

THE CONTROL OF FERAL ANIMALS AND INTRODUCED PLANTS

From 1800 to 1960, man was the principal predator and agent of wildlife destruction in the Galapagos. Since the establishment of the Darwin Foundation, such iniquities as the killing of giant tortoises for food and their collection for the pet trade have been for the most part eliminated. However, the success of the Research Station, together with the publicity needed for fund raising, led to the creation of a tourist industry and there was renewed anxiety over the invasion of the fragile ecosystems by thousands of visitors. Thanks to the organization of the Galapagos National Park Service and the enforcement of its regulations, little harm seems to have resulted so far. There is no room for complacency but constant studies of "tourist impact" over the last ten years have shown that, with reasonable limitations on numbers and adjustments to meet changing circumstances, the National Park can be made safe from man as well as for man.

Today the main threat to the environment comes from the introduced animals and plants which have gone wild and multiplied. Much success has been achieved in reducing the countless thousands of feral goats: they have been eliminated on Plaza, Santa Fé, Rábida, Española and Marchena and brought under control on Pinta, but they still remain a grave threat to the precious ecosystems of Santiago.

The campaign to save the endemic flora from the goats continues. But the flora also suffers from the competition of introduced plants and the Darwin Station has now appointed a staff botanist to co-operate with the National Park Service on the eradication of alien vegetation which is spreading from the farms into the Park in a dangerous way.

Much of this issue is devoted to feral animal problems. This reflects the present preoccupations of the Foundation and its Research Station. No known species has become extinct since the CDRS was set up and the only one currently endangered is the Hawaiian Petrel: but there are *populations* of animals on various islands which are in hazard. Ideally the Charles Darwin Foundation would like to preserve every indigenous animal population on its native island and to eradicate all introduced species. With hitherto known techniques, even if adequate funds were available, it must be admitted that the chances of eliminating rats and cats, let alone some of the thriving insects and plants, are remote.

Any attempt to control pests without adequate research could be a danger in itself. The CDRS has devoted years of study to the situation with the help of visiting scientists in addition to its own staff. Some aspects will only become clear in the course of time because, on islands afflicted with more than one pest, the elimination of one may have serious repercussions on the others. The following papers by several authors and covering various periods show different approaches and attitudes towards the problems created by different species on different islands. The Executive Council of the Darwin Foundation will be holding a seminar in Quito immediately prior to its March 1982 meeting, solely to discuss these feral problems.

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