

GUEST EDITORIAL

GALAPAGOS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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Galapagos is an extraordinary and special place, and over the last 50 years, the Charles Darwin Foundation (CDF) has made substantial contributions to the conservation of the islands. In this edition of Galapagos Research, we take stock of the past and present, and look toward the future of the CDF.

The past work of the CDF has led to many successes in conserving endangered species and managing invasive species, the legacies of Galapagos's whaling and colonizing history. CDF has also supported the building of stronger local organizations including the Galapagos National Park and Galapagos Quarantine System. In addition, the CDF played a seminal role in the early development of tourism and in establishing the control of direct impacts through guides, trails and itineraries.

Despite the hard work of the past 50 years, Galapagos finds itself today at risk; the President of Ecuador and UNESCO both declared Galapagos as such in 2007. The last 20 years have seen rapid economic growth, unregulated development, and alarmingly rapid immigration. This has brought about rapid political, social and cultural change, with an increasing population and new migrants bringing a heterogeneous culture from the mainland. These changes have increased the risks of the arrival of introduced species in cargo boats, planes and tour boats, and some of these species have proven to be complex conservation challenges.

The future CDF will need to be equipped to deal with these and other changes still to come. CDF will need to work collaboratively with government agencies to provide innovative solutions to these challenges. CDF will also need to work with the local community and

their representatives to help build a sustainable society. Included among these challenges will be the need to create an integrated research and monitoring framework to guide effective decision-making.

During 2009, the CDF will celebrate 50 years of its existence. During 2007, the Galapagos Islands were declared at risk because of the changes they have seen over the last 20 years. The CDF will need to change its role in Galapagos to address the challenges of today and the future, based on the lessons from the past. The Galapagos Islands are unique; to lose them or see them degrade further would be a terrible loss for humanity. The CDF of today and the future needs to work with all interested parties to support a shared view of the islands and so help develop a shared vision for the future.

The articles in the following special Galapagos Commentary stem from talks presented at a symposium held at the CDF General Assembly meeting in November 2007. Their authors review aspects of the past, present and future of the CDF and Galapagos conservation, and suggest directions for the critical role that the CDF will play in determining the future of these extraordinary islands.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CDF extends thanks to the following for financial support for the symposium at which the papers in the following section were originally presented: Ecuador's National Council for Higher Education (CONESUP) and National Secretariat for Science and Technology (SENACYT), the Galapagos Conservancy, IUCN and UNESCO.