



Charles Darwin Foundation

# The work of the CDF in the Galapagos Islands





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# The work of the CDF in the Galapagos Islands

Photographs by Godfrey Merlen

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This document, dedicated to the work of the Charles Darwin Foundation (CDF) in the Galapagos Islands, combines a series of photographs by the British researcher Godfrey Merlen, preserved as slides in the audiovisual collection of the Library, Archive & Museum of the CDF, with a selection of texts taken from Gerard Thomas Corley Smith's book *Galapagos*.

Using both resources, and connecting the visual works with narrative fragments, a comprehensive approach to the activities of the CDF in the archipelago is sought.

The texts included in these pages belong to Chapter XXI of Corley Smith's work, titled "The Darwin Foundation", in which the former Secretary General of the organization briefly reviewed the history of the CDF.

Our thanks to Godfrey Merlen for the images, and to all the writers who left, in their paragraphs, testimony of the scientific activities developed, throughout the years, in "The Encantadas".

Edgardo Civallero | Charles Darwin Foundation





"For the Galápagos, the century that followed their annexation by Ecuador and the visit of Charles Darwin was a period of almost unrelieved disaster. Foreign sailors ravaged the wildlife without restraint and, when they had reduced it to a level at which it was no longer worth their while to call, the Ecuadorean oil hunters stepped in to finish the job of exterminating the tortoises. The only protection afforded to the unique flora and fauna was the remoteness of the islands, the abominably difficult and dangerous terrain, and the fact that most of the species had no commercial value."

[Photography without data]



"Until the turn of the century, nobody seemed to care; perhaps the worst of the trouble was that there was nobody whose business it was to care. The handful of soldiers who constituted authority in the archipelago were not interested in conservation and, if they had been, could scarcely have exerted control over the scattered islands. The worst of the damage was done without profit to Ecuador. The foreign sailors arrived, helped themselves generously to tortoises, turtles and whatever else took their fancy, and went on their way; at the most, the settlers earned a few *suces* for the toil of carrying the monstrous tortoises down to the beaches. There was no official supervision or interference with this free-for-all, and apparently no protest was raised either in Ecuador or elsewhere."

[Park and Station personnel with Dark-rumped petrel.  
Santa Cruz. Galapagos. 21 Feb. 97]



"It is true that at the beginning of this century conservation was the eccentric pursuit of a very small minority. There were only four National Parks in the world, but all four were in the United States and two of them in California, so if anyone knew about National Parks, it must have been the scientists from the California Academy of Sciences. Yet ... they did nothing — or rather they made things worse. Convinced that it was only a matter of time before much of the Galápagos wildlife became extinct, they ... deliberately collected as much as they could of what was left for preservation in museums and zoos. Today this seems misguided, but those were the men on the spot at the time; they were as deeply concerned about nature as any of their contemporaries and on the evidence available, they judged that the situation in the Galápagos was so hopeless that there was no better course."

[[Personnel with Dark-rumped petrel]. 30 Feb. 97]



"Between the two world wars, the decline continued. Several of the luxurious yachts, which made the increasingly fashionable cruise to the islands, offered hospitality to scientists anxious to study the flora and fauna before its final eclipse; they added to knowledge, but their collections reduced the surviving species still further. Yet in the nineteen-thirties a change of attitude in scientific circles was becoming apparent. The fact that the centenary of Charles Darwin's visit fell in 1935 was probably no more than a catalytic agent — but a most useful one. Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, writer and naturalist, with Ecuadorean, North American and British support, organized a memorial expedition and erected a monument to Darwin, near the spot where he first landed on Chatham Island. This pious tribute was of less importance to the organizers than their hope of making a start with conservation."

[Whish - drawing. 35]



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"The government of Ecuador joined the celebrations and brought out a special Galápagos issue of stamps. Much more important, the President issued a decree completely banning the export of a list of protected animals and birds, severely controlling the introduction of domestic animals, and establishing nature reserves on a number of islands. But this far-sighted law had little or no immediate effect, if only because there was no administrative organization on the archipelago with the knowledge, or for that matter the staff, to enforce the decree. Señora de Rendón mentions that in 1940 she saw giant tortoises in a pen at Chatham, waiting to be sold to the next visiting ship; the pen was not many yards away from the governor's office. It was difficult to convince officials, not to mention settlers and visitors, that the new law was not a lot of nonsense."

[[Rearing tortoises]. 1 May 99]



"On the international front, good intentions likewise produced no immediate results. The Galápagos Committee of London, headed by Sir Julian Huxley, was anxious to set up a permanent scientific station in the islands, but war came in 1939 before sufficient support had been rallied. In the United States, Dr. Waldo Schmitt continued the struggle until, like so much else, his plan was swept away by Pearl Harbour."

[[Rearing tortoises]. 7 May 99]



"It was not until ten years after the Second World War that a new effort to save the Galápagos was begun. By that time, the idea of conservation was gaining an increasing number of supporters in many parts of the world. In 1955, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) sent Dr. I. Eibl-Eibesfeldt to the Galápagos on a fact-finding mission."

[[Rearing tortoises]. 9 May 99]



"Two years later, alarmed by his reports, the IUCN, together with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Council for Bird Preservation, the New York Zoological Society and *Life* Magazine, financed another mission, which included Dr. Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Dr. Robert I. Bowman, to carry the investigations further and to choose a site for a permanent biological station with the approval of the Ecuadorean Government."

[Tortoise rearing centre. Pulling out eggs. Española tortoises. D. Sutherland. 1992. 33. Dec. 92 F02]





"Again, a centenary —that of the pronouncement of Darwin's theory of evolution in 1858— acted as a catalyst, and the International Zoological Congress of 1958 set up a Galápagos Committee. Out of this committee arose The Charles Darwin Foundation for the Galapagos Islands, an international body which was established in 1959 under Belgian law, thanks to the zeal of a number of organizations and individuals and particularly to Professor Victor Van Straelen, who became the first president of the Foundation."

[Sarah Darwin pulling down cinchona. Sta. Cruz. 471. 4 Mar. 96]



SENSITIVITY

HIGH



BATT. TEST

TONE



A  
B  
C  
D  
E

KC

KC

KC

KC

D.F.

SENSE

LV



NV

SW

"The Government of Ecuador secured the support of UNESCO; several scientific bodies in Europe and North America pledged assistance and within a few months, the Foundation's representatives landed at Academy Bay on Indefatigable Island and began the establishment of the Research Station."

[[Mouse among scientific equipment]. 25]



"The early years of the Station, when it was under the direction first of M. Raymond Lévêque and then of Dr. André Brosset, might be called the heroic period, though some will maintain that scientific and conservation work in the Galápagos will always demand a good measure of heroism. Suffice it to say that in spite of all the obstacles, the little station arose amid the lava slabs and cactus."

[12]



"When the official opening took place in 1964, admirably marshalled by Dr. Harold J. Coolidge, the sweltering dignitaries could admire the laboratory, library, meteorological and seismological installations and even some simple accommodation for staff and visiting scientists. Ecuador was represented by two members of its ruling Military Junta and its Minister for Foreign Affairs, various European countries and the United States by their ambassadors, and California by the largest collection of scientists ever embarked in a single ship."

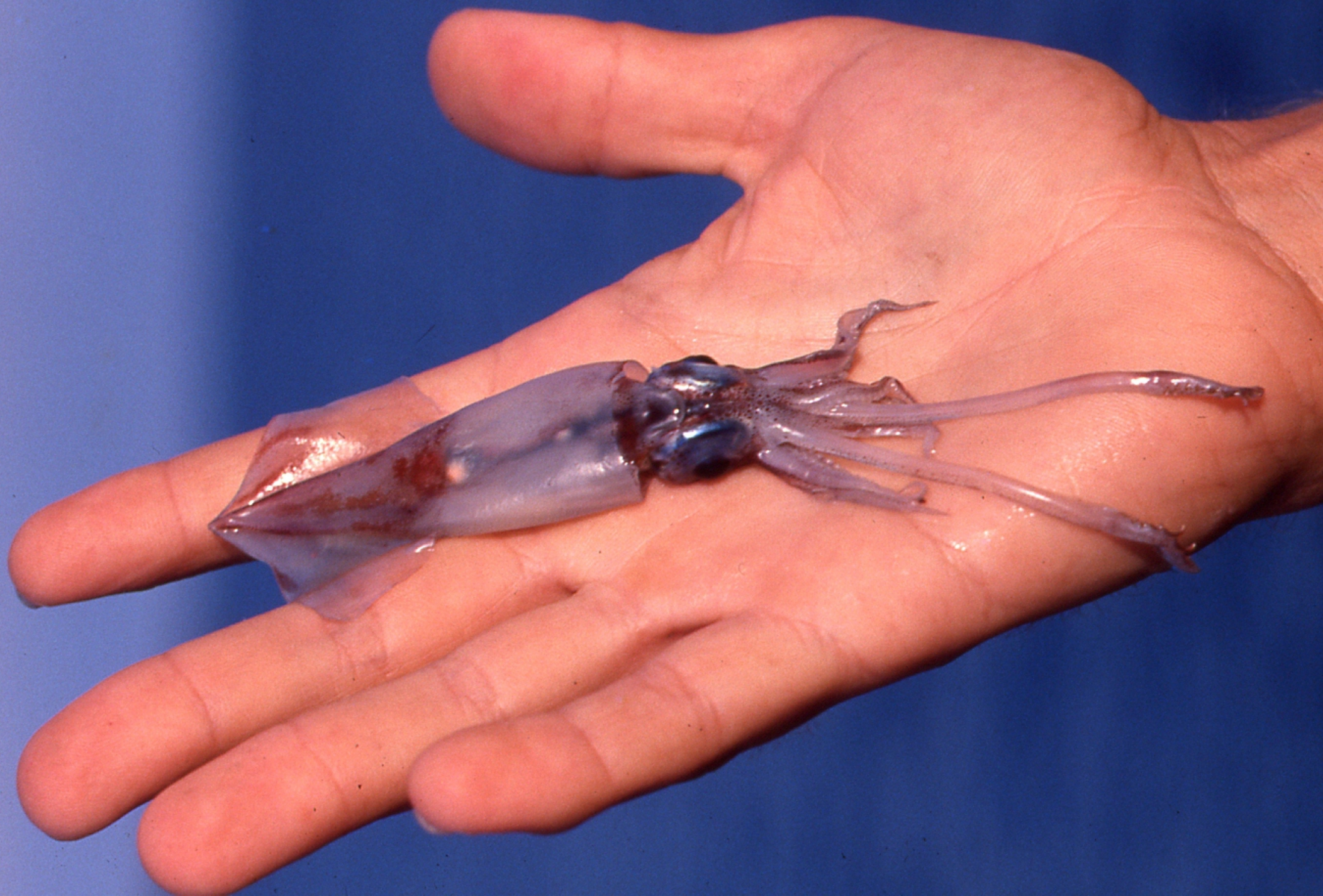
[Advancing [...] new cone. March 1995. 22 Jun. 95 N11]





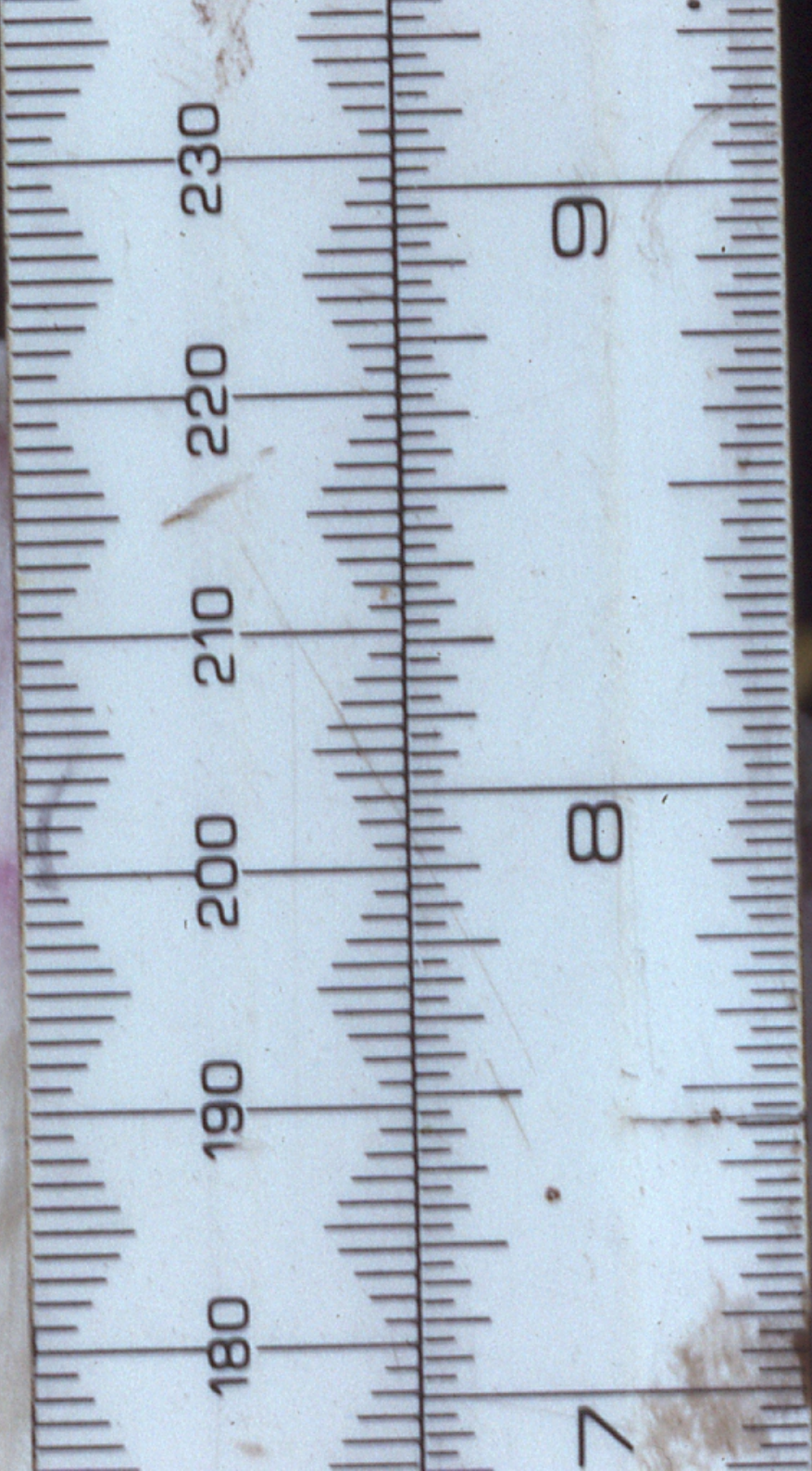
"Many of the supporting organizations sent delegates. Charles Darwin's granddaughter, Lady Barlow, was unable to undertake the arduous journey, but the family was represented by her son. For similar reasons, the Foundation's Honorary President, Sir Julian Huxley, could not be present, but Professor Van Straelen came all the way from Belgium to preside over the happy event for which he was so largely responsible. It was his last voyage, and he died not many days after seeing the first fruits of his great endeavour. The presidency of the Foundation passed into the able hands of Professor Jean Dorst."

[31 Sep 86 P12]



"The purposes of the Foundation can be grouped under two main headings: promoting scientific research and advising the government on conservation matters. However, as the government at first lacked any conservancy organisation, the Foundation became by consent more actively involved in protection than had originally been contemplated. It went to work from the very beginning without waiting for buildings and adequate equipment."

[Small squid. Galapagos]



"Any valid conservation programme involves much fundamental and applied ecological research. Ten years of intensive work has taught us much about the wildlife of the Galápagos and its inhabitants, but it has also made clear how much is still to be learned. Only people who have not penetrated the waterless wildernesses of the more remote peaks will be surprised at the new discoveries made as late as 1970 — and that doubtless will be made in the years to come."

[Coral growth. 17 May 94]



"On the scientific side, the Research Station has been a centre of continuous activity since its very beginning. The Darwin Foundation is a thoroughly international body. In addition to the unflagging aid of UNESCO and the World Wildlife Fund, it has received regular financial support from several national scientific bodies in Europe and North America. The scientists who make use of its facilities in the Galápagos come from all parts of the world and their publications yearly enrich science. Most of them are not directly concerned with conservation, but they make their contributions, as all ecological knowledge is grist to the conservationist's mill."

[Fabian with [whale] vertebrae. Rabida. 9 Mar. 96 N15]





"Perhaps the Research Station's greatest contribution is the simple fact that it is there. For centuries, the unique assets of the Galápagos were allowed to be despoiled because there was nobody responsible for preventing this despoliation. The pessimism of the early part of our own century was followed between the wars by a period of good intentions, but as there was no national or international organization to put the good intentions into effect, the decline continued. For the last ten years, there has been a body on the spot, which could at least notify authorities when damage was being done and suggest how best to put things right."

[Shark fins. 469]



"As an international body, the Foundation, of course, has no police powers but its constant patrols round the scattered islands in the execution of its scientific duties have had a salutary effect. These patrols were greatly facilitated when various bodies and individuals combined to present the Foundation with a Cornish lugger, named *Beagle II*."

[[Scientists in Galapagos]. 32]



Aún Estamos a Tiempo de Proteger  
La Naturaleza de Galápagos.

There is Still Time to Save  
The Wildlife of Galapagos.

"Complacency would be unpardonable, but ten years of uphill work have shown how much can be achieved as well as how much remains to be done. The presence of the Foundation may well have marked a turning point in the history of the archipelago."

[[Sign]. 465. 4 May 96 N12]







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**Charles Darwin**  
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GALAPAGOS