

THE INAUGURATION

Progress with the construction work made it possible to hold the formal inauguration of the Charles Darwin Station (CDRS) on 20 January 1964. The ceremony was attended by General Gándara and Colonel Freile, (members of the ruling Military Government), Victor Van Straelen, the Ambassadors of the countries supporting the Foundation and representatives of UNESCO and the universities of Ecuador. The inauguration was planned to coincide with the arrival by sea from California of 66 members of the Galapagos International Scientific Project. This project, administered by Robert L. Usinger and Robert I. Bowman, was funded by the University of California with support from the National Science Foundation. From the beginning, a trickle of visiting scientists had been using the station as a base for their investigations but this invasion put Galapagos research on a new scale. There was no building big enough to house the gathering so the ceremony, marshalled by Harold J. Coolidge, was held in a clearing amid the cactus under the blazing equatorial sun.

A few weeks later, on 14th February 1964, the basic agreement between the Republic of Ecuador and the Charles Darwin Foundation was signed in Quito by the acting Minister for External Affairs, Armando Pesantes García, and Victor Van Straelen. The agreement defined the terms on which the Foundation could own and operate the Charles Darwin Research Station and promote conservation and scientific investigation in the Galapagos for the next 25 years, and was renewable for further periods of 5 years. This was a day of triumph for Van Straelen as the agreement crowned his years of devoted labour to save the Galapagos for posterity. Alas, his signature on the document was his last achievement as he died on his return to Belgium.

The inauguration marked the end of the first, one might even say the heroic stage of the CDRS. Life was still difficult and, later that year, David Snow reluctantly left as his wife was expecting a second child. Although being an ornithologist herself made life more bearable, she found that the combined effects of isolation, the daily struggle with primitive

living conditions and the difficulty of obtaining suitable food were too extreme for her to raise her family. It would require a separate chapter to pay adequate tribute to the contribution of Directors' wives to the success of the CDRS. Living conditions gradually improved, but for the next six years the Director was an English bachelor, Roger Perry.

A brief visit in 1964 by H.R.H. Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, had consequences in later years. He made his first tour of the islands accompanied by Aubrey Buxton of Anglia Television and G.T. Corley Smith, the British Ambassador in Quito. All three became and remain devoted supporters of Galapagos conservation. Prince Philip eventually became Patron of the Foundation as well as President of WWF International. Corley Smith served for ten years as Secretary General of the CDF and for twelve as editor of *Noticias*. Buxton sent out his crack camera team (Alan and Joan Root) to make a brilliant, hour-long, colour film in Anglia Television's "Survival" series for which Prince Philip wrote and spoke the commentary. This film, "The Enchanted Isles", brought the Galapagos into millions of homes all over the world.



Galapagos Fur Seal
Photograph by The Duke of Edinburgh