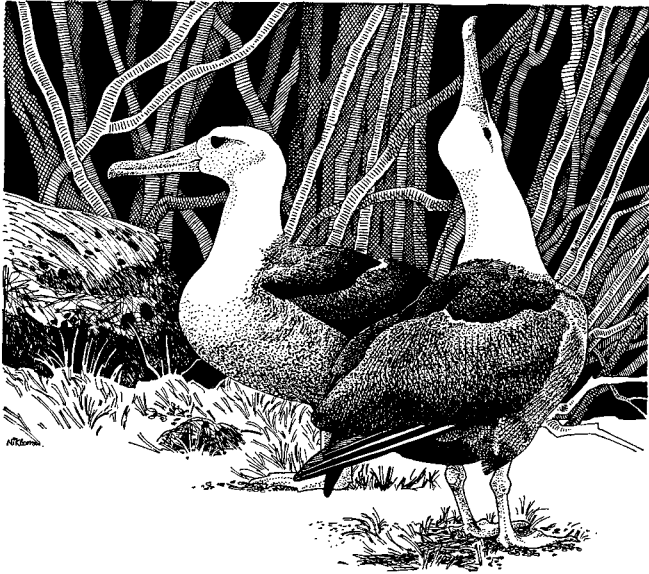


## THE GALAPAGOS

### *The Ultimate Galapagos Bird and Wildlife Adventure*

**Thursday 2nd May – Tuesday 14th May 2013 (13 days)**  
**Ecuadorian Andes Extension to Saturday 18th May (4 days)**  
**Leaders: Mike Watson and a local naturalist-guide in Galapagos, Juan Carlos Calvachi in mainland Ecuador)**  
**Group Size Limit: 15**  
**Tour Category: Easy**



Waved Albatrosses (Nik Borrow)

The Galapagos are special for the naturalist in many ways. They have one of the highest rates of endemism of any island group in the world and harbour many unique creatures, including several forms of giant tortoise, the strange Marine Iguana and no less than 29 endemic species of birds, plus a series of near-endemics and breeding endemics. They are largely unspoilt by development, their ecology has not been extensively disrupted or even destroyed by harmful introductions of alien species and they are renowned for the total fearlessness of their wildlife, allowing extremely close yet harmless approach. Moreover, they are a starkly beautiful group of islands.

They are also justly famous as the birthplace of Charles Darwin's theories of evolution through natural selection and the inspiration

for his book *The Origin of Species*, formulated after his visit over 170 years ago. This world in microcosm is situated on the Equator some 1000km out into the Pacific Ocean off Ecuador. Here Darwin found a raw, active volcanic world that was geologically young and had never been joined to the continents. He found it inhabited by a strange, almost random, selection of plants, reptiles, birds and mammals – all of which had apparently reached the islands by chance and were in the process of 'coming to terms' with their new-found environment, slowly evolving into new species that would be adapted to an often harsh and demanding habitat.

Thanks to the isolation of the archipelago, its general inhospitability to man and the generations of zoologists who followed Darwin and made the world aware of the

unique phenomenon that is the Galapagos, many of the islands can still be seen in a fairly similar condition to that which Darwin viewed them in 1835. Although depredations by whalers, sealers, settlers and passing mariners took their toll of wildlife in the past, the Ecuadorian government declared most of the 8000 square kilometres of the archipelago, which consists of over 50 islands, a national park in 1959. It is now carefully protected as one of the most precious of the world's natural showpieces.

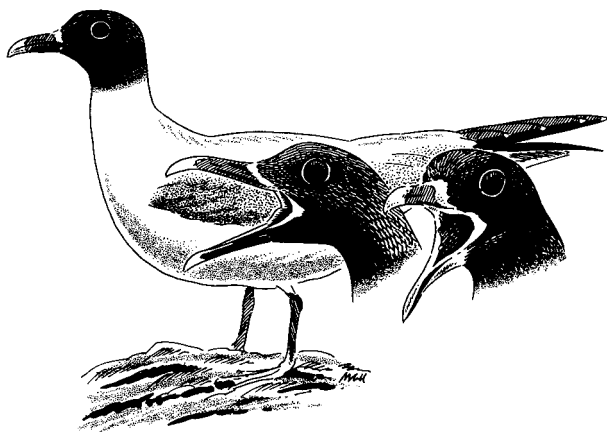
On some of the flatter islands, recent lava flows, some smooth and rope-like, others jagged and clinker-like, still await their first covering of vegetation, while older flows nearby are already thick with cacti, spiky shrubbery and white-barked Palo Santo trees adapted to the arid climate. The volcanic peaks rise to over 1700m and the scant soils support a thicker, lush vegetation that benefits from a more humid climate. Along the coasts, beautiful white, black and red sand beaches contrast with mangrove-fringed lagoons and tall cliffs of volcanic cinders. Isabela, one of the more recently formed islands, is the largest in the archipelago at over 100km long, and at the other extreme are tiny eroded islets, remnants of old volcanic

cones, that now support large and spectacular seabird colonies. This variety of terrestrial habitats combined with surrounding cold oceanic currents with their abundant marine life makes for a rich pattern of wildlife. The isolation of the Galapagos has of course stimulated the evolution of endemic plants and animals – many confined to single islands within the archipelago. This will make every day of the tour a unique experience in itself, as we sail from island to island finding new sights and new species at each.

A visit to the Galapagos provides an unforgettable, absolutely fantastic wildlife experience for every type of birder and natural history enthusiast. Our tour has been specially designed to be the ultimate in birding and wildlife tours to the Galapagos, aiming to provide an in-depth appreciation of the islands (as part of a dedicated natural history group) in a way not possible on the large cruise ships, which take up to 100 or more passengers (many with little interest in wildlife), whose much shorter periods ashore inevitably make for a rushed and incomplete experience.

We shall be travelling on an exceptionally comfortable motor yacht, allowing us to visit areas only accessible to





*Swallow-tailed Gulls (Michael Hodgson)*

smaller boats (and get there without spending too much time over it). The itinerary has been carefully worked out to ensure that we have plenty of time at each place we go ashore to see the wildlife and to appreciate it in our own way. It will give us an excellent chance of finding all of the islands' accessible endemic birds and we shall also come face to face with the famous Giant Tortoises that gave their name to the archipelago (galápagos means 'riding saddle' in Spanish and is probably a reference to the shell shape of some of the endemic forms).

During our voyage through this magical archipelago we plan to visit Seymour (or North Seymour), Genovesa (or Tower), Isabela (or Albemarle), Fernandina (or Narborough), Floreana (or Charles), Española (or Hood), Santa Cruz (or Indefatigable), Santa Fé (or Barrington), San Cristóbal (or Chatham), Bartolomé (or Bartholemew) and Plaza Sur (or South Plaza). Cruising amongst the islands is an intensely exciting experience, yet at the same time wonderfully relaxing, with time between landfalls to watch this strange world (and some fine seabirds!) pass by, and whilst at anchor, get into the water and snorkel amongst beautiful tropical fish and ever-curious sealions.

Of all the wildlife journeys we make on this marvellous but threatened planet of ours, we rate our Galapagos voyages amongst the most amazing and most memorable experiences.

In recent years the Galapagos National Park authority has greatly tightened the regulations affecting landings. All yachts and larger vessels now have a rigid timetable of landings, which cannot be modified (whatever the charter companies or tour operators tell potential guests, hoping to lure the unwary onto their boats!). As a result, for anyone with a keen interest in birds, it is vital to select a yacht which has an authorized itinerary that includes all the key islands, and in particular Genovesa (or Tower), deservedly renowned as the very best of the Galapagos 'enchanted islands' and the only accessible place in Galapagos for the endemic Sharp-beaked Finch and for Red-footed Booby, never mind the finest seabird spectacle in the entire archipelago!

Our handsome first-class motor yacht, the *Tip Top IV*, has the necessary permissions to achieve the perfect 10-night itinerary for keen birders. No current 7-night cruise, to the best of our knowledge, can deliver this. It costs a lot of money just to get to Galapagos (and a lot more

to sail around the islands, especially if you want to do so in comfort), but we are firmly of the opinion that only a 10-night cruise on a really first-class motor yacht can provide visitors with the finest Galapagos experience, never mind all of the accessible endemic birds! For full details and photographs of *Tip Top IV*, one of the best and most modern yachts available in the Galapagos (more a floating boutique hotel than a typical yacht), have a look at [www.tiptopfleet.com](http://www.tiptopfleet.com): you are surely going to be impressed!

*Tip Top IV* has 10 cabins available for either twin or single occupancy (the twin beds can be modified to create a double bed for those guests who prefer) and takes a maximum of 16 passengers. The pleasant and roomy cabins are air-conditioned, have ample storage space, a private bathroom with hot shower, and 110v AC electrical outlets (with USA-type sockets). On-board instrumentation includes satellite navigation, radar, sonar, single sideband radio and cellular phone. *Tip Top IV* is a very stable boat (minimal chance of seasickness unless you are unusually prone, or there is atypical weather for this time of year!) and is very spacious overall, with lots of indoor and outdoor viewing/lounging areas, and an attractive interior that features a library/conference room (with VCR and a natural history video library) and a spacious dining room. The boat carries a crew of nine, including the captain, first mate, engineer, two sailors, two cooks, a waiter/cabin steward and a university-level naturalist-guide. If you want the ultimate in Galapagos birding and wildlife adventures, this is surely it!

After our Galapagos adventure ends there will be an optional extension to the west slope of the Ecuadorian Andes, where we will explore the bird-rich cloudforests of Yanacocha and the famous Mindo area. These cool

forests with their host of colourful species, including numerous very approachable hummingbirds at the many feeders, will come as a startling contrast to the islands. Just to add to the magic, we will visit Angel Paz's now famous 'antpitta forest' where Giant, Ochre-breasted and Moustached Antpittas have been habituated to emerge from the recesses of the forest in order to eat provided earthworms!

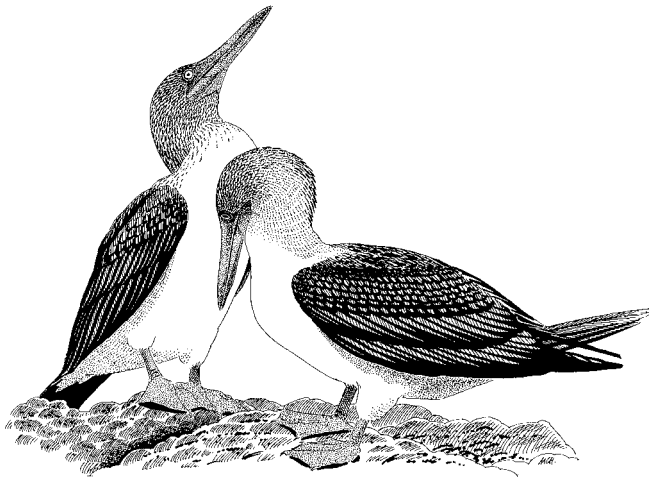
Birdquest has operated tours to the Galapagos since 1989.

The Galapagos cruise, but not the mainland extension, is a shared departure with our Wild Images wildlife photography division. Landings are of set duration in the Galapagos, the great majority of visiting Birdquesters are keen to take good photographs while in the islands, and so on this particular cruise it is easy to cater to the requirements of all.

### Itinerary

**Day 1** The tour begins in the evening at Quito, the capital of Ecuador, where we will stay overnight.

**Day 2** This morning we will take a flight to the island of Baltra (which lies just off the northern coast of the much larger island of Santa Cruz (or Indefatigable: most islands in the Galapagos having both Spanish and English names). Here we will board *Tip Top IV*, our home for the next ten nights. During this period we shall cruise amongst the 'Islas Encantadas' or 'Enchanted Islands' as the Galapagos are known, for much of the time leaving the inhabited and greatly transformed larger islands behind and exploring the natural paradise that still survives on the smaller islands. Much of our travelling will be done at night to maximize time ashore, but even daylight hours at sea are not wasted as we can enjoy



*Blue-footed Boobies (Michael Hodgson)*

searching for pelagic seabirds such as the endangered Galapagos Petrel (now mostly treated as a distinct species from Hawaiian) which breeds in just a few colonies in the highlands, and cetaceans such as Bryde's Whale and Common Bottle-nosed Dolphin.

This afternoon we will make our first landing at nearby Seymour (or North Seymour), a small island that epitomizes the abundance and fearlessness of the local wildlife. Within minutes of landing we shall be stepping over and around nesting Blue-footed Boobies. Whilst we have to adhere to designated footpaths to minimize damage to the environment, the boobies know no such rules and are content to raise their comical looking chicks in the centre of the main thoroughfare. In low *Cryptocarpus* (saltbush), both Magnificent and Great Frigatebirds nest at eye-level and within arm's reach. Here we should be able to enjoy the spectacle of the males waggling their grossly inflated red throat pouches and see the ungainly young on the tiny stick nests awaiting the next instalment of fish stolen by their parents from the hapless boobies. A long stretch of boulder beach is home to

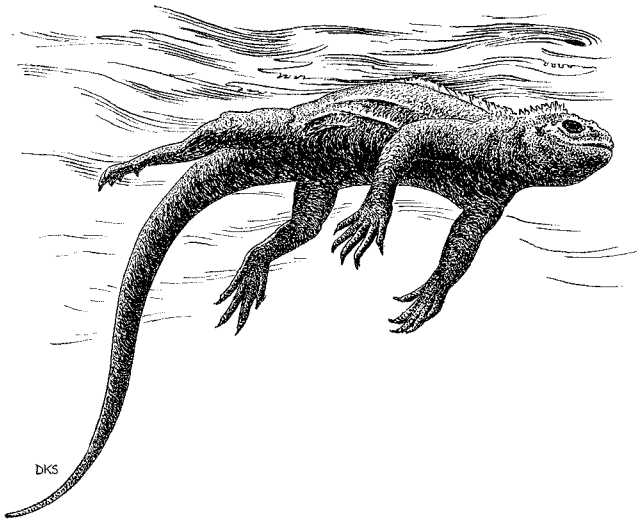
dozens of the Galapagos race of the California Sealion, an immensely appealing animal that we will encounter many times during our cruise and have some close encounters with. Here, if sea conditions are suitable, we can watch them body-surfing through crashing, sunlit rollers. We should also find some Galapagos Fur Seals trying to shelter from the sun. With a total Galapagos population close to that of the sealions, they are much more shy and less often encountered, possibly because of the slaughter of tens of thousands in the past for the fur trade. Rubbing shoulders with the seals will be a small number of Lava Gulls. This is possibly the rarest gull in the world, numbering just 300-400 pair, and is found only in the Galapagos archipelago. The intertidal zone is also good for the endemic Lava Heron and Yellow-crowned Night Heron, both feeding on the abundant, brilliant red Sally Lightfoot Crabs. Elliot's Storm Petrel is a common inshore species in Galapagos, and we may well find a group pottering around our yacht, but surprisingly its nesting locations in the islands have never been found. Other new birds today are likely to include Brown Pelican and Small Ground-Finch. This evening we will set sail for

one of the most remote islands in Galapagos, and surely their ultimate seabird colony, Genovesa (or Tower).

**Day 3** Genovesa (or Tower) is magnificent and remote, and every inch seems covered with birds. During the morning we shall visit El Barranco, which is reached via Prince Philip's Steps, named after the Duke of Edinburgh following his visit to Genovesa. Here Nazca Boobies (split from Masked) nest in fair numbers, whilst Red-billed Tropicbirds prefer the narrower ledges along the cliffs which they share with exquisite Swallow-tailed Gulls, virtually a Galapagos breeding endemic (a few nest on Malpelo island off Colombia) and possibly the most beautiful gull in the world. Another attraction here is the vast colony, numbered in tens of thousands of pairs, of Madeiran (or Band-rumped) and Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrels. The latter species is unusual in being active at the colony by day, and the air is full of these tiny whirring seabirds weaving in and out on their way to and from their nest holes, and occasionally falling prey to the Galapagos form of the Short-eared Owl (which possibly represents a distinct species). During the afternoon, on landing at Darwin Bay, we step ashore on a white coral beach to find a mass of nesting Red-footed Boobies – one of the main reasons for our visit. This species, most of which are of the brown phase in the Galapagos, nests only on the outermost islands and is unusual for a booby in that it nests in low trees and shrubbery. Amongst these absurdly confiding birds nest good numbers of Great Frigatebirds. The prime landbird speciality here is Sharp-beaked Ground-Finch (this is the only island in Galapagos where visitors can see this interesting endemic), and the island also holds Large Cactus-Finch. The Darwin's finches are a complex and unique group,

perfectly illustrating adaptive radiation. On Genovesa the Sharp-beaked Ground-Finch and Large Cactus-Finch share the limited resources with Large Ground-Finch and Dusky Warbler-Finch (split from Olive). Large Cactus-Finch has evolved a bill midway between the huge, parrot-like bill of the Large Ground Finch and the slim bill of the other two species. Where we see this species again, on Española (or Hood), it has no such competition and has developed an enormous seed-cracking beak much like the Large Ground-Finch on Genovesa! There are no such identification problems with the ever-present Mangrove Warbler (a form often lumped with Yellow and Golden Warblers) and the endemic Galapagos Dove. After leaving Genovesa we can expect to see Madeiran Storm-Petrel and the breeding-endemic Galapagos Shearwater (split from Audubon's) offshore.

**Day 4** Along the spectacular west coast of Isabela (or Albemarle) a series of volcanic peaks tower up to 1707m above this largest of the Galapagos islands. At Punta Vicente Roca, at the northwestern tip of Isabela, we can take a dinghy ride below the impressive tuff (volcanic ash) cliffs where nesting Brown Noddies are abundant, their smoky brown plumage well camouflaged against the rock, and Galapagos Penguins hide in the recesses. The coastal mangroves of northwest Isabela hold almost all of the remaining population of the very localized and declining endemic Mangrove Finch (there are a few others in southern Isabela; the population on Fernandina is thought to be extinct). The park authorities have not been allowing visits to the remaining sites for this species for some time now, in an effort to prevent disturbance to this critically-endangered bird, but should this change we will make a landing in search of



*Marine Iguana (Dafila Scott)*

this rarest of all the Darwin's finches.

Fernandina (or Narborough) is one of the most recently active volcanic areas of the Galapagos and also one of the most magical islands. This afternoon we will land at Punta Espinosa. Areas of bare lava are just beginning to be colonized by the first intrepid plant species such as the *Brachycereus* cactus. Where the lava reaches the sea there are some of the most impressive gatherings of Marine Iguanas in the Galapagos. Hundreds of them lie motionless, basking in the sunshine, with just the odd snort as they sneeze away excess salt through their nostrils. Some are scattered across the flat, rocky platform while others are packed together in an intertwined mass. In this area we can also expect stunning, close-up views of nesting Flightless Cormorants. With the world population of less than 1000 individuals confined to this northwestern part of the Galapagos, it is one of the world's rarest seabirds. The Galapagos Penguin, which occurs here in some numbers, is yet another Galapagos bird with a claim to fame, being the most northerly penguin in the world. The tidal pools

often attract Green Turtles and along the shoreline we may find waders such as American Oystercatcher, Semipalmated Plover, Wandering Tattler and Ruddy Turnstone.

**Day 5** Today we will visit two areas on the western coast of Isabela. At Bahía Urquina there was a dramatic volcanic uplift in 1954 which raised some seven kilometres of coastal reef by more than five metres, extending the coastline more than a kilometre further out to sea! At Bahía Elizabeth we can explore the mangrove creeks by zodiac. There is a good chance in this area of seeing the uncommon Galapagos Martin.

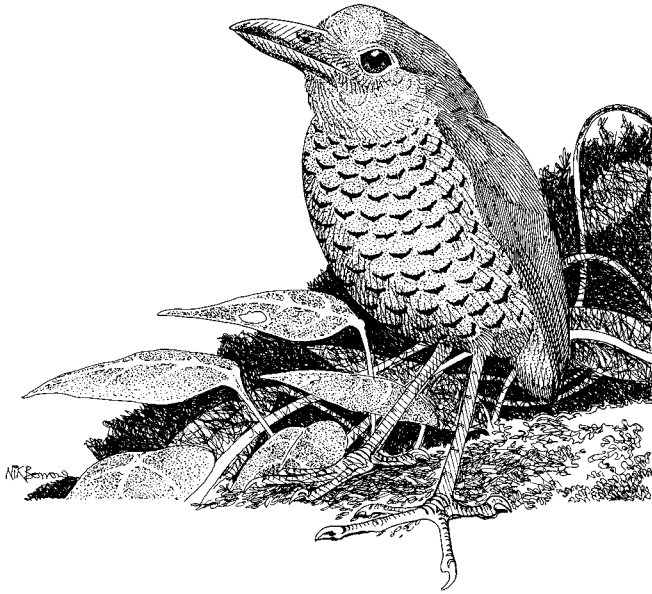
**Day 6** At Floreana (or Charles), the Charles Mockingbird is now confined to the tiny offshore islets of Gardner and Champion, where it can be watched through a telescope from our boat early this morning (as landings are not permitted). Afterwards we can visit the Devil's Crown, the jagged broken rim of an extinct volcano sticking up out of the water, which provides some superb snorkelling. At Punta Cormorant we will visit a mangrove-fringed lagoon where a number of impossibly pink American

Flamingos and White-cheeked Pintails should be present, along with waders such as Least and Spotted Sandpipers and Black-necked Stilt. The island has a fascinating and intriguing human history including numerous attempts by colourful characters to settle the island, mysterious disappearances and unsolved murders! During the afternoon we will go ashore at the settlement and travel by 'truck-bus' (a truck converted to carry passengers) into the comparatively luxuriant highlands. Here we will be looking in particular for the Medium Tree Finch, which is only found in the higher parts of this one island. We will also be able to see the cave dwellings used by the first settlers on the island.

**Day 7** Española (or Hood) is the most southeasterly island of the archipelago. By this time, many of us will be assessing which has been our favourite island or most memorable experience – wait until Española before making any decisions! At this low-lying island some 15 kilometres long and totally uninhabited, we shall be greeted at Gardner Bay this morning by the customary palaver of honking sealions, but amongst them are the distinctively heavy-billed Hood Mockingbirds, phenomenally inquisitive, running up to peck at loose shoe-laces and discarded rucksacks. During the afternoon our visit will reach its climax at fabulous Punta Suarez. Here can be found the much larger-billed version of the Large Cactus-Finch, the largest of the endemic lava lizards and some particularly fine examples of Marine Iguanas with a bright reddish hue to the sides of their bodies. The Galapagos Hawks here are remarkably tame as they have never been persecuted, unlike the situation on the inhabited islands. The real highlight, however, will be that most special of all the Galapagos

seabirds, the Waved Albatross (which breeds only here and, in much smaller numbers, on Isla de la Plata off the coast of Ecuador). At this time of year many adults will be tending large chicks, but others will be displaying as they attempt to reinforce the pair bond before departing in December. Watching them point their bills skywards while stretching out their long wings and making their strange wailing cries is an experience one never forgets. Ungainly on land, once these leviathans have waddled rapidly across the rocks and taken to the air they become transformed into huge but graceful creatures that ride the updrafts along the cliffs. This fantastic island also has some spectacular mixed colonies of Blue-footed and Nazca Boobies, Red-billed Tropicbirds and Swallow-tailed Gulls. Offshore, we can often get quite close to rafting albatrosses.

**Day 8** By this morning we will be anchored in the bustling harbour of Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz (or Indefatigable). From here we will make an outing to the highlands. Early in the day we will creep along one of the highland trails where we have an excellent chance of encountering the delightful little endemic Galapagos Rail, which is sometimes quite unconcerned by its huge admirers, making a very close approach. Later we will visit Los Gemellos, where some enormous sinkholes in the limestone rocks are surrounded by beautiful forest that holds some exciting endemics, including Large-billed (or Galapagos) Flycatcher, Galapagos Vermilion Flycatcher (sometimes lumped with Vermilion Flycatcher of the mainland), Galapagos Mockingbird, Medium Ground-Finch, Large and Small Tree-Finches, Olive Warbler-Finch and the famous Woodpecker Finch. We may also find Dark-billed Cuckoo. During the afternoon we



*Giant Antpitta (Nik Borrow)*

will have the opportunity to search for Giant Tortoises. Formerly common and widespread on many islands in the Galapagos, they are now either extinct or scarce. Tens of thousands were taken up to the 19th century by passing mariners. Stored live in ships' holds for months with no food and water, they provided a ready source of fresh food and were also used as ballast! We shall visit a reserve area set aside for these prehistoric, painfully slow and cumbersome relics. At a marshy pool, where the tortoises often come to cool off, we will also keep a lookout for Paint-billed Crane (a recent colonist from the mainland), Common Moorhen and Purple Gallinule. Another target today will be the endemic Galapagos Barn Owl (now sometimes considered a distinct species), and we will have another good chance for Galapagos Martin. In addition, we are likely to come across Western Cattle Egret and Smooth-billed Ani.

**Day 9** The Darwin Research Station in Puerto Ayora, which we will visit this morning, offers excellent displays of

material explaining Galapagos geology and ecology. The breeding programme for Giant Tortoises is open to the public, and we can mingle with some huge specimens from various islands displaying a great variety of adaptation of shell shape to environment. Particularly poignant is 'Lonesome George', the last survivor of the Pinta island form. The vegetation around the station is dominated by Prickly Pears and huge *Jasminocereus* cacti (Candelabra cacti) where we will find a variety of finches, including Common Cactus-Finch and perhaps the rather bullfinch-like Vegetarian Finch. This afternoon we will make a landing on Santa Fé (or Barrington), an island famous for its endemic Santa Fé Land Iguana and very large prickly pears.

**Day 10** San Cristóbal (or Chatham) is the most easterly of the Galapagos islands. This morning we will be off Kicker Rock (or Leon Dormicida, 'Sleeping Lion') at sunrise, just in time to admire this extraordinary and spectacular cleft pinnacle at its best. Afterwards we will make a

landing at Cerro Brujo where there is a dramatic, eroded volcanic tuff cone. This was one of the first places visited by Charles Darwin, as he explored the islands on the *Beagle*, and the beach and lagoon here hold Brown Pelicans and a variety of shorebirds. The only town on the island, Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, is the administrative capital of the Galapagos. San Cristóbal is a geologically older island, compared to much of the Galapagos, with a lush vegetation of cactus, poisonous Manzanillo trees and introduced fruits such as bananas and oranges. This afternoon we will explore the mountainous interior as far as El Junco lagoon. Here we will be looking in particular for Chatham Mockingbird, found just on this one island. This is also a good place for finding the uncommon Vegetarian Finch.

**Day 11** South Plaza, which is situated off the east coast of Santa Cruz, is one of the jewels of Galapagos. This geologically uplifted island, which has cliffs along its southern coast, has a rich variety of tame creatures that make a walk here a real delight. Land Iguanas can be found munching away on prickly pear fruits right next to the trail, while along the cliff edge Swallow-tailed Gulls perch on the rocky outcrops, contrasting with the blue background waters, that blood-red eyering adding the finishing touch, and Red-billed Tropicbirds glide past, their impossibly long tail plumes undulating gently in the breeze. This is truly a photographer's paradise!

Bartolomé (or Bartholemew) off the southeast corner of Santiago (or James) is only a small islet but one of the most photographed in Galapagos with its tooth-like Pinnacle Rock jutting skywards at the end of a beautiful white sandy beach. This islet is special for its geological formations – hollow lava tubes, cliffs of

compressed cinders and small spatter cones where molten lava and ash have created an almost lunar landscape. We will have time to climb the 114m summit, from where there is an extraordinary view across Bartolomé to the island of Santiago beyond, and explore a beach where Galapagos Penguins often come ashore.

**Day 12** Early this morning we will make a zodiac cruise amongst the mangrove-fringed channels of Caleta Tortuga Negra (or Black Turtle Cove) on the north coast of Santa Cruz. Here, Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets wait for fish, and Brown Noddies perch on the backs and heads of fishing pelicans as they try to snatch a scrap or two. We are also likely to come across one or two Striated Herons amongst the Lavas. White-tipped Reef Sharks, one of the smallest and mildest mannered of the family, lie in wait for their prey and schools of juvenile Spotted Eagle Rays and Golden Cowrays flap slowly past. Afterwards we return to Baltra where we say goodbye to our boat and crew before taking a flight to Quito for an overnight stay.

**Day 13** The tour ends this morning at Quito.

#### **Ecuadorian Andes Post-Tour Extension Itinerary**

**Day 13** We will start our birding in the vicinity of Quito, and surely no other Latin American capital can rival its splendid natural setting. Above the city rises the awesome Pichincha volcano, which still smokes occasionally (a 1999 eruption sent a 10-km-tall ash cloud into the stratosphere!). While the city-facing slopes have long since been brought under cultivation, the western side of the mountain is clothed in uninterrupted and magnificent cloudforest from treeline down to upper tropical elevations. Via a maze of little country roads, we shall drive up the

volcano to Yanacocha, an area of extraordinarily beautiful upper temperate forest that seems light years away from the bustling city. Here an amazing set of feeders attracts a bewildering variety of hummingbirds, and we are likely to see Shining Sunbeam, Mountain Velvetbreast, Great Sapphirewing, the amazing Sword-billed Hummingbird, Golden-breasted and Sapphire-vented Pufflegs, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Tyrian Metaltail and Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, whilst sneaky Glossy and Masked Flowerpiercers, their sharp bills crossed at the tip like tiny secateurs, steal away the sweet liquid by nipping at the bases of some nearby flowers. This is also the best place in the country to see the exquisite Black-chested Mountain-Tanager. Among the other birds we may find in this invigorating habitat are Andean Pygmy-Owl, Barbellied Woodpecker, Azara's and White-browed Spinetails, Pearled Treerunner, Blackish Tapaculo, White-throated Tyrannulet, Tufted Tit-Tyrant, Crowned Chat-Tyrant, Barred Fruiteater, Brown-bellied Swallow, Great Thrush, Rufous Wren, Spectacled Whitestart, Blue-backed Conebill, Golden-crowned Tanager, Scarlet-bellied and Hooded Mountain-Tanagers, Rufous-collared Sparrow, and Rufous-naped and Stripe-headed Brush-Finches. If we are very fortunate we will even come across the delightful Rufous Antpitta or the much larger Undulated Antpitta. Later we shall descend the western slope of the Andes to the Mindo area for a four nights stay.

**Days 14-16** In the lush subtropical forests near Mindo we shall enjoy a lovely dawn chorus amidst splendid

mountain scenery. Here the beautiful antiphonal song of the shy Russet-crowned Warbler fills the crisp morning air, Turquoise Jays add a touch of blue to the green wilderness and gaudy Toucan Barbets utter their haunting duets. Pearled Treerunners, Streaked Tuftedcheeks and Montane Woodcreepers search the moss and bromeliad-encrusted branches whilst White-collared and Chestnut-collared Swifts fly at tremendous speeds overhead. As the sunlight penetrates the canopy it may illuminate the splendid plumage of a Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, whilst a Golden-headed Quetzal may dazzle us with its fantastic attire. As the mist rolls in, swirling flocks of dazzling Rufous-throated, Fawn-breasted, Golden, Flame-faced, Golden-naped, Metallic-green, Beryl-spangled, Black-capped, Blue-capped and White-winged Tanagers may be seen feeding on the fruits of the silvery-leaved *Cecropia* trees. Several sets of hummingbird feeders in the area, including one on our lodge's porch, provide an unrivalled spectacle as Tawny-bellied Hermit, Green-fronted Lancebill, White-necked Jacobin, Green Violetear, Western Emerald, Speckled Hummingbirds, Purple-bibbed Whitetip, Empress and Fawn-breasted Brilliants, Brown and Collared Incas, Buff-tailed and Velvet-purple Coronets, Gorgeted Sunangel, Booted Racket-tail, Violet-tailed Sylph and Purple-throated Woodstar indulge themselves on the artificial nectar. In recent years, Giant, Ochre-breasted, Yellow-breasted and Moustached Antpittas have been habituated to eat provided earthworms by some of the local guides in the Mindo area and as long as these individuals survive (or

are replaced) we will have a good chance of seeing several of these normally very elusive birds! We will also visit a lek of the Club-winged Manakin, where the smart males perform their courtship rituals whilst emitting their most unusual calls.

Other species we may see in this area include Barred and Roadside Hawks, Band-tailed and Plumbeous Pigeons, Red-billed Parrot, Rufous-bellied Nighthawk, Wedge-billed Hummingbird, Masked Trogon, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Crimson-mantled and Powerful Woodpeckers, Azara's Spinetail, Spotted and Rusty-winged Barbtails, Lineated Foliage-gleaner, Streak-capped and Uniform Treehunters, Slaty Antwren, Long-tailed Antbird, Nariño and Spillmann's Tapaculos, Sierran Elaenia, White-tailed Tyrannulet, Bronze-olive Pygmy-Tyrant, Smoke-colored Pewee, Black Phoebe, Streak-necked, Ornate, Flavescent, Cinnamon and Golden-crowned Flycatchers, Green-and-black and Scaled Fruiteaters, Olivaceous Piha, Swainson's Thrush, Beautiful Jay, Mountain Wren, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Brown-capped Vireo, Spectacled and Slate-throated Whitestarts, Black-crested and Three-striped Warblers, Blue-winged and Black-chinned Mountain-Tanagers, Dusky Bush-Tanager, Western Hemispingus, Dusky (split from Tricolored), White-winged and Chestnut-capped Brush-Finches, and Masked and White-sided Flowerpiercers. If we are extremely fortunate we will even see the noisy Dark-backed Wood-Quail, the retiring Colombian Screech-Owl (often lumped in Rufescent) or the striking Tanager-Finch.

**Day 17** After some final birding in the Mindo area we will return to Quito where the tour ends this afternoon.

#### **Accommodation & Road**

**Transport:** For our cruise in the Galapagos we shall be based on our first class motor yacht with twin or double berth cabins (available for either twin or single occupancy) with private bathroom. The hotel in Quito and the lodge at Mindo during the extension are of normal Birdquest standard. The few roads in the islands are of variable quality, as are those in the Quito region. Road transport will be by small coach or minibus (and 'truck-bus' on Floreana).

**Walking:** The walking effort in the islands is mostly easy, but some nature trails on the islands are over rougher terrain where some agility, or a stick, are required. The walking effort during the extension is easy or moderate.

**Climate:** From sea-level to moderate altitudes in Galapagos it is predominantly warm or hot all year. Sunny and overcast conditions tend to alternate, but rain is only likely at these elevations between January and April, when the humidity is rather high. Conditions in the highlands are similar but cooler and there can be rain showers at any time of year (with frequent rainfall between January and April). From May to December, low cloud often shrouds the highlands, but the lowlands are usually sunny. Conditions in the Ecuadorian Andes are similar to those in the highlands of Galapagos, but it is typically cool in the early morning (even cold at Yanacocha).

**Bird & Wildlife Photography:** Opportunities are outstanding.