

Galápagos Islands Tour Report 2025

11 June 2025

by Mike Watson

Our 2025 Galapagos tour was another successful visit to the 'Enchanted Isles'. The Galapagos Archipelago is a true bucket list birding and wildlife destination and thoroughly deserves this reputation. Our birders saw 63 species, 30 of them were Galapagos-breeding endemics, 2 were breeding near-endemics and a further 13 were breeding endemic subspecies! Added to this, of the 30 breeding endemic species we saw a further 7 endemic breeding subspecies representing more splitting potential (the nominate form of Grey Warbler-Finch is not found on our itinerary and there are another three species of Darwin's Finches out of the public reach for conservation reasons – Mangrove, Sharp-beaked and Vampire). There aren't many compact island groups with this level of endemism – only São Tomé & Príncipe and Hawaii rival the Galapagos. Charles Darwin visited the islands in 1835, putting them firmly on the map as the birthplace of his evolutionary theories and it was fascinating to see the animals that inspired him and to follow in his footsteps. There was much else to point our lenses at, and we also saw a total of 11 reptiles again, 10 of them endemic. As well as some interesting mammals and insects, not to mention almost 50 species of fish (including four species of shark), most of which were seen underwater on our five snorkeling excursions.



A walk in the woods on Floreana (Image by Mike Watson)

The seven nights cruise of around 1000 nautical miles around the desert island archipelago aboard the classy motorized catamaran Nemo III took in no fewer than 11(!) islands: Baltra, Seymour Norte (North Seymour), Genovesa, Isabela, Fernandina, Floreana, Champion, Esañola, San Cristobal, Santa Fé and finally the main island, Santa Cruz. Our action-packed itinerary is designed to see all the publicly accessible endemic bird species, plus the other main wildlife spectacles and is only made possible within this short timescale by sailing overnight on many occasions. It also visits the main northwestern islands of Isabela and Fernandina, which shorter cruises do not. Our excellent Galapagos National Park naturalist, Jairo Gusqui, mentioned that many of us were about to realise a long-held dream to visit the Galapagos, this was certainly the case with our group.



Our fabulous Galapagos National Park guide Jairo take a break with one of his pals (Image by Mike Watson)

ISLAND NO.#1 BALTRA

It appeared that someone had left the heating on as we got off the flight from Quito, or not, after the cool of the Andes, the warm wind blowing across the airstrip was like a hair dryer. A Small Ground Finch was in the rafters of the airport terminal as we stepped aboard the public transfer bus that would take us to Baltra Port and our cruise vessel. We could see the masts of a couple of beautiful catamarans in the bay, but which one? Nemo II, the sister ship to ours, was also here today. A couple of Lava Gulls were on the rocks by the jetty and distracted us while we put our life jackets on for the short zodiac ride to Nemo III. It's only the rarest gull in the world with somewhere between 300 and 600 individuals! New birds followed quickly, with frigatebirds, Blue-footed Boobies, Galapagos Shearwaters, Brown Pelicans and Brown Noddies before we even left the harbour. The usual orientation and safety talk followed, as well as lunch as we sailed north. In no time at all we had dropped anchor and were ready for our first landing, a dry one on Seymour Norte. It was all happening very fast on this tour!



This is fun! (Image by Mike Watson)

ISLAND NO.#2 SEYMOUR NORTE

A colony of Swallow-tailed Gulls thought by most to be the most beautiful gull in the world was waiting to greet us at the landing steps of Seymour Norte. What a welcome! We had a short while to take some backlit images against the dark shadows of the low lava cliffs where the gulls had bred. There was a scattering of goggle-eyed juveniles among the adults, hinting at their nocturnal feeding habits. A procession of frigatebirds of both species, Magnificent and Great were also riding the updraft of the cliffs as we headed inland through a Blue-footed Booby colony. Another of the wildlife highlights of the Galapagos. We saw around 50 pairs of these terrific birds, some of which were indulging in pair-bonding courtship, including their weird sky-pointing and foot waving display. We could study the differences between the two frigatebirds (Great and Magnificent), while passing by massive Land Iguanas in the lovely low angle evening light. We also added Red-billed Tropicbird and Red-footed Booby to our trip list. Our first Marine Iguana and Galapagos Sea Lion also put in the appearances but more of them later. Painted Locusts *Shistocerca melanocera* and a few Galapagos Sulphur butterflies *Phoebis sennae marcellina* added further colour. Seymour Norte is Galapagos in miniature and had been a lovely introduction to some of the wonderful creatures we would spend the next week with. As we sailed north, the night sky was quite clear this evening (it wasn't often on this tour) and our expert weatherman/astrologer Jay kindly shared his knowledge of the night sky with us, including the Southern Cross – a new constellation for those who had not crossed the equator before.

ISLAND NO.#3 GENOVESA

Sailing north overnight saw only some gentle movement as the big cat showed off her stability and next morning saw us at anchor in the vast flooded volcano caldera of Great Darwin Bay at Genovesa Island. We had crossed the equator for the first time this tour during the hours of darkness and now our view was of higher basalt cliffs than Seymour Norte, their base also dotted with gorgeous Swallow-tailed Gulls. The cliffs are only around 25 metres tall but they form the walls of the flooded caldera and drop a further 60 metres below the water's surface! Small parties of Galapagos Shearwaters zipped by as we boarded our large zodiac for another dry landing. However, before we landed, we cruised along the cliffs in search of a few special animals. We noted Mangrove Warbler (one landed on Nemo III),

the ubiquitous Galapagos Dove, a feisty young Lava Heron busy hunting the colourful and plentiful Sally Lightfoot crabs, a pair of Genovesa Ground Finches at their nest in a Prickly Pear cactus, Galapagos Mockingbirds and a Yellow-crowned Night Heron of the local form *pauper*. Finally, we found what we were really searching for, the scarce and shy Galapagos Fur Seal, this is a good spot for them, and we only saw this special mammal once again on the tour. Sometimes we only see it at this spot! There were at least four of them, including one thick-set male, which allowed some nice portrait images to be captured. A sleek Galapagos Sea Lion nearby was a good comparison. The Prince Philip steps lay ahead, named in honour of the Duke of Edinburgh, who visited Genovesa. Fortunately, they are now actual steps. One good thing to come out of the Covid-19 lockdowns was that the National Park staff built some concrete steps with handrails here, in place of the rough rock scramble through the lava boulders that only resembled steps.



The uncommon and shy Galapagos Fur Seal pictured here on Genovesa (Image by Mike Watson)

At the top of the steps our instant reward was a Large Ground Finch. Probably the most striking of all of Darwin's Finches, with an unfeasibly huge bill that looks way too big for its head. Also here was a lovely pair of Red-footed Boobies with a well grown chick. We would have appreciated them more had we realised at the time how few we would see on the rest of the tour. I was happy to see some healthy versions of this ocean-going gannet after my experience in Texas last month. Orange-billed Nazca Boobies dominated the hinterland of this landing though and were much appreciated as we walked between them. We are supposed to give them plenty of room, but this is impossible when they approach you and block your path! As if all this was not enough, the real highlight of the morning landing lay ahead. As the bushes thinned out, we found ourselves on the edge of a lava field that stretched away to the sea and a sky full of Wedge-rumped Storm Petrels, coming and going from their nest sites in the tiny crevices between the rocks. Petrels visiting their colony in such numbers during daytime was a new phenomenon for me. We counted at least 50 Red-billed Tropicbirds too, some being harassed by Great Frigatebirds (they outnumber Magnificent here, unlike everywhere else we went from now on). Such a throng of small birds must attract predators, right? Of course it does. We could see the remains of storm petrels here and there across the lava field, wings and breastbones mostly. The work of Short-eared Owls. That is what people come here for. Eventually an owl showed up, mobbed as it flew across the storm petrel colony, which number in the thousands! The owl landed and would bob its head from side to side as it followed the flight of the storm petrels, lining up potential victims and then it struck. Unsuccessfully a few times, after which it relocated

and tried again in another spot until grabbed one out of the sky, serious skills! The poor storm petrel was carried off into the bushes, maybe to feed hungry owlets? We managed some great images of this action, a real tour highlight, of BBC wildlife documentary standard! On another subject, strangely Genovesa does not have any lava lizards!



Genovesa scenes (Image by Mike Watson)

Deep water snorkeling in the caldera was very productive with Scalloped Hammerhead Sharks the highlight, but we still had plenty of finchy business to attend to here, we were still missing two of the endemic forms. One a species in its own right, Genovesa Cactus Finch, and the other the drab and unassuming *mentalis* subspecies of Grey Warbler-Finch. Our afternoon wet landing in Darwin's Bay scored both as well as featuring some very nice views of Lava and Swallow-tailed Gulls, a walk through a Red-footed Booby and Great Frigatebird colony, a Wandering Tattler and another couple of Large Ground Finches. Genovesa would be the only place we would see these monsters. Cruising west this evening towards Marchena gave us our first chance to do some proper pelagic birding and among hundreds of Wedge-tailed Storm Petrels we spied a few Band-rumpeds in our wake, their crazy swinging flight action the first clue and further away from the boat and frankly disinterested in us, our first Galapagos Petrels started to appear. Their deliberate shearing action, with barely a wing flap was very noticeable. What a day it had been! As darkness fell and identifying birds against the water became impossible, a group of Swallow-tailed Gulls kept us company for a while, far out to sea. I wonder how far they wander at night?



Our lovely catamaran Nemo III (Image by Mike Watson)

ISLAND NO. #4 ISABELA

One of the most enjoyable things about our Galapagos cruise is spending time on Nemo III. It was nice to be on deck as we sailed around the northwest tip of Isabela before dawn, watching storm petrels and shearwaters coming and going as we neared Punta Vicente Roca. Breakfast itself was rudely interrupted by a pair of Galapagos Penguins stood on rocks in the sheltered cove here but they slipped into the waves and were lost to view. A special moment being some of our folks' first ever penguins. Well, they are the only penguins in the world found this far north. We could also see their fellow flightless distant cousins, Flightless Cormorants resting on the rocky beach in the same cove. Both birds are confined to the Galapagos and only the northwest corner of the archipelago at that. High above the cove our first Galapagos Hawks hung on the updrafts, and a colony of Blue-footed Boobies was a hive of activity. Our zodiac rides got us very close to the cliffs and the Brown Noddies nesting there, as well as the numerous Marine Iguanas and a few Flightless Cormorants. The cormorants might not sound too appealing but those bright turquoise eyes shine like precious stones and did you know Flightless is the largest cormorant in the world? They are bold as well and one of them appeared behind the zodiac and started chewing the mooring rope! The second zodiac ride scored a penguin too, but it was all too elusive for the cameras, constantly diving in the surf off the point itself. We spent the rest of the morning cruising south in the broad Canal Bolivar, adding to our Galapagos Petrel tally in the sunshine, although without a breath of wind they were not keen on flying.



Flightless Cormorant habitat at Punta Vicente Roca, Isabela (Image by Mike Watson)

As we neared Tagus Cove, on the west coast of Isabela, named after a British warship that visited the area in 1814, we started our search for the endangered Galapagos Martin, another bird whose population is only in 3 figures and status is unknown, with a woolly estimate reported by IUCN of between 250 and 999 birds! John excelled himself in spotting one flying along the cliff top well before we reached the cove, pressure off. We spotted another four in the cove itself, two adults and two youngsters. A little too far for worthwhile images. As we watched them a group of penguins swam by. Also here were more Flightless Cormorants and another hawk.

ISLAND NO.#5 FERNANDINA

The action-packed day continued not far to the west off the northeast corner of Fernandina at Punta Espinosa ('Spiny Point'), where the snorkelers got to see the transformation of ungainly cormorants into sleek, torpedo-like underwater beings. The late afternoon dry landing was one of the most fun of the tour for the photographers. We explored the low rocky point with its patches of mangroves and lovely sandy beaches. Bird diversity was low here with only 10 species that included our first Great Blue Heron of the bright local race *cognata* and a couple of Ruddy Turnstones. We had some close views of Galapagos Hawk here too. The piles of Marine Iguanas stole the show, sneezing saltwater from their nostrils and presenting some great photo compositions. The lovely *Brachycereus* Lava Cactus growing in small clumps on the relatively young swirls of pahoehoe lava flows was another wonderful sight. Fernandina was made famous by the BBC wildlife documentary Planet Earth II with a sequence of a baby Marina Iguana running the gauntlet of a writhing mass of snakes. We did not see any writhing masses, but we did manage to find two Fernandina Snakes, one of the spotted variety featured in the video clip and another of the striped form. It was difficult to accept that these two snakes were the same species, but the only other possibility on Fernandina is the heavily banded Darwin's Racer, which looks nothing like either of them. Happily, they are both harmless to man, nice to know as one slithered across John's foot. The island's endemic lava lizard was nice too, one of which stood on the rearranged bones of a Bryde's Whale.



Fernandina scenes (Image by Mike Watson)

RETURN TO ISABELA

Next morning we anchored off Isabela's main town, Puerto Villamil, protected by an extensive lava reef. Our dry landing this morning began with an extended zodiac ride along the reef edge, which resulted in some great views of Hudsonian Whimbrel, our best views of Galapagos Penguin by far and a very close Lava Heron, also our best encounter with this one. Keeping up the volcanic theme, a couple of Lava Gulls flew by. As we approached the jetty a group of Brown Pelicans was diving into the surf off the beach and when we looked closer, we could see they were accompanied by a gang of penguins, there was obviously a shoal of fish here. Another seven Ruddy Turnstones were by the jetty, they were leaving it rather late to head north or maybe they were taking a year out? At least one adult male was in nice breeding plumage suggesting the former. Strolling to our Chiva (open-sided truck), our first Galapagos Flycatcher was on nearby lamp posts. It is small for a *Myarchus* genus flycatcher! Winding our way through town we headed up into the mist that shrouded Volcan Negra. The more humid climate here has allowed a moss-clad forest to develop and with it more endemic birds. This was our only shot at the lovely Darwin's (or Brujo, *yeuch*!) Flycatcher. We were lucky to see three of them, including one nice pink male. More finches were added to our list – Green Warbler-, Woodpecker, Small Tree and Medium Ground. The smart Dark-billed Cuckoo and the not-so-smart Smooth-billed Ani were also added to our list. There is a much trickier bird here though. Eventually, we heard it along one of the narrow paths through the ferns and damp woodland undergrowth and it wasn't long before we were able to set eyes on it, crossing the path almost at our feet, Galapagos Crake (or Rail). Like Darwin's Flycatcher is an obvious descendant of Vermilion Flycatcher, the tiny little crake looks like a relative of Black Rail. The mist put paid to our chances of hiking to the crater rim, much to the disappointment of those already 'finched-out' by this point. Quite understandably. Our visit to the uplands of Isabela ended on a sad note with a dead American Barn Owl in the gutter, it was unlucky to get hit on this unbelievably quiet road. Butterflies abounded here with Queen, Galapagos Sulphur, Galapagos Blue and Long-tailed Skipper.



Galapagos Penguin obscura (Image by Mike Watson)

We descended to the coastal lowlands and the vicinity of Puerto Villamil, where a flooded quarry produced several gaudy American Flamingos, White-cheeked Pintail and Common Gallinule. Only aerial views available here though so of little use to us in the harsh sunlight. Another rather uninspiring lake in town with a robust boardwalk produced the same again plus Black-winged Stilts and a stray Lava Gull hassling them. We were still missing one finch by this point, and it was spotted in the most bizarre location, on a transformer box in town, the long-beaked Common Cactus Finch. We had been looking for it in the cactus forest outside town without any luck. The afternoon was spent cruising east towards Floreana, diverting south a little to skirt the edge of the deeper water. We enjoyed some more great seabirding, tallying 34 Galapagos Petrels and our only surprise seabird, a Sooty Shearwater. Well away from land the wavelength was truly awesome, maybe 300m at times? Coming from a faraway storm in the Pacific maybe?

ISLAND NO.#6 FLOREANA

Another island, another Chiva. This time it was creepy Floreana with its weird history of European immigrants, unsolved murders and people who had their teeth removed before they came here and shared a pair of metal dentures! The peaks of the twin volcanoes that dominate the island were also shrouded in mist and birding up there was a little damp. We managed a good view of the recent colonist Paint-billed Crake, a widespread South American bird, by taking a short diversion from our search for our main target on this island, the thoroughly underwhelming Medium Tree Finch. It does have an interesting wheezing call though. We found a few only a stone's throw from the caves where the island's first European settlers had found shelter, at Asilo de la Paz. We were back on board Nemo III in time for lunch. Some of our photographers had stayed behind around the jetty and enjoyed more Sally Lightfoot Crabs, Marine Iguanas, sea lions and Blue-footed Boobies fishing just offshore.



Asilo de la Paz carving on Floreana island (image by Mike Watson)

ISLAND NO.#7 CHAMPION ISLAND

We didn't set foot on this one and it is more of an islet satellite of Floreana, lying only a short way offshore. However, it is one of the last refuges of Floreana Mockingbird, which no longer occurs on the mainland. The mockingbird did the decent thing and showed itself to us, quite closely actually. We had some nice views atop the prickly pears along the clifftop. It was rather scraggy though, in heavy moult, so not photogenic. Then followed a circumnavigation of the island, admiring its numerous Swallow-tailed Gulls, Galapagos Shearwaters and Red-billed Tropicbirds before the snorkelers jumped in and explored under the water too.



A Red Ghost Crab excavates its burrow as the tide recedes, a never ending task (Image by Mike Watson)

The late afternoon landing at Punta Cormorant (there are no cormorants here, it is named after a US boat, not the flightless bird) featured a deluge, some great looks at Red Ghost Crab on the beach, busily excavating its hole in the sand as the tide went out and finally some lovely light on the flamingo colony on the nearby brackish lagoon for the photographers. We added Semipalmated Plover to our trip list here too was a group of four Cow-nosed Golden Rays was in the shallows for the over-water-only folks.



American Flamingo of the form endemic to the Galapagos (Image by Mike Watson)

ISLAND NO.#8 ESPAÑOLA

The jewel in the crown of islands, Española did not disappoint. Our early morning wet landing was on the beach at gorgeous Gardner Bay, the world's 47th best beach, apparently. The other 46 must be amazing! Gardner Bay is a 2km long curved white sand beach with crystal clear turquoise water. With only sea lions for company for a while we explored the beach and the bushes along the high-water mark. Finch alert! There were lots of Española Cactus Finches and Small Ground Finches as well as Galapagos Doves and the heavy-billed Española Mockingbirds, which were by far the boldest mockingbirds we had encountered so far. A few Grey Warbler-Finches of the island form *cinerascens* foraged in the bushes on the edge of the beach and the island's lava lizard was also here. Some saw American Oystercatcher here too. Long-tailed Skippers landed on the sand and every now and again a freak wave would surprise those getting down for a low angle photo. The snorkelers enjoyed an excellent swim from the beach and around a nearby islet, before it was time to relocate.



Wild Imagers Agné and Daniel at Gardner Bay on Española (Image by Mike Watson)

The best of Española (and the entire tour) was reserved for the afternoon's dry landing at Punta Suarez, where the unfortunate cruise boat Cormorant II had run aground around six months earlier. We saw their plastic bottles in the water around the coastline here. What a shock that must have been, no one was hurt but talk about a bad day at the office! Another question today was ' *How have we not seen a Waved Albatross on our travels yet when this island is stacked with them* ?'. They mostly head south and east from Española to feed and away from the archipelago. We saw plenty of them today though, around 250. The trail at Punta Suarez took us through their colony and allowed some great close encounters with these amazing birds. Quite small for an albatross, in fact not much longer than a Nazca Booby but with a massive yellow bill and a vast wingspan. We saw mostly single birds on nests, a few pairs, including one engaged in an elaborate courtship display that was surely the reason this was the runaway winner of the 'bird of the trip' contest. The pair tapped bills, waved their necks from side to side and threw open their mouths in an incredible sequence where one copied the other's moves. There were lots of Nazca Boobies here too and a few Blue-footed. At the southern tip of the point a tremendous blowhole blasted water 25m high into the sky with every few waves (and one freak wave, which broke over the cliff top, a warning that such things exist when facing a vast ocean). Red-billed Tropicbirds and Swallow-tailed Gulls flew by here too. It really was a perfect scene, but we only had eyes for the albatrosses, a couple of which walked to the cliff top and eventually took to the skies. Many more of them cruised past through the breakers below or even at eye level along the clifftop. Rafts were gathering offshore, no doubt birds getting ready to go on feeding sorties. One of the best birding spots I had the privilege to visit so far. Simply stunning.

ISLAND NO.#9 SAN CRISTOBAL

This morning, we woke up in San Cristobal harbour, the administrative capital of the Galapagos no less. It has even got a police car with blues and twos! A very civilized and built-up town, full of tourist souvenir shops, bars and restaurants. We escaped from these quickly and headed inland in a nice coach. We needed four birds here: San Cristobal Mockingbird, a separate species, plus three subspecies, Grey Warbler-Finch (*luteola*), Woodpecker Finch (*striatipecta*) and Small Tree Finch (*salvini*), all of which were seen quite easily in either the local cemetery or along its adjacent cycle track! Another rather surreal experience, as the cemetery is not an earth burial one, more a safety deposit box style operation. All beautifully maintained. We were done with the birding quickly and got trapped in the souvenir

shops briefly, before it was time to leave San Cristobal. Again, some of our 'finched-out' photographers made the wise decision to spend time around the harbour and managed some very worthwhile sea lion images. Cruising west in the sunshine was very pleasant and produced a Waved Albatross, our only one of the trip at sea, another 16 Galapagos Petrels and three Band-rumped Storm Petrels.



The 2025 group (Image by Fred Bloggs)

ISLAND NO.#10 SANTA FÉ

Barrington Bay is a lovely, sheltered lagoon on the north coast of Santa Fé and was our final snorkeling location. After the snorkelers had finished their excursion, we all donned life jackets for our final wet landing of the tour. A trio of Spotted Eagle Rays greeted us! There weren't any new bird species here for us but there were a couple of nice subspecies, the Santa Fé Galapagos Mockingbird and Grey Warbler-Finch. The former was waiting for us on the beach, but the latter took a lot of searching. Eventually we found one along the trail, which was dotted with Common Cactus Finches, the first we had seen since Genovesa. There were two very nice other species though, Santa Fé Land Iguana and Santa Fé Lava Lizard. We could see evidence of the Land Iguana's work on the large *Opuntia* cacti here and we saw three of them. The first a small youngster but then two real brutes, the first so big it was literally dragging itself along the trail away. from us. We reached our rendezvous beach and found it already occupied by sea lions, which made some nice evening photo subjects.



Santa Fé Lava Lizard. Almost every island of any size has its own endemic lava lizard! (Image by Mike Watson)

ISLAND NO.#11 SANTA CRUZ

All good things come to an end, and this morning we disembarked Nemo III. It had been a classic cruise. We were now in the Canal Itabaca at the Santa Cruz ferry port and boarding another nice coach! Santa Cruz holds a good number of special birds and other things. Our first port of call was partly to get everyone a view of the elusive Galapagos Crake, which worked spectacularly well in the damp highlands of the island, after about a kilometre steady uphill walk. The other reason was to work on some more finches. We added the *pallida* form of Woodpecker Finch along the same trail and had some nice views of Green Warbler-Finch again. We also saw a couple of Paint-billed Crakes and Dark-billed Cuckoos along the road in this area. Descending into plantations of coffee, papaya and banana growing among large trees, we began our search for Large Tree Finch. Like many of the finches we saw, they had already bred and were not at all responsive, in fact the ones we saw were already feeding young.



The elusive Galapagos Crake is a benchmark bird for our birders (Image by Mike Watson)

So, one more item of unfinched business. Vegetarian Finch. Often the toughest to find I was told. Arrive at the quarry, park the bus, walk about 30 metres and there they are, feeding in a cat's claw tree on its tiny round fruits. This was probably the most satisfying of all the 20 forms of Darwin's Finch we saw. A hulking brute, the size of a grosbeak, with a decent length tail, they don't pass in a crowd of other finches. The sooty-headed male is an impressive beast! Which just left a couple of other things to do.



Lava Tunnel on Santa Cruz Island (Image by Mike Watson)

The Primicias Ranch in the southwest of the island is our (and I think everyone else's) goto spot for American Barn Owl. There was one in residence at its roost and allowed a procession of us to take a peek at it. We even had time to enjoy a guided walk along a very impressive lava tunnel. The star attraction of the ranch, however, is its giant-tortoises. Our 'finchfull' folks headed straight here today instead of birding and spent an extended period with the giant-tortoises. Santa Cruz Giant-Tortoise is one of 14 species of giant-tortoise, some of which are now extinct. They seem to be doing well on the ranch, and we were told they roam freely and are of wild origin? Being tortoises, they do not do much except eat, but at least one of them 'chased' a female briefly before she made off, about five metres away and he gave up. They were still very popular with our group and their faces are undeniably characterful. After the islands' discovery by the Europeans the giant-tortoises were plundered by sailors. They could live for long periods without food, so they made ideal sources of fresh meat. They were even used as ballast! Phew, it was humid on Santa Cruz today, around 97% to be precise and after a truly energy-sapping morning we retired to our comfortable hotel in Puerto Ayora.



Giant-Tortoises can look quite sinister, belying their gentle nature (Image by Mike Watson)

Opening the curtains next morning there was a pair of American Oystercatchers piping away on the rocks in the bay, a nice catch up for those up early enough today. A pale adult Striated Heron was here too! The immature small herons are thought nigh impossible to ID. We made a quick visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station and added another giant-tortoise to our list, albeit a long dead one, Lonesome George in his temperature-controlled mausoleum, the last Pinta Giant-Tortoise, which died in 2012 after 41 years in captivity. He was discovered on Pinta Island in 1971 by Hungarian zoologist József Vágvölgyi and relocated to Santa Cruz for his own safety. His habitat on Pinta had been degraded by goats and he was the only remaining individual of his (at that time) subspecies. There were some wild Santa Cruz Lava Lizards here too. Our journey back to the mainland went smoothly and swiftly, with a Land Iguana as we walked from the departure gate to the aircraft.



Lonesome George in his mausoleum, unfortunately there was no hope for him (Image by Mike Watson)

Thank you to our very enthusiastic group and particularly to our Galapagos National Park Naturalist Guide Jairo Gusqui and the awesome crew of Nemo III, who went well above and beyond to make our trip a safe and very enjoyable one. Nemo III herself was a real star too, what a lovely and very comfortable way to travel around the 'Enchanted Isles'!



Eclipse and storm chasers Jay and Judy on everyone's favourite island, Española (Image by Mike Watson)



Yellow-crowned Night Heron of the endemic Galapagos race pauper (Image by Mike Watson)



Wedge-rumped Storm Petrel is abundant at its colony on Genovesa (Image by Mike Watson)



Waved Albatrosses were taking to the air in the late afternoon sunshine during our visit to Española, we could feel the 'whoosh' of air as they passed! (Image by Mike Watson)



Ungainly on land, Waved Albatrosses transform into majestic masters of the air in flight (Image by Mike Watson)



There is nothing quite like watching an albatross over the waves (Image by Mike Watson)



Waved Albatross pair bonding. Most of the albatross pairs in the Española colony has at least one partner at sea but a few were together like this (Image by Mike Watson)



Waved Albatross coming through, this one barged us off the path (Image by Mike Watson)



Waved Albatross is one of the smaller albatrosses, barely longer than a Nazca Booby but they do have a massive bill! (Image by Mike Watson)



Santa Fé Lava Lizard. Almost every island of any size has its own endemic lava lizard! (Image by Mike Watson)



Waiting for the return of its parents in the shadows of the mangroves (Image by Mike Watson)



Marina Iguanas have to sneeze salt water out of their noses! (Image by Mike Watson)



Red-footed Booby, another ocean-going seabird breeding in the Galapagos (Image by Mike Watson)



Swallow-tailed Gulls feed at night, hence the big goggly eyes! (Image by Mike Watson)



Swallow-tailed Gull is a virtual Galapagos breeding endemic, thought by many to be the most beautiful gull in the world. You can see why in this photo! (Image by Mike Watson)



Ruddy Turnstones, feeding up in preparation for the long way up to their Arctic breeding grounds (Image by Mike Watson)



Nazca Booby, one of the commonest seabirds in the archipelago (Image by Mike Watson)



The famous Sally Lightfoot crab, named after a sailor's dancer girlfriend (Image by Mike Watson)



Swallow-tailed Gulls below the shelter of a Prickly Pear forest on Champion Island (Image by Mike Watson)



Backlit Swallow-tailed Gull (Image by Mike Watson)



Gigantic! A Santa Cruz Giant-Tortoise at Rancho Primicias (Image by Mike Watson)



Vegetarian Finch feeding in a Cat's Claw Tree (Image by Mike Watson)



The male Vegetarian Finch is a handsome grosbeak-proportioned beast (Image by Mike Watson)



Santa Fé Galapagos Mockingbird. Another mockingbird that waits to greet you on the beach (Image by Mike Watson)



Giant-Tortoises can look quite sinister, belying their gentle nature (Image by Mike Watson)



Santa Fé Grey Warbler-Finch, is another creature endemic to the tiny island of Santa Fé (Image by Mike Watson)



The waves don't break over the 25 metre cliffs do they? Well, actually sometimes they do. (Image by Mike Watson)



Waved Albatross bill detail (Image by Mike Watson)



Santa Fé Land Iguana, endemic to the tiny island of the same name (Image by Mike Watson)



Red-billed Tropicbird is a common breeding seabird in the Galapagos (Image by Mike Watson)



A Red Ghost Crab excavates its burrow as the tide recedes, a never ending task (Image by Mike Watson)



Punta Espinosa pahoehoe lava flow (Mike Watson)



Lava Heron was formerly a race of Green Heron – it blends in well to its rocky shoreline habitat (Image by Mike Watson)



Lava Heron in search of Sally Lightfoot Crabs (Image by Mike Watson)



Lava Heron immature, probably (Image by Mike Watson)



Lava Tunnel on Santa Cruz Island (Image by Mike Watson)



Galapagos Long-tailed Skipper butterfly on a white sand beach (Image by Mike Watson)



Frigatebird males keep this incredible pouch inflation going until they find a mate (Image by Mike Watson)



The ubiquitous Mangrove Warbler is not confined to mangroves, it is everywhere, including trying to get into our bus or on our boat (Image by Mike Watson)



A pile of Marina Iguanas on Fernandina (Image by Mike Watson)



Marina Iguana, a living dinosaur (Image by Mike Watson)



Lava Gull, the rarest gull in the world! (Image by Mike Watson)



Lava Cactus, a true pioneer of new habitats (Image by Mike Watson



Large Ground Finch is probably the most striking of all Darwin's Finches and therefore the most bearable? (Image by Mike Watson)



A Land Iguana walks out of the evening shadows on Seymour Norte (Image by Mike Watson)



Isabela Lava Lizard (Image by Mike Watson)



Isabela Lava Lizard (Image by Mike Watson)



Elliot's Storm Petrel is ever present, often quite close inshore too (Image by Mike Watson)



The elusive Galapagos Crake is a benchmark bird for our birders (Image by Mike Watson)



The uncommon and shy Galapagos Fur Seal pictured here on Genovesa (Image by Mike Watson)



The Galapagos is home to several species of mockingbird, the original inspiration for Darwin's evolutionary theory (Image by Mike Watson)



Española Cactus Finch is abundant on the island of the same name (Image by Mike Watson)



Española Mockingbird is well known as the boldest of the Galapagos mockingbirds (Image by Mike Watson)



Galapagos Penguin obscura (Image by Mike Watson)



Galapagos Penguin. It is actually pretty difficult to get a view like this of the shy bird! (Image by Mike Watson)



Española Mockingbird is well known as the boldest of the Galapagos mockingbirds (Image by Mike Watson)



Galapagos Petrel, the endemic Pterodroma petrel of the archipelago (Image by Mike Watson)



The endearing Galapagos Sea Lion (Image by Mike Watson)



The sinister Fernandina Snake (Image by Mike Watson)



Fernandina Snake, the striped form. It is difficult to believe this is the same species as the spotted form! (Image by Mike Watson)



This feisty young Galapagos Sea Lion has caught a Tiger Snake Eel (Image by Mike Watson)



Galapagos Shearwater is a numerous breeding bird in the islands (Image by Mike Watson)



Flightless Cormorant – those beautiful turquoise precious stone eye! (Image by Mike Watson)



Flightless Cormorant, the largest cormorant in the world! (Image by Mike Watson)



Galapagos Short-eared Owl and its unfortunate storm petrel prey (Image by Mike Watson)



Darwin's (or Brujo) Flycatcher is endemic to the Galapagos Islands (Image by Mike Watson)



Brown Noddies inhabit the base of the lava cliffs (Image by Mike Watson)



Blue-footed Booby's bizarre sky-pointing display posture (Image by Mike Watson)



Asilo de la Paz carving on Floreana island (image by Mike Watson)



American Flamingo of the form endemic to the Galapagos (Image by Mike Watson)



Never outgunned, ready for every eventuality! (image by Mike Watson)



Zodiac Feet (Image by Mike Watson



Every now and again a much bigger wave arrives from far away! (Image by Mike Watson)



Fancy a date with a Waved Albatross? (Image by Mike Watson)



Dennis Darwin in Española Island (Image by Mike Watson)