

## ISLA SAN CRISTOBAL

By: Jacinto Gordillo G. and Amrit Work Kendrick

**Size.**—With a size of 558 km<sup>2</sup>, the Island is about half the size of Isla Santa Cruz and the fourth largest of the Galápagos Islands.

**Elevation.**—The highest elevation is Cerro San Joaquín (735 m), a parasitic cone and part of a large volcanic area reaching 660 m in the middle of the western half of the Island. Elevations in the eastern half of the Island are less than 160 m.

**Geography and Geology.**—Like the other Islands in Galápagos, San Cristóbal (previously known as Isla Chatham) is volcanic, comprised of both extrusive and intrusive lavas originating from various volcanic stages. It is the easternmost part of the Archipelago and probably the oldest island. The northeastern half of the Island is younger than the more mountainous western half where the human population is located.

**Ecology.**—Similar to the other large Islands of the Galápagos, San Cristóbal has moist, thickly vegetated highlands and arid lowlands. Due to prevailing winds and the Island's topography, the northeastern half is the most arid part of the Island; it is also most isolated from the colonized areas.

**Human Population.**—Despite being the easternmost of the Islands, closest to the South American Continent, and a large island with abundant natural resources, San Cristóbal was not the first island colonized by man. Only after the colonization of Floreana began to fail did people begin to appear in San Cristóbal. Little is known about the earliest settlers, but in 1866 Manuel J. Cobos and José Monroy arrived with the intent of harvesting the "orchilla" (*Rochella abintonii*), a moss used in making a then-important dye. The colony also worked with sugar cane and built its own sugar refinery.

The abandonment of Floreana and subsequent colonization of San Cristóbal resulted in political status for the latter. It was designated the capital of the province in 1861, only to have Islands grouped under the Province of Guayas from 1885 until 1973 when San Cristóbal was once again recognized as a provincial capital representing the entire Archipelago.

At present, the human population exceeds 3,000 people. Many are natives of Galápagos, but other

residents are recent arrivals from elsewhere in Ecuador. The historical occupations of farming and fishing still predominate, but increasing opportunities exist for employment in government, tourism, and technical fields.

Since 1979, and especially after 1980 with the establishment of the Instituto Nacional Galápagos (INGALA) and increased governmental grants, vehicles have arrived in greater numbers to the Island, and roads have improved. The opening of the airport in 1986 provided another leap forward for the Island, bringing tourists and rapid economic, social, and cultural changes. Hotels, tourists shops, and restaurants have multiplied to meet the needs of the Island's visitors.

**Current Problems.**—Near the airport are sandy beaches that have been mined for sand needed in the accelerated construction on San Cristóbal. Flooding in the town and sewage outfall into the harbor are frequent concerns because roads and culverts were constructed without planning for variations in rainfall and tides. As on all the populated Islands, the danger of introducing more exotic species is increased with additional traffic of people and cargo. The struggle against exotics already resident is ongoing with feral cats and dogs at various visitor sites. The tortoise population on the eastern side of the Island is considered to be one of the least threatened in Galápagos because of diligent efforts by the Galápagos National Park Service over a period of more than 10 years.

**Sites of Interest.**—*Laguna El Junco* - One hour drive inland from the port, and then a short walk up the steep slope of the crater. Often pintails (*Anas bahamensis*) are found swimming on the lake and frigate birds are sighted flying high above the lake. Shrubs of *Miconia* and ferns extend down to the water's edge.

*Cerro de las Tijeretas* - Named for the frigates that nested here until recently, this hill can be reached on foot from the port (1.3 km). Midway is a sandy beach, Playa Mann, and an abandoned fish processing plant.

*Puerto Grande y Sappho Cove* - This tiny cove near Roca León Dormido has a beach and provides an opportunity to see large cactus (*Opuntia*) and other coastal plants.

*La Lobería* - A favorite site to view the sea lions near the port.

*Isla Lobos* - One hour by boat from Pto. Baquerizo Moreno is a rock named for the sea lions that congregate here. During the nesting season Blue-footed Boobies are conspicuous here.

*La Galapaguera* - The population of tortoises that

lives in a xeric area of eastern San Cristóbal is one of the most secure in the Archipelago, in part due to diligent research and management activities conducted by Park personnel for more than a decade. This is not a visitor site.

*Islote Pitt* - Many sea birds nest on this small Island.

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## GALAPAGOS ISLAND NAMES

By: John M. Woram

In any attempt to sort out all the names that have been applied to this or that island in the Galápagos Archipelago, one usually begins with William Ambrosia Cowley, who visited the Islands in 1684. According to no less an authority than himself, he “. . . being the first that came to an Anchor there, did give them all distinct Names.” Or so he claims in the much-edited printed edition (Cowley 1699) of his handwritten journal (Cowley ca. 1690). In the journal itself, Cowley is more restrained: “. . . there being in Number 15 Ilands that I have Seen: I have Named 8 of them.”

Of the first of these eight, Cowley writes that “This island maketh high Land, the which I called King Charles’s Island.” Tradition has it that this is the Island now known officially as Santa María and popularly as Floreana. According to the journal, the other seven were: “Duke of Yorks Iland but now by the Grace of God King James the Seconds Iland, Duke of Norfolks, Duke of Albemarle, Lord Norris’s, Lord Wainmans, Ld Culpeppers, and Cowlys [sic].” The change from Yorks to James reminds us that the Galápagos segment of Cowley’s journal was written after the fact, for it was not until the death of Charles II in February 1685 that the Duke of York became King James II. Cowley did not hear of Charles’ death until late in December of the same year, according to his printed edition. Therefore, unless Ambrosia was the Jeanne Dixon of his era, the “by the Grace of God” remark could not have been written much before 1686, even though it appears as a June 1684

entry (p. 14).

In fact, Cowley lost his onsite Galápagos notes in August 1684, when he left Captain Edward Davis and the *Batchelors Delight* to join Captain John Eaton aboard the *Nicholas*. In an entry for that month he writes “. . . I got neither my Journall which I had kept from Virginia, nor more than my quadrant.” All else was left behind. So at some point after this date he rewrote the lost journal from memory, and then began making more-or-less daily entries in a new journal. At first glance, these might appear to begin on page 28, where for the first time the day is noted (December 22, 1684), a practice which continues throughout the rest of the journal. However, it is not until page 71 that the journal reaches the time when Cowley learned of James’ accession to the throne (although this point is not actually mentioned). Since the journal is only 116 pages in its entirety, it’s a safe bet that the entire manuscript now preserved at the British Library was written after October 1686, when its author finally returned to England; rummaged through his various notes, shipboard journals, and earlier recollections; put things in chronological order; and changed Yorks to James.

To return now to the details of Island names, Cowley writes of King Charles Island that “we having the Wind at South, and being on the Northside thereof, . . . we could not sail to get to it, to discover what was upon it.” Yet in the journal of Cowley’s more-famous shipmate, William Dampier (ca. 1690) describes anchoring “at the Easter Side of the