on the Galapagos are of a distinctive dark endemic subspecies.



19 November: North Seymour and return to Quito

One of the last remaining items on our wish lists that was missing was to see frigatebirds with their bright red throat sacs inflated in display, and so this was what we finished with. A short stop and hike on tiny North Seymour island rectified this, as we walked among displaying **Magnificent Frigatebirds** that were perched in

the dry Palosanto trees with their vivid scarlet throat sacs bloated to perfection (*photos below*). As we walked through the colony we had to sidestep a number of dancing **Blue-footed Boobies**, raising their best feature as they did so, to the amusement of all.



After this fantastic finale, a short navigation brought us back to Baltra Island, where we boarded our flight back to Quito for a final farewell dinner. Over a final meal we voted on the highlights of our trip, that was filled with many unforgettable memories, many captured in hundreds of great photos, and that featured

amazing landscapes, unique birds, and truly unique experiences with birds. In the end **Galapagos Rail** was elected the best bird of the trip closely followed by the striking **Swallow-tailed Gull**.

Floreana Mockingbird...



Magnificent Frigatebird...



Marine Iguana...



BIRD LIST

The codes by each species mean the following:

r=permanent resident - can be seen year round in the right area.

b=breeding resident - normally present during the breeding season only

m=northern migrant - normally only present from about August - April. Some individuals may stay longer.

v=vagrant - few records and never to be expected.

DUCKS, GEESE, WATERFOWL	ANATIDAE
v Blue-winged Teal	<i>Anas discors</i>
r White-cheeked Pintail	<i>Anas bahamensis galapagensis</i>
GREBES	PODICIPEDIDAE
r Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>
FLAMINGOS	PHOENICOPTERIDAE
r American Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>
PENGUINS	SPHENISCIDAE
r Galapagos Penguin (E)	<i>Spheniscus mendiculus</i>
ALBATROSSES	DIOMEDEIDAE
b Waved Albatross	<i>Phoebastria irrorata</i>
SHEARWATERS AND PETRELS	PROCELLARIIDAE
r Galapagos Petrel	<i>Pterodroma phaeopygia</i>
r Galapagos Shearwater	<i>Puffinus subalaris</i>
STORM-PETRELS	HYDROBATIDAE
White-vented (Elliot's) Storm-	
r Petrel	<i>Oceanites gracilis galapagoensis</i>
r Band-rumped Storm-Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma castro</i>
r Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma tethys tethys</i>
TROPICBIRDS	PHAETHONTIDAE
r Red-billed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon aethereus</i>

BOOBIES AND GANNETS

- r Nazca Booby
- r Blue-footed Booby
- r Red-footed Booby

PELICANS

- r Brown Pelican

CORMORANTS AND SHAGS

- r Flightless Cormorant (E)

FRIGATEBIRDS

- r Magnificent Frigatebird
- r Great Frigatebird

HERONS, EGRETS, BITTERNS

- r Great Blue Heron
- r Cattle Egret
- r Striated (Lava) Heron
- r Striated Heron

- r Yellow-crowned Night-Heron

HAWKS, EAGLES, AND KITES

- r Galapagos Hawk (E)

FALCONS AND CARACARAS

- m Peregrine Falcon

RAILS, GALLINULES, COOTS

- r Galapagos Rail (E)
- r Common Moorhen

PLOVERS AND LAPWINGS

- m Black-bellied (Gray) Plover
- m Semipalmated Plover

OYSTERCATCHERS

- r American Oystercatcher

STILTS AND AVOCETS

- r Black-necked Stilt

SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES

- m Spotted Sandpiper
- m Wandering Tattler
- m Willet
- m Whimbrel
- m Ruddy Turnstone
- m Sanderling
- m Least Sandpiper
- m Wilson's Phalarope
- m Red-necked Phalarope
- m Red Phalarope

GULLS

- r Swallow-tailed Gull
- m Franklin's Gull
- r Lava Gull (E)

TERNs

- r Brown Noddy

PIGEONS AND DOVES

- r Galapagos Dove (E)

CUCKOOS

- r Dark-billed Cuckoo
- r Smooth-billed Ani (I)

BARN-OWLS

- r Barn Owl

SULIDAE

- Sula granti*
- Sula neboxii excisa*
- Sula sula websteri*

PELECANIDAE

- Pelecanus occidentalis urinator*

PHALACROCORACIDAE

- Phalacrocorax harrisi*

FREGATIDAE

- Fregata magnificens*
- Fregata minor*

ARDEIDAE

- Ardea herodias cognata*
- Bubulcus ibis*
- Butorides striata sundevalli*
- Butorides striata striata*
- Nyctanassa violacea pauper*

ACCIPITRIDAE

- Buteo galapagoensis*

FALCONIDAE

- Falco peregrinus*

RALLIDAE

- Laterallus spilonotus*
- Gallinula chloropus cachinnans*

CHARADRIIDAE

- Pluvialis squatarola*
- Charadrius semipalmatus*

HAEMATOPODIDAE

- Haematopus palliatus galapagensis*

RECURVIROSTRIDAE

- Himantopus mexicanus*

SCOLOPACIDAE

- Actitis macularius*
- Tringa incana*
- Tringa semipalmata*
- Numenius phaeopus*

- Arenaria interpres*

- Calidris alba*

- Calidris minutilla*

- Phalaropus tricolor*

- Phalaropus lobatus*

- Phalaropus fulicarius*

LARIDAE: LARINAE

- Creagrus furcatus*

- Leucophaeus pipixcan*

- Leucophaeus fuliginosus*

LARIDAE: STERNINAE

- Anous stolidus galapagensis*

COLUMBIDAE

- Zenaida galapagoensis galapagoensis*

CUCULIDAE

- Coccyzus melacoryphus*

- Crotophaga ani*

TYTONIDAE

- Tyto alba punctatissima*

OWLS

- r Short-eared Owl

SWIFTS

- v Chimney Swift

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

- r Vermilion Flycatcher
- r Galapagos Flycatcher (E)

SWALLOWS

- r Galapagos Martin (E)
- m Barn Swallow

MOCKINGBIRDS

- r Galapagos Mockingbird (E)
- r Charles Mockingbird (E)
- r Hood Mockingbird (E)
- r San Cristobal Mockingbird (E)

NEW WORLD WARBLERS

- r Yellow Warbler

EMBERIZID FINCHES

- r Green Warbler Finch (E)
- r Gray Warbler Finch (E)
- r Vegetarian Finch (E)
- r Woodpecker Finch (E)
- r Large Tree-Finch (E)
- r Medium Tree-Finch (E)
- r Small Tree-Finch (E)
- r Small Ground-Finch (E)
- r Large Ground-Finch (E)
- r Sharp-beaked Ground-Finch (E)
- r Common Cactus-Finch (E)
- r Medium Ground-Finch (E)
- Large Cactus-Finch (E)
- r (Española)
- Large Cactus-Finch (E)
- r (Genovesa)

STRIGIDAE

Asio flammeus galapagoensis

APODIDAE

Chaetura pelagica

TYRANNIDAE

Pyrocephalus rubinus nanus
Myiarchus magnirostris

HIRUNDINIDAE

Progne modesta
Hirundo rustica

MIMIDAE

Nesomimus parvulus
Nesomimus trifasciatus
Nesomimus macdonaldi
Nesomimus melanotis

PARULIDAE

Dendroica petechia aureola

EMBERIZIDAE

Certhidea olivacea
Certhidea fusca
Platyspiza crassirostris
Camarhynchus pallidus
Camarhynchus psittacula
Camarhynchus pauper
Camarhynchus parvulus
Geospiza fuliginosa
Geospiza magnirostris
Geospiza difficilis
Geospiza scandens
Geospiza fortis

Geospiza conirostris conirostris

Geospiza conirostris propinqua

REPTILES

r Galapagos Tortoise (E)	<i>Geochelone elephantopus</i>
r Pacific Green Turtle	<i>Chelonia midas agassisi</i>
r Marine Iguana (E)	<i>Amblyrhynchus cristatus</i>
r Land Iguana (E)	<i>Conolophus subcristatus</i>
r Santa Fe Land Iguana (E)	<i>Conolophus pallidus</i>
r Galapagos Lava Lizard (E)	<i>Microlophus albemarlensis</i>
r Española Lava Lizard (E)	<i>Microlophus delanonis</i>
r Floreana Lava Lizard (E)	<i>Microlophus grayi</i>
r Slevin's Snake (E)	<i>Alsophis slevini slevini</i>

MAMMALS

r California (Galapagos) Sea Lion	<i>Zalophus californianus wollebacki</i>
r Galapagos Fur Seal	<i>Arctocephalus galapagoensis</i>
r Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>
r Short-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i>
? Melon-headed Whale	<i>Peponocephala electra</i>
? Pygmy Killer Whale	<i>Feresa attenuata</i>
m Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>

