



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Ecuador

Galapagos Archipelago Cruise

17th to 26th August 2019 (10 days)

Trip Report



Waved Albatross by Forrest Rowland

Trip report compiled by Tour Leader: Forrest Rowland

Tour Summary

Our Galapagos adventure began with our arrival to Baltra Island, where most of the flights to the Galapagos arrive. After passing through a worry-free customs experience, we were met by friendly crew members of the Nemo III catamaran, who were more than patient with us as we fawned over our first of many of Darwin's Finches. We scarcely made it to the airport parking lot before the birding began! Small and Medium Ground Finches, though numerous and widespread, represented our first encounter with Charles Darwin's iconic legacy. We were all elated to begin our cruise, following in the most famous of scientists' footsteps, through the Galapagos Archipelago.

Our mode of conveyance for the long week was the Nemo III, a superior-class tourist vessel known for being both birder and eco-friendly. There are very few sailing vessels in the archipelago with a commercial license, and fewer still operate tours throughout the island chain catering to the desires of birders. So, we were privileged to enjoy this voyage aboard the Nemo III, with her crew of 8, to visit all the major islands of the Galapagos. We departed Baltra on the first afternoon of our tour amidst a volley of Blue-footed Boobies launching themselves like arrows into the water for fish, Elliot's Storm-Petrels dancing on top of the water, as well as our first Lava Heron doing its best to avoid detection beneath the dock. During the short passage to Seymour Norte, we noted a good many Galapagos Shearwaters, of which were to see many, as well as our only Snowy Egret of the tour.



Elliot's Storm-Petrel by Forrest Rowland



Lava Heron by Forrest Rowland

Seymour Norte is a perfect introduction to the Galapagos. With a smattering of both Magnificent and Great Frigatebirds for direct comparison, as well as a good number of nesting Blue-footed Boobies and stunning Swallow-tailed Gulls, the time flew for us as we walked amongst Galapagos Sea Lions, Galapagos Yellow (mangrove) Warblers, and far too many photo opportunities to allow for a reasonable pace. The shortest walks in the Galapagos can take hours, in a good way. From Seymour, we sailed north, overnight, to Genovesa Island.

Genovesa Island is perhaps one of the highlights of the Galapagos. Being isolated and quite northerly has its advantages. For one, it's irresistibly attractive for seabirds searching for nesting grounds. To boot, its

waters are a bit warmer and attract a good deal of interesting sea life. Not to mention the two Genovesa Endemic Finches, this island is a must-visit! We began our time here by climbing Prince Philips' steps on the south peninsula, so named after a visit from the Prince himself in 1968. Before reaching the top, we were delighted to views of Red-footed Booby. This would be our only site to enjoy this beautiful species, as it only nests here, and on the northern-most outlying Darwin and Wolf isles.

Not 10 feet into our morning's exploration of the island, and we saw our first Genovesa Ground Finches (formerly Sharp-beaked Finch), Grey Warbler Finches, Galapagos Doves, Galapagos Mockingbirds, and Nazca Boobies. This island is renowned for not only an impressive diversity of birds but a high density, as well. We found a Yellow-crowned Night Heron on a nest, as well as our first Genovesa Cactus Finch, en route to the most impressive site on the island – the Wedge-rumped Storm Petrel colony. Delighting in all the Red-footed and Nazca Booby, antics along the way slowed our progress, as this time of year the island is covered in youngsters. Recently fledged to down-covered, this island was covered in young Boobies of all sorts! Upon arriving at the Storm-Petrel colony, we were all aghast. Expecting several dozen, but seeing thousands, of Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrels frenetically darting this way and that as



Magnificent Frigatebird by Forrest Rowland



Swallow-tailed Gull by Forrest Rowland

far as the eyes can see (more like “bins can reach”) was truly mind-numbing and impressive beyond description. We also managed to find a pair of Short-eared Owls taking advantage of the amazing density of Storm-Petrels. The Owls sit and wait...and then grab as fast as they can...for their prey, the Storm-Petrels, as they emerge from their nests in the crevices of this massive lava flow. It was quite a spectacle! We spent a good hour just enjoying the scene here, with Red-billed Tropicbirds and Frigatebirds constantly in flight overhead, and Marine Iguanas loafing in clumps and clusters of well over 200!

In the afternoon, we snorkelled along the rocks of Darwin's Bay, or walked the beach, generally taking it easy. For those on land, getting more views of Genovesa Ground-Finch, a few Ruddy Turnstones, and our first of several Wandering Tattlers were highlights. For snorkelers, seeing nearly two-dozen White-tipped Sharks schooled not 7 feet away was

incredibly exciting! A few other underwater highlights were long-tailed stingray, marbled ray, schools of Moorish Idol, the beautiful King Angelfish, and our first Bumphead, Azure, and Bluechin Parrotfish.

We departed Genovesa around three in the afternoon, to begin our navigation to Vicente Roca, Isabela Island, for two main reasons: the navigations would take 12+ hours, and we could spend 3 daylight hours in the best pelagic zone of the archipelago! Despite (or maybe because of) quite rough waters, the pelagic birding was excellent. We had well some two dozen Galapagos Petrels, more Galapagos Shearwaters than you could count, and were constantly being surrounded by dozens of Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrels right up until dusk. It ended up being a Storm-Petrel bonanza, as we began to pick up Band-rumped Storm-Petrels about an hour in, with the first truly mega sighting coming in the form of a graceful Markham's Storm-Petrel that spent several minutes off our port bow, before crossing to starboard and eventually disappearing. We also had no fewer than 4 White-faced Storm-Petrels, which is considered a vagrant in these waters! This is a testament to just how few birders are aboard vessels here, as well as how little time is spent during daylight hours in the passage.



Mangrove Warbler by Forrest Rowland

The following morning, we awoke to the fascinating rock formations of Pedro Vicente Roca, of north Isabela Island. After a rather rough night's waters, we decided to slowly motor along the calm in the lee of Isabela Island to enjoy our first looks at Flightless Cormorant, Galapagos Hawk, as well as more



Galapagos Dove by Forrest Rowland

Brown Noddies, Blue-footed and Nazca Boobies, and Galapagos Fur Sea Lions. We spent the entire morning cruising slowly south along the West coast of Isabela Island to Tagus Cove. En route, we focused on getting further good looks and photos Galapagos Shearwater, Galapagos Petrel, and Elliot's Storm-Petrels on the opalescent calm waters we found ourselves in. A focus for this time was in the hopes of finding a whale. We were delighted when we spotted a Bryde's Whale spout nearby! On our way towards it, we spotted not only two more Bryde's Whales (which eventually ended up surfacing not 10 meters of our bow) but a very distinctive blow in the distance – that unique vertical tower blow of a Blue Whale. After enjoying views and photos of the Bryde's, we motored towards the Blue Whale to find a mother and calf Blue Whale surfacing and diving in the deep trench between Isabela and Fernandina islands!!! It was incredible, and a lifer experience for nearly everyone on board. Bryde's Whales are relatively common in these tropical pacific waters. Blue Whale is a rare, wonderful sighting here. To top it off, the whale feeding area was rich with somersaulting Mobula Rays launching themselves several feet out of the water, and we spotted Giant Manta and Mola

Mola (Sunfish) as well as enjoying the feeding antics of several hundred Red-necked Phalaropes containing a few Grey (Red) Phalaropes in their midst.

At Tagus Cove, we spent the majority of our time observing Galapagos Penguin family groups swimming off our bow, dozens of Galapagos Green Turtles in all directions, Flightless Cormorants on their nests, and the endangered Galapagos Martin, which nests in the cliffs there. Our course took us past the mangroves where Mangrove Finch can be seen, but due to the die-off of Mangroves and sensitive, critically endangered status of the Finch, no one is allowed to approach. We kept our distance, looking longingly in the direction of Caleta Black, as we motored towards Punta Espinosa, where we would spend the afternoon.

Punta Espinosa itself has high entertainment value in the form of the ridiculous, lazy, nose-blowing, Marine Iguanas that numbers in the hundreds lounging on the scenic lava flows here. Despite their seeming lack of motivation, they are incredibly photogenic and have a wise visage. Underwater, they are downright graceful and are very fun to watch. So that was the highlight of our visit to Punta Espinosa, for some, was our time snorkeling with Marine Iguanas, watching them feed, swim, and dive here. One participant had an iguana practically scamper across his back in the water! Another had a Galapagos Green Turtle (one of dozens we were swimming with) swim right up beneath him, startling him



Red-footed Booby by Forrest Rowland



Wedge-rumped Storm Petrel by Forrest Rowland

comically, as he was looking forward and didn't notice until the huge turtle was a foot from his face. There is something magically tranquil and deeply serene about swimming with these turtles. While they appear so clumsy on land, they glide through the water, as if in slow motion, and are mesmerizing. The star of the show might have come in the form of a lone, lively, Galapagos Penguin that decided the fishing was too good, despite our presence, to pass up. One participant had it brush his hand as it zoomed this way and that for a meal. The cute, but seemingly clumsy, penguins are incredibly agile beneath the waves, making hairpin turns on a dime and reaching remarkable speeds as they propel themselves towards prey. It was awesome to witness! From Punta Espinosa, we had a 12-hour overnight navigation to Puerto Villamil, to prepare for our next day's events. Isabela is the largest island in the Galapagos, being at least three times larger than any of the other islands. This is due to its position over the geological feature that formed the Galapagos – the Galapagos Hotspot. A hotspot is a general term in volcanology referring to a

weak point in the under layer of the Earth's crust, or an exceptionally hot and active point in the mantle layer, at which magma seeps up from below. In the case of the Galapagos, this magma pours through and is then cooled by the ocean's waters, to form islands. As the Nazca tectonic plate moves across the Galapagos Hotspot, the magma punches through its weaker points and accumulates, forming lava islands and a series of shield volcanoes. The island of Isabela is made up of six distinct shield volcanoes, and the higher areas of land connecting them. Most of the Galapagos Islands, such as Fernandina, are made up of just one such volcano or are merely an accumulation of lava that has been pushed up above the ocean's surface via seismic/geologic activity. Isabela and Fernandina are, by far, the most active volcanoes in the Galapagos, and the newest islands. Islands to the East, such as Espanola and San Cristobal, formed much earlier given the easterly direction of the Nazca plate. We took advantage of our visit to Isabela by traveling up the second highest volcano in the archipelago – Vulcan Sierra Negra.



Galapagos Shearwater by Forrest Rowland

Our main targets today were Paint-billed Crake and Darwin's Flycatcher. Though only a few participants saw a male Darwin's Flycatcher, our entire crew got onto one very obliging female of this newly-split species. With its origins in the Vermilion Flycatcher complex (Scarlet Flycatcher was another split from the superspecies), the Darwin's Flycatcher female is the more distinctive than the male, which looks for



Nazca Booby by Forrest Rowland

all intents and purposes identical to a male Vermilion. The female, however, is quite yellow below, with only mild streaking across the breast. Very different from the female Vermilion Flycatcher. We were also delighted to have not one, but three Paint-billed Crakes this morning! One, in particular, put on a wonderful show, including a brief pose for photos. This species is exceptionally difficult anywhere else on the planet. Woodpecker Finch was very evident today, as we picked up our first Green Warbler Finch, Small and Large Tree Finches of the tour. It was a finch bonanza during which we spent plenty of time sizing up the beaks and doing our best to differentiate between the confusing species. No fewer than three Dark-billed Cuckoos also graced us with their presence, taking a bit of pressure off of this sometimes tricky-to-see species. Despite a bit of rain, we managed to have a lovely and successful morning in the humid highlands of Isabela today. In the afternoon we began our long navigation towards Isla Espanola

where would begin tomorrow and celebrated a special occasion for a friend of many of the participants.

Waved Albatross is considered critically endangered. With a world population around 30,000 individuals, this may seem like an overly-dire assessment. However, the species breeds on only two islands on Earth – Isla de la Plata (near mainland Ecuador) and Isla Espanola. Seeing this gorgeous, graceful species all preening, displaying, landing, taking off, and from just about every angle in flight that one could imagine, was one of the highlights of the entire tour! Our visit this day, to Punta Suarez, Espanola Island, was a rather sublime experience. Aside from seeing this beautiful, rare species of albatross, we sat on the cliffs above the Suarez Blowhole, watching Red-billed Tropicbirds and Swallow-tailed Gulls cruise by at eye-level. Adult Nazca and Blue-footed Boobies surrounded us, attending to their downy babies beneath them. A pair of Galapagos Hawk watched over the area, as their fledged juvenile learned to hunt, scoring a Lava Lizard that we watched him eat. And we had plenty of time to enjoy the endemic Espanola Mockingbird’s antics, as well as easily identifying the Espanola Cactus Finch by its obviously oversized bill. Our two hours on land flew by, as we observed, photographed, and discussed the goings-on. We even noted a Spotted Sandpiper amidst Wandering Tattlers as a surprise, as well as appreciating the colourful blue and pink subspecies of Marine Iguana endemic to this island alone. It was one of the best mornings of the cruise, undoubtedly.



Blue Whale by Forrest Rowland



Galapagos Penguin by Forrest Rowland

Our full afternoon on Espanola was one of relaxation. Some stayed aboard to read and relax, while others enjoyed the sunny afternoon on Gardner Bay beach, which we had entirely to ourselves...save for a few Galapagos Sea Lions and Espanola Mockingbirds, of course. Some walked the beach, others snorkelled the nearby rocky outcrops, and the youngest member of our party drew a large, impressive, mural in the sand. It was an easy afternoon, with no real target aside from enjoying ourselves. We found that easy enough to do in the idyllic setting. Back aboard, we watched the documentary “The Baroness”, in preparation for our visit to Floreana Island. For many in the Galapagos, Floreana is considered a haunted, foreboding place, given the bizarre stories surrounding the settlers of this remote island. We were eager to see Floreana for ourselves.

Our full day on Floreana began by landing at Puerto Velasco, formerly known as Black Beach. Greeted by a bust of Rolf Wittmer (one of the original settling families of the island, along with Friedrich Ritter, Dore Strauch, and the famous “Baroness” herself), we made our way to

the chiva transport that drove us up into the highlands of Floreana. A “chiva” is a special mode of transport most famous in Colombia, but equally common in Ecuador, involving a typical lorry, box truck, or school bus cab and chase, with 4-5 rows of wooden bench seats mounted behind, open-air fashion with a roof covering. This seemingly unconventional construct is common in rural areas, as it can travel rougher roads and carry many passengers. For us, it served its purpose by allowing great views of the countryside we passed through, unhindered by doors, frames, and windows.

Our destination for our morning on Floreana was the famed Asilo de Paz, dubbed so by the Wittmer family in the late 1930s. Originally, this highland site was first discovered in 1807 by a marooned Irish Sailor who found the caves and rock formations to be great shelter. The nearby flowing spring was a necessity for his survival and the survival of those to follow. After trading his crops to passing sailors for years, Patrick Watkins (said sailor) was able stockpile enough rum to inebriate an entire schooner crew. Shortly thereafter, he found himself sailing East, and an

unlucky crew found themselves the latest residents of Asilo de Paz. The history of the area only becomes more bizarre from there, including the disappearance of the Baroness von Wagner and her paramour, and subsequent death of two of the men speculated to have aided in their disappearance. Though intriguing, we did not visit the site only for reminiscing speculative history. We were targeting one of the rarest birds on Earth – Medium Ground Finch. Despite the difficulties Floreana had presented to visitors in the above-recounted events, we had no trouble at all locating two of this dwindling example of Darwin’s Finches. We also enjoyed fine views of our first Galapagos Flycatchers and several impressive Floreana Giant Tortoises. Though of hybrid descent, these hearty beasts are no less fascinating to behold. We even got to see two yearlings! Our morning’s visit wrapped up with a visit to the Wittmer’s Hotel on Black Beach, where we enjoyed a staple of the new civilization on the Galapagos – ice cream.



Woodpecker Finch by Forrest Rowland



Red-billed Tropicbird by Forrest Rowland

one of our participants (kidding Simon), as a means of communicating with family and friends of the sailors and pirates that plied these waters. So, it was established that any passer-by had to check the barrel

In the afternoon, we made the mandatory visit to Post Office Bay, in order to observe a 220+ year-old-tradition. The Post Barrel of Post Office Bay was placed in 1792 by Capt. James Colnett, the uncle of

to see if therein was addressed a letter near enough to one's home to someday deliver. If so, the visitor was obliged to hand-deliver the post to the recipient on behalf of the sender. So, several of us participated by not only leaving our own postcards but also thumbing through the dozens of postcards in search of one addressed somewhere close to our homes. Most of us found at least one!

From Post Office Bay, we made the short navigation over to Champion Island where we scored yet another critically endangered species – Floreana Mockingbird. We tallied at least 4 individuals, including some fine photos, despite not being able to land on the tiny island. Over a century ago the main island of Floreana was invaded by rats, cats, dogs, goats, pigs, and other introduced species brought on by settlers. In the meantime, a few, or all, of these introduced species extirpated the Floreana Mockingbird from the main island. The only two populations of this species left on Earth were the few pairs that breed on Champion, and another 50 or so pairs breeding on the larger Gardner Island. At no time has the Floreana Mockingbird returned to successfully breed on the main island, therefore the only access to this critically endangered bird is by viewing them from a boat at Champion or Gardner Island. We were thrilled with our success at seeing this handsome species whose total population numbers less than 250 birds. From there, we began motoring northeast towards San Cristobal.



Blue-footed Booby by Forrest Rowland

We awoke to a drizzly “garúa” morning, which persisted diligently almost the whole morning long. This time of year, with the cold Humboldt Current coming in from the South, and the humid Equatorial Current coming in from the East, much of the season's moisture falls as this fine drizzle and mist. Clouds



Juvenile Galapagos Hawk by Forrest Rowland

and fog cling to the mountainsides on all the taller islands this time of year. Unlike the true rainy season, which sees the occasional heavy downpour and near-daily thunderstorms, the garúa moisture can be withstood with a light rain jacket. Our main targets on San Cristobal were the island's endemic Mockingbird, as well as the robust, nearly unmistakable Vegetarian Finch. Though we did have a chance to see the Vegetarian Finch on Isabela, we did not have any definitive views. This massive finch (the largest of all Darwin's Finches) feeds mostly on fruits and blossoms of native and introduced plants alike. Despite the relative abundance of food, given its large size and seasonal resource scarcity, Vegetarian Finch is nowhere numerous. The San Cristobal Mockingbird

only occurs in the higher elevations of the island, where the finch happens to prefer, as well. Though it took a bit of looking to see both, including a rather pleasant (if damp) downhill, walk back towards town,

we ended up with point-blank views of multiple individuals of each of our main targets, as well as many other species we had come across before on the cruise. Both the Mockingbird and the Finch posed well for photos before we made our way back down to town for some respite from the elements. Some light shopping and Los Coqueiros ice cream helped us enjoy our experience in the capitol city of Galapagos all the more. We were off the island, en route to Santa Fe for some afternoon fun on the beach, by 10 am.

The small island of Santa Fe doesn't really hold a lot of appeal from a birding standpoint, other than getting more great looks at Common Cactus Finch and the like. However, it is a lovely location for snorkelling and enjoying the beach. Relaxing, in

general. We had this afternoon to take it easy and enjoy ourselves, essentially, as well as taking some time to watch the behaviour and note the differences between the newly-split Santa Fe Land Iguana, and the nominate widespread species it was separated from. Only three land iguanas exist, the other being nearly inaccessible, high on the slopes of Vulcan Alcedo on Isabela Island, where the iguanas are pink. The colorful iguanas of Santa Fe are bright yellow and green. After our pleasant visit to Santa Fe, we motored north to moor in the channel between Santa Cruz Island and Baltra Island, where our adventure began a week ago.



Enjoying Galapagos Sea Lions on the beach by Forrest Rowland



Santa Fe Land Iguana by Forrest Rowland

Our final day of the cruise was not on the boat at all. We worked our way across Santa Cruz Island, from North to South, by land for the first time. The idea today was to clean up anything we'd missed and have a solid shot at the very shy and difficult-to-see Galapagos Crake (Rail). En route to the best site for the Crake, we stopped at a quarry and picked up some more lovely views of Woodpecker, Vegetarian, and both Large and Small Tree Finches. Photo ops were plentiful, but we did not find the hoped-for Darwin's Flycatcher male. We had only scored but a brief view of a male on Isabela, though we did enjoy great looks at a female there. Later, we carried on high into the mountains, to search for Galapagos Rail at Cerro Crocker.

The trail up to Cerro Crocker was a testament to the fact that it does indeed rain in the highlands. The slog up the muddy track into the Miconia habitat we needed to reach was certainly the most physical walk of a very easy tour. It took us quite some time, after arriving at the special habitat the Galapagos Crake prefers to actually locate our first calling individual. The leaders were sweating it a bit, as the

species is often very vocal. This morning there was a foggy near-silence over the forest. At last, over an hour we began our ascent, we had our first visual of this skulking species! It took a wee bit longer to stumble into a situation where photos were possible, but many participants even managed photos of this bird, that rarely leaves cover. It was a massive success, and our last Galapagos endemic!



Galapagos Crake by Forrest Rowland

After the Crake quest, we enjoyed a delicious lunch and some time spent with the tortoises at the Charles Darwin Center in Puerto Ayora. We also had a few Cactus and Vegetarian Finches as we wandered through the displays that explained the history and monumental efforts undertaken to ensure the longevity of the iconic Giant Tortoises of Galapagos. The final exhibit we visited, was the tomb of the most famous Giant Tortoise, Lonesome George. Lonesome George was the only Tortoise from Pinta Island to be found. The rest of his subspecies was gone before researchers could round some up for breeding. Attempts were made to encourage George to reproduce, including some pretty radical measures. But he was not to be persuaded. Lonesome George died in 2014, and his body was sent to expert taxidermists in New York City, U.S.A. In 2017, his body was returned to the Galapagos for display. We paid our respects before heading to the fancy Ikala Hotel for a rest before our final dinner together.

A sincere thanks to all the wonderful participants on our inaugural Galapagos Island Cruise. You were all helpful to one another, enthusiastic, and great fun to be with. We look forward to having you on another adventure!



Galapagos Tortoise by Forrest Rowland

Species Accounts

Taxonomy follows IOC v9.2. “*” denotes heard-only species. “E” refers to Endemic species, “NE” refers to near-endemics. “En” labels endangered species, “Cr” for Critically Endangered.

Total Bird Species Recorded: 72 (including 30 endemics & 4 near endemics)

DUCKS & GEESE 1

White-cheeked Pintail *Anas bahamensis galapagensis* – seen on Isabela, Floreana, and Santa Cruz; this subspecies is being considered for full species status.

CUCKOOS 2

Smooth-billed Ani *Crotophaga ani* – common on the big islands in all habitats

Dark-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus melacoryphus* – great views of several on Isabela, and we also had brief looks on both Floreana and Santa Cruz.

DOVES 1

Galapagos Dove *Zenaida galapagoensis* (E)– common on all islands

RAILS, CRAKES & COOTS 4

Galapagos Crake *Laterallus spilonota* (E, Vu) – After some effort, every tour participant enjoyed great views of this skulking endemic that spends its entire life in the dense undergrowth of native scrub high on the wet volcanic slopes of the big islands. A few people even scored photos!

Paint-billed Crake *Neocrex erythops erythops* – Isabela and Santa Cruz islands are, by far, the easiest places on Earth to see this widespread, though extremely shy, species. We had outstanding views on Isabela of two individuals.

American Coot *Fulica Americana* – a vagrant to the Galapagos, one individual has been present at wetlands near Puerto Villamil, Isabela, for over a year now!

Common Gallinule *Gallinula galeata* – common at wetlands and swampy areas on the big islands

GREBES 1

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* – common at wetlands on the big islands

FLAMINGOS 1

American Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* – seen well at wetlands on both Isabela and Floreana

OYSTERCATCHERS 1

American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus galapagensis* – only a few seen this tour, in singles and pairs, on Baltra, Genovesa, Fernandina, and Floreana.

STILTS & AVOCETS 1

Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus* - present at wetlands on Isabela and Santa Cruz

PLOVERS 2

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatorola* – a few on Isabela were the only migrants seen

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus* – singles seen on Isabela, Floreana, and Santa Cruz

SANDPIPERS & ALLIES 7

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus rufiventris* – the most numerous and widespread shorebird in the Galapagos

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* – small groups encountered on Genovesa, Fernandina, Floreana, and Espanola.

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor* – one vagrant at Punta Cormoran on Floreana was a big hit, as it was a lifer for a few clients!

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* – Hundreds and hundreds seen during our cruise down the West coast of Isabela in the channel between that island and Fernandina. The deep water there was full of marine life, from birds to whales!

Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* – a few were mixed in with the scores of Red-necked Phalaropes in the channel. Unfortunately, all phalaropes had already molted to non-breeding plumage.

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularis* – rare visitor to the Galapagos seen well on Espanola!

Wandering Tattler *Tringa incana* – common through the islands, in singles and pairs.

GULLS, TERNS, & SKIMMERS 3

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus galapagensis* – a unique subspecies that is considered by some authorities to be Galapagos Noddy, a full species. Common on all islands.

Swallow-tailed Gull *Creagrus furcatus* (NE) – Perhaps the most beautiful gull on Earth, we had dozens of encounters with this special bird during our tour, mostly on smaller islands.

Lava Gull *Leucophaeus fuliginosus* (E) – Technically the world's rarest gull, though the small population that exists on the larger islands of the archipelago is considered very stable.

TROPICBIRDS 1

Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus mesonauta* – regular breeder on Genovesa and Espanola, where we had the best looks at this lovely species.

PENGUINS 1

Galapagos Penguin *Spheniscus mendiculus* (E, En) – Great experience swimming with them on Fernandina! Also a few family groups seen during our morning cruising the West coast of Isabela.

AUSTRAL STORM PETRELS 2

Elliot's Storm Petrel *Oceanites gracilis galapagensis* (NE, DD) – Almost ubiquitous at anchor, as this species is found throughout the archipelago. A graceful species that bounces on the surface of the water lightly in small groups.

White-faced Storm Petrel *Pelagodroma marina* – We saw four of these wide-wandering pelagic birds during our sail from Genovesa Island, past Marchena, to Isabela. Presumably the *maoriana* subspecies.

ALBATROSSES 1

Waved Albatross *Phoebastria irrorata* (NE, Cr) – one of the highlights of the tour, undoubtedly, was walking amongst the many paired couples of this elegant, beautiful, species on Espanola. We watched one pair displaying, another pair aloopreening, and had several impressive flybys!

NORTHERN STORM PETRELS 3

Wedge-rumped Storm Petrel *Oceanodroma tethys tethys* (NE) – Huge colony at Prince Phillip's Steps of several hundred individuals darkening the skies over the cliffs. A truly impressive sight! The subspecies here is considered by some to be its own species, Galapagos Storm Petrel.

Band-rumped Storm Petrel *Oceanodroma castro* – Several seen on the longer sails between Genovesa and Isabela, and again between Isabela and Espanola.

Markham's Storm Petrel *Oceanodroma markhami* – We had three encounters with this long-tailed, elegant species during our longer sails, including two spectacularly good views of close birds!

SHEARWATERS & PETRELS 2

Galapagos Petrel *Pterodroma phaeopygia* (E, Cr) – We saw dozens of these awesome birds arcing, swinging, and cutting through the air nearly every day of the tour! During breeding season, this exceptionally rare species seems almost common, despite the dwindling population.

Galapagos Shearwater *Puffinis subalaris* (E) – We saw thousands of these during our week in the archipelago. They were practically ubiquitous!

FRIGATEBIRDS 2

Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata mgnificens* – Abundant breeder on nearly all islands, and always fun to observe during breeding season. We had all ages from newly hatched to breeding males displaying!

Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor ridgwayi* – Common breeder on nearly all islands, often more numerous than the previous species. The antics of Frigatebirds is always enjoyed.

GANNETS & BOOBIES 3

Blue-footed Booby *Sula nebouxii excisa* – Perhaps the most iconic bird species of the Galapagos archipelago, we were lucky enough to come across several displaying pairs, dancing, foot wagging, the works!

Nazca Booby *Sula granti* – Common breeder on several of the islands; best seen on Genovesa, Isabela, and Floreana. We walked through several breeding colonies.

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula websteri* – This gorgeous species is restricted to breeding on the northern islands of the Archipelago: Genovesa, Darwin, and Wolf. We had a great time with the Red-footeds on Genovesa at Prince Philip's Steps. Several juveniles were still loafing, and we had a number of breeding adults there, as well.

CORMORANTS 1

Flightless Cormorant *Phalacrocorax harrisi* (E, Vu) – a few seen at various locations on Isabela and Fernandina islands, where they have a small, stable, population.

HERONS & EGRETS 7

Yellow-crowned Night Heron *Nyctanassa violacea pauper* – Singles seen on nearly every island; this subspecies is a possible split.

Lava Heron *Butorides sundevalli* (E) – A few seen on rocky coastlines on the smaller islands

Striated Heron *Butorides striata* – One seen at the boardwalk near Puerto Villamil, Isabela

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* – one of the most common and widespread species on inhabited islands

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias cognata* – surprisingly few this tour; we only saw this species twice the whole week

Great Egret *Ardea alba* – one seen on Santa Cruz

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula* – rare on the islands, we had one fly by us on Seymour Norte Island the first afternoon on the boat, catching us offguard.

PELICANS 1

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis urinator* – a few dozen seen of this widespread species

HAWKS 1

Galapagos Hawk *Buteo galapagoensis* (E, Vu) – we had fine views of several pairs and a few recently-fledged youngsters on our tour

BARN OWLS 1

American Barn Owl *Tyto furcata punctissima* – We enjoyed a pair roosting near the entrance of a massive lava tube on Santa Cruz!

OWLS 1

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus galapagoensis* – The most reliable place to see this special bird is probably at Prince Philip's Steps where a few Owls hunt the Wedge-rumped Storm Petrels at the massive colony there. We had luck at this precise location with fine views of two. The subspecies is a likely split.

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS 2

Darwin's Flycatcher *Pyrocephalus nanus* (E) – A surprisingly difficult species to find and getting more difficult all the time. We had luck with a cooperative female, and brief views of a male, on Isabela.

Galapagos Flycatcher *Myiarchus magnirostris* (E) – Several cooperative individuals on various islands

SWALLOWS & MARTINS 1

Galapagos Martin *Progne modesta* (E, En) – Declining population trend at highland nesting sites led to the park hosting a few martin houses at lowland cliff nesting sites. We scored at Tagus Cove, where there are about a dozen nesting pairs.

MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS 4

Galapagos Mockingbird *Mimus parvulus* (E) – so many subspecies! Different one on every island. We had the opportunity to see the nominate subspecies on Isabela, Fernandina, and Santa Cruz; *barringtoni* on Santa Fe island; *bauri* on Genovesa island.

Floreana Mockingbird *Mimus trifasciatus* (E, Cr) – a few heard on Champion Islet, and a pair came down to the rocky coastline for great views, even distant photos. There are estimated to be fewer than 150 individuals left on Earth.

Espanola Mockingbird *Mimus macdonaldi* (E, Vu) – several seen well on our short walk around Punta Suarez, right down on the beach and cliffs.

San Cristobal Mockingbird *Mimus melanotus* (E, En) – A little more difficult to get views of, sometimes, than the previous species. We had luck with half a dozen of these vociferous birds in the humid mixed woodland and agricultural land above Puerto Velasco, San Cristobal island.

WARBLERS 1

Mangrove Warbler *Setophaga petechial aureola* – This beautiful endemic subspecies is one of the more widespread and common birds in the archipelago, and one of the more fun to watch. While one thinks of warblers as being in trees, in the Galapagos, they spend more time on the rocky coasts and arid scrub.

TANAGERS & ALLIES 14

Large Ground Finch *Geospiza magnirostris* (E) – uncommon, but in decent numbers on all the big islands, plus Genovesa.

Espanola Cactus Finch *Geospiza conirostris* (E) – several of this exceedingly range-restricted species seen well on Espanola.

Medium Ground Finch *Geospiza fortis* (E) – common on islands where present

Small Ground Finch *Geospiza fuliginosa* (E) – abundant on islands where present.

Genovesa Ground Finch *Geospiza acutirostris* (E) – about a dozen or more seen well on Genovesa, at Prince Philip's Steps

Common Cactus Finch *Geospiza scandens intermedia* (E) – we had a few cooperative birds, though not as numerous as we expected

Genovesa Cactus Finch *Geospiza propinqua* (E) – We had a few on Prince Philip's Steps

Vegetarian Finch *Platyspiza crassirostris* (E) – Nice views of this massive, beast of a finch on Espanola and Santa Cruz

Large Tree Finch *Camarhynchus psittacula* (E) – seen at a several high elevation sites on Isabela and Santa Cruz, where we had the *affinis* and *psittacula* subspecies

Medium Tree Finch *Camarhynchus pauper* (E, Cr) – we had shockingly good luck near Asilo de Paz, Floreana, with this exceptionally rare species of which we encountered two with ease

Small Tree Finch *Camarhynchus parvulus* (E) – two subspecies seen on our cruise were *parvulus* and *salvini*

Woodpecker Finch *Camarhynchus pallidus* (E) – we were lucky enough to see all three subspecies (*pallidus*, *productus*, and *striatipecta*) on our cruise, and have time to enjoy the behavior of a few individuals at length

Grey Warbler Finch *Certhidia fusca* (E) – *mentalis*, *luteola*, *bifasciata*, *cinerascens*, and *ridgwayi* subspecies seen at their respective islands

MAMMALS

Galapagos Fur Seal (E)

Galapagos Sea Lion (E)

Bryde's Whale

Blue Whale

Humpback Whale

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Giant Tortoise (E)

Green Turtle

Galapagos Lava Lizard (E)

San Cristobal Lava Lizard (E)

Espanola Lava Lizard (E)

Floreana Lava Lizard (E)

Land Iguana (E)

Santa Fe Land Iguana (E)

Marine Iguana (E)

Hood Racer (E)

FISH

Galapagos Shark (E)

Whitetip Reef Shark

Galapagos Bullhead Shark (E)

Diamond Stingray

Long-tailed Stingray

California Butterfly (Marbled) Ray

Monk's Devil (Mobula) Ray

Giant Manta Ray

Speckled Moray

Spotted (Tiger) Snake-Eel

Burrito Grunt

Panama Porkfish

Pacific Graysby

Barred Serrano

Panamic Frillfin
Bluebanded Goby (E)
Bullseye Puffer
Bumphead Damsel
Dusky Sargeant
Panamic Sargeant Major
Giant Damsel
Mexican Hogfish
Harlequin Wrasse
Spinster Wrasse
Chameleon Wrasse
Cortez Rainbow Wrasse
Panamic Soldierfish
Convict Surgeonfish
Razor Surgeonfish
Yellowtail Surgeonfish
Barnaclebill Blenny
Large-banded Blenny (E)
Bigeye Trevally
Yellowfin Jack
Steel Pompano
Threebanded Butterflyfish
Cortez Chub
Bravo Clinid
Blue-and-Gold Snapper
Mexican Hogfish
King Angelfish
Azure Parrotfish
Bumphead Parrotfish
Yellowfin Tuna
Moorish Idol
Chinese Trumpetfish

Pacific Coronetfish

Orangeside Triggerfish

Ocean Sunfish

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