



Field Guides Tour Report

Galapagos: An Intimate Look at Darwin's Islands I 2017

Jun 10, 2017 to Jun 20, 2017

Jesse Fagan & local guide

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.



Black Beach on the island of Isabela. The lava rock in the picture was home to Flightless Cormorant and Galapagos Penguin. In the distance, you can see Fernandina Island, the Bolivar Channel, and our catamaran, Nemo III. Photo by guide Jesse Fagan.

A fabulous trip to the Galapagos. I couldn't have asked for a better group of people. Thanks for the memorable mornings on the deck of the Nemo III with coffee in hand, or, if you like, memorable evenings looking up at the Southern Cross with a glass of wine (and Swallow-tailed Gulls feeding in the boat lights). Man, those stars! There were so many other memories, too. Several really stand out for me: watching clacking, clucking, waddling, and dancing Waved Albatrosses strengthen their pair bonds, and there was the very friendly Galapagos Penguin on Black Beach, and what about all those American sixth graders in the Baltra airport! Just kidding. Indeed, we did well by the birds, seeing all the possible endemics and interesting subspecies; though it looks like we will need to come back for Vampire Finch (Google it!).

I want to thank our excellent local guide, Peter Freire, and our dedicated crew of the Nemo III. Thanks for their hard work in making this a most excellent trip. I really enjoyed your company and hope to see you again on the birding trail. All the best in 2017.

Jesse (aka Motmot) from Lima, Peru

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*) – Small numbers on various freshwater pools on Isabela and Santa Cruz. This resident subspecies seemed less "white-cheeked" than mainland populations.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – This is a rare, possibly breeding resident in the Galapagos. Seen on Isabela.

Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

AMERICAN FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) – Good numbers on Fernandina and Isabela.

Spheniscidae (Penguins)

GALAPAGOS PENGUIN (*Spheniscus mendiculus*) – We had a fun experience with a friendly individual on Black Beach, and seen close from our zodiac in the Bolivar Channel. Not super common, but good numbers on the west side of Isabela. [E]

Diomedidae (Albatrosses)

WAVED ALBATROSS (*Phoebastria irrorata*) – A memorable experience with breeding couples on Espanola. The bill clacking, head dipping, and strutting was fun to watch. A few were seen on the open water as we motored between islands.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

GALAPAGOS PETREL (*Pterodroma phaeopygia*) – Breeds only in the Galapagos. Seen well as we traveled between islands. Amazing flying abilities!

SOOTY SHEARWATER (*Ardenna grisea*) – One briefly between Genovesa and Isabela.

GALAPAGOS SHEARWATER (*Puffinus subalaris*) – Most of the individuals we saw had white(ish) underwings, but a small population in the Bolivar Channel has dark underwings. More studies needed here.

Hydrobatidae (Storm-Petrels)

ELLIOT'S STORM-PETREL (*Oceanites gracilis galapagoensis*) – Very common during our trips between islands. These guys fly light and like to pitter-patter on the water's surface. Also known as "White-vented" SP; the white vents visible on most individuals.

BAND-RUMPED STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma castro*) – Small numbers between Genovesa and Isabela, and again between San Cristobal and Santa Fe. Nests in small numbers on several islands in the Galapagos.

WEDGE-RUMPED STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma tethys tethys*) – Less common on the open water than Elliot's, but the breeding colony on Genevosa was in the tens of thousands! Flies more like a bat. We had nice comparisons between this species and Elliot's from the bow of the Nemo.

MARKHAM'S STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma markhami*) – Just two individuals that zipped by the boat.

Phaethontidae (Tropicbirds)

RED-BILLED TROPICBIRD (*Phaethon aethereus mesonauta*) – We saw this beautiful species very well on a couple of different islands. It was fun trying to watch them land at their nesting holes on the Genovesa cliff faces.

Fregatidae (Frigatebirds)

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata magnificens*) – The most common frigatebird in the Galapagos. This one has the purple sheen above, remember?

GREAT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata minor ridgwayi*) – Seen well at North Seymour and Genovesa, but not again after that. A green sheen above and white axillaries distinguishes this species (males!) from the previous one. The females are more difficult.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

NAZCA BOOBY (*Sula granti*) – Good numbers nesting on the northern islands.

BLUE-FOOTED BOOBY (*Sula nebouxii excisa*) – The most common booby seen on the tour, owing to their preference to feeding closer to shore. Also, a common nester on various islands.

RED-FOOTED BOOBY (EASTERN PACIFIC) (*Sula sula websteri*) – This is actually the most common booby in the Galapagos. However, you wouldn't know it by the number of individuals seen. This is because they nest primarily on one island (Genovesa) and feed much further from shore in deeper waters.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

FLIGHTLESS CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax harrisi*) – Not observed by Darwin himself, and not surprising, since we saw them only in the Bolivar Channel. [E]

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

BROWN PELICAN (SOUTHERN) (*Pelecanus occidentalis urinator*) – Seen most days. A resident subspecies.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (BLUE FORM) (*Ardea herodias cognata*) – Most memorable was one eating a tiger snake eel on Black Beach.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) – First showed up in the Galapagos in 1964. Well established now on islands with lots of cattle.

STRIATED HERON (*Butorides striata*) – Several individuals were plumaged much like mainland Striated Herons.

STRIATED HERON (GALAPAGOS) (*Butorides striata sundevalli*) – These individuals were slate gray overall perfectly blending with the black lava rock that they hunted on. This is a resident subspecies. Also known as "Lava Heron". [E]

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (GALAPAGOS) (*Nyctanassa violacea pauper*) – Seen well on Genovesa, but also nesting in the mangroves on Isabela and Santa Cruz. This resident subspecies is also much darker than mainland populations.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GALAPAGOS HAWK (*Buteo galapagoensis*) – Not super common. One was seen soaring very high over Isabela, but good numbers were found on Espanola. This is the most recent of the native species to evolve on the islands (arriving some 300,000 years ago) and its closest relative is the Swainson's Hawk! [E]

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

GALAPAGOS RAIL (*Laterallus spilonota*) – Incredible to see this so well! [E]

PAINT-BILLED CRAKE (*Mustelirallus erythropus*) – Even more incredible was seeing this bird walking around in the open! Seen on Fernandina, but heard on Isabela and Santa Cruz.

PURPLE GALLINULE (*Porphyrio martinicus*) – A couple were skulking around the dense vegetation during our visit in the highlands of Santa Cruz. Surprising to what you may think, this is not a resident. Seasonal visitor.

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – Resident where found at freshwater pools. We saw it a few times on Isabela and Santa Cruz.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – Small numbers in the freshwater ponds.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus palliatus galapagensis*) – One on the beach in Baltra was our first. Seen again a few other times, but not common. This is a resident subspecies, galapagensis. Less than 200 pairs in the Galapagos.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – One very distant bird was on the salt flats on Floreana.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

WHIMBREL (HUDSONIAN) (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*) – One lonely bird on the beach at Floreana was our only one.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – Some of you were delighted to see this species actually turning stones!

WANDERING TATTLER (*Tringa incana*) – Singles on Genovesa and Espanola.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

SWALLOW-TAILED GULL (*Creagrus furcatus*)

LAVA GULL (*Leucophaeus fuliginosus*) [E]

BROWN NODDY (*Anous stolidus galapagensis*) – This was one of our first birds in the Galapagos. Common around the docks and along the rocky coastlines.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

GALAPAGOS DOVE (*Zenaida galapagoensis*) – A spectacular looking endemic dove. Seen well on most islands. [E]

EARED DOVE (*Zenaida auriculata*) – Seen at the Guayaquil airport.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

SMOOTH-BILLED ANI (*Crotophaga ani*) – An introduced species (for tick control!) found on any island with a sizable human population.

Apparently colonized other islands (from San Cristobal) on its own. [I]

DARK-BILLED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus melacoryphus*) – Small numbers on Isabela, Floreana, and San Cristobal.

Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)

BARN OWL (GALAPAGOS) (*Tyto alba punctatissima*) – Such a strange experience seeing this species peering into a dark window while balancing on three cinder blocks!

Strigidae (Owls)

SHORT-EARED OWL (GALAPAGOS) (*Asio flammeus galapagoensis*) – Finally caught up with this species on Genovesa after some intense searching. Good eyes, Peter! (A few of you saw a bird fly off that was perched on the cliff face at Los Gemelos-Santa Cruz.)

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (GALAPAGOS) (*Pyrocephalus rubinus nanus*) – We had several in the foothills above Puerto Villamil (Isabela). The females are quite different looking from mainland populations.

GALAPAGOS FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus magnirostris*) – These were common on Floreana, but seen again on several of the eastern islands. The Myiarchus are strong fliers and show up as endemics on several of the Caribbean islands. [E]

TROPICAL KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) – Guayaquil airport.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

BLUE-AND-WHITE SWALLOW (*Pygochelidon cyanoleuca*) – Guayaquil airport.

GRAY-BREASTED MARTIN (*Progne chalybea*) – Guayaquil airport.

GALAPAGOS MARTIN (*Progne modesta*) – Several birds were seen flying around a cliff overhang in the Bolivar Channel. The males are very similar to Purple Martins; females were sooty gray-brown. We were fortunate to see two near the crater of Volcan Sierra Negra. [E]

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GALAPAGOS MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus parvulus*) – This was the common Galapagos mocker seen on most of the islands. [E]

FLOREANA MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus trifasciatus*) – Also known as "Charles Mockingbird." Only found on two small islets off the coast of Floreana. We observed a small family group from the bow of the Nemo III. [E]

ESPAOLA MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus macdonaldi*) – Quite tame and curious. They walked right up to us after we landed on the beaches of Espanola. Watch your water bottles! [E]

SAN CRISTOBAL MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus melanotis*) – Our first was in the cemetery above the town of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno (San Cristobal). They were seen a few times during our walk that morning, but again at the boat dock just before we returned to the Nemo III. [E]

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

YELLOW WARBLER (GALAPAGOS) (*Setophaga petechia aureola*) – All the islands, everyday of the tour.

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)

GREEN WARBLER-FINCH (*Certhidea olivacea*) – Seen on two islands: Isabela and Santa Cruz. Still quite similar to Gray Warbler-Finch. [E]

GRAY WARBLER-FINCH (*Certhidea fusca mentalis*) – We saw several subspecies of Gray Warbler-Finch. This one on the island of Genovesa. [E]

GRAY WARBLER-FINCH (*Certhidea fusca luteola*) – San Cristobal. [E]

GRAY WARBLER-FINCH (*Certhidea fusca bifasciata*) – Santa Fe. [E]

GRAY WARBLER-FINCH (*Certhidea fusca cinerascens*) – Espanola. [E]

VEGETARIAN FINCH (*Platyspiza crassirostris*) – Took us until San Cristobal to catch up with this species. It was seen again on Santa Cruz. [E]

WOODPECKER FINCH (*Camarhynchus pallidus pallidus*) – One of the easiest of the finches to identify. We didn't (as a group) witness them foraging with a tool, unfortunately. This subspecies was found on Santa Cruz. [E]

WOODPECKER FINCH (*Camarhynchus pallidus productus*) – Isabela. [E]

WOODPECKER FINCH (*Camarhynchus pallidus striatipecta*) – San Cristobal. [E]

LARGE TREE-FINCH (*Camarhynchus psittacula psittacula*) [E]

MEDIUM TREE-FINCH (*Camarhynchus pauper*) – A rare finch that is only found on Floreana. We observed several individuals and a couple with banded legs. [E]

SMALL TREE-FINCH (*Camarhynchus parvulus parvulus*) – Seen on several of the islands. [E]

SMALL TREE-FINCH (*Camarhynchus parvulus salvini*) – San Cristobal subspecies. [E]

MANGROVE FINCH (*Camarhynchus heliobates*) – The rarest of the Darwin's Finches that we saw in the mangroves on Black Beach (Isabela). Fewer than two hundred individuals are estimated to survive in the wild.

SMALL GROUND-FINCH (*Geospiza fuliginosa*) – Probably the most common Darwin's finch encountered on the tour. Found on all the islands. [E]

LARGE GROUND-FINCH (*Geospiza magnirostris*) – Seen only on Genovesa and Santa Cruz. Not super common and some individuals were difficult to separate from Medium Ground-Finch. [E]

SHARP-BEAKED GROUND-FINCH (DIFFICILIS) (*Geospiza difficilis difficilis*) – Only on Genovesa where its identification is rather straight forward since there are only two other species of Darwin's finches on the island. [E]

COMMON CACTUS-FINCH (*Geospiza scandens intermedia*) – Seen on the islands of Isabela, Floreana, and Santa Cruz. Always on or near the *Opuntia* cactus (prickly pear). [E]

MEDIUM GROUND-FINCH (*Geospiza fortis*) [E]

LARGE CACTUS-FINCH (CONIROSTRIS) (*Geospiza conirostris conirostris*) – Found on only four islands (two of which we visited). This subspecies we saw on Espanola. [E]

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

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Several at the airport in Guayaquil.

MAMMALS

HOUSE MOUSE (*Mus musculus*) – Yes! Seen at the Charles Darwin Research Center on Santa Cruz.

SHORT-BEAKED COMMON DOLPHIN (*Delphinus delphis*) – A large pod was seen in the Bolivar Channel.

COMMON MINKE WHALE (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) – Briefly from the Nemo III as we motored between Espanola and San Cristobal.

BRYDE'S WHALE (*Balaenoptera edeni*) – One showed close to the boat as we watched for the Blue Whale in the Bolivar Channel!

BLUE WHALE (*Balaenoptera musculus*) – The largest mammal in the world! We watched one from a good ways out in the Bolivar Channel as it came up for air a few times. Its size, blow and dorsal fin cinched the identification.

"GALAPAGOS" SEA LION (*Zalophus californianus wollebacki*) – A subspecies of Californian Sea Lion, but resident and breeding on the Galapagos Islands. Seen everyday, very common.

GALAPAGOS FUR SEAL (*Arctocephalus galapagoensis*) – Seen only on Genovesa. Smaller than the previous species. Hides in shady crevices during the day; maybe that's why we didn't see so many? [E]

Herps

MARINE IGUANA (*Amblyrhynchus cristatus*) – Seen on most of the islands. Several subspecies represented. Most are the color of the lava rock, but at least one subspecies (*venustissimus*; Espanola) can be quite red or pink in color. [E]

LAND IGUANA (*Conolophus subcristatus*) – We saw this species on Baltra and North Seymour, and the subspecies *pallidus* (very pale) on the island of Santa Fe, sometimes split as Santa Fe Land Iguana. [E]

GALAPAGOS LAVA LIZARD (*Microlophus albemarlensis*) – This was the more common lava lizard seen on several islands. [E]

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

FLOREANA LAVA LIZARD (*Microlophus grayi*) [E]

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

GALAPAGOS (GIANT) TORTOISE (*Geochelone elephantopus*) – The history of the giant tortoises of the Galapagos is very interesting and sad. Nearly all visitors to the islands will experience these amazing creatures in a controlled environment. It is still jaw dropping to see these peaceful giants. We had close encounters at educational facilities on Isabela, Floreana, and Santa Cruz. [E]

GREEN SEA TURTLE (*Chelonia mydas*) – Good numbers seen at sea (normally just a head) and better views, of course, while snorkeling.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

A few of the other critters seen from the boat or in the water:

1) Scalloped Hammerhead (*Sphyrna lewini*) = A couple seen on our dive in the crater at Genovesa.

2) Whitetip Reef Shark (*Triaenodon obesus*) = Several seen very well on our snorkeling trip off Floreana.

3) Giant Manta (*Manta biostriis*) = Several seen breaching during our crossings between islands.

4) Tiger Snake Eel (*Myrichthys tigrinus*) = We watched one being slowly devoured by a hungry Great Blue Heron at Black Beach.

5) Diamond Stingray (*Dasyatis dipterura*) = Several in the surf during a couple of wet landings, as well as, during our afternoon walk along the beach at Floreana.

6) Spotted Eagle Ray (*Aetobatus narinari*) = Seen from the boat once or twice. The white spots on their dark bodies really stood out.

7) Pacific Seahorse (*Hippocampus ingens*) = Hard to see camouflaged in the brown algae. Very cool!

8) Razor Surgeonfish (*Prionurus laticlavus*) = One of the more common tropical fish seen on our dives. Often in large schools.

9) Moorish Idol (*Zanclus cornutus*) = One of the flashier tropical fish seen on our snorkeling trips. Fairly common.

10) King Angelfish (*Holocanthus passer*) = One of Ed's favorites!

- 11) Bluechin Parrotfish (*Scarus ghobban*) = Good numbers throughout the Galapagos, but usually as singles or in pairs.
- 12) Panama Sergeant Major (*Abudefduf troschelli*) = Lots in small schools on most dives.
- 13) Mexican Hogfish (*Bodianus diplotaenia*) = One of the larger tropical fish seen, and pretty nice to look at!
- 14) Giant Damselfish (*Microspathodon dorsalis*) = Large and fairly uncommon. Odd head shape.
- 15) Galapagos Ringtail Damselfish (*Stegastes beebei*) = A few of these seen as well.

The list of tropical fish continues (with common names)...

REEF CORNETFISH

BUMPHEAD PARROTFISH

DUSKY CHUB

GOLDEN GROUPER

CORTEZ RAINBOW WRASSE

AZURE PARROTFISH

SPINSTER WRASSE

BLUE-AND-GOLD SNAPPER

Totals for the tour: 78 bird taxa and 7 mammal taxa