

## Tour Report

# Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine

2 – 15 June 2022

Medium groundfinch



Galapagos fur seal



Sally Lightfoot crab



Waved albatross



Compiled by Chris Breen

**Day 1: London Heathrow to Quito (via Amsterdam)**

**Thursday 2 June 2022**

*Weather: mostly clear skies with the odd snow shower, a light wind and -7° C*

Chris was at Quito airport to welcome the group as they arrived from the UK. The weather was clear on arrival.

It was about a 45-minute drive from the airport into the Latin Quarter of Quito where we were staying at Casona de la Ronda. After everyone had settled into their rooms, we went to an excellent restaurant a short walk down the road for dinner and a drink before returning to the hotel for an early night – it had been a long day and it was going to be an early start in the morning.

**Day 2: San Cristobal**

**Friday 3 June 2022**

*Weather – cool and muggy!*

We gathered in the hotel foyer, picked up our packed breakfast and were on the coach to the airport by 6:00. Our flight departed at 9:30 and we landed in the Galapagos at about midday where Mark and Juan were waiting for us. We put our baggage in the back of a pick-up truck, jumped onto the coach and went straight to the harbour. As we walked along the jetty, we were treated to the sight of sea lions in and around the rocks, and even a lava heron that had just caught a crab. We jumped on the Zodiacs (pangas) to get over to Beluga – our home for the next 13 days – with magnificent frigatebirds overhead.



We settled into our cabins and had our first onboard lunch before getting ourselves ready to return to shore and walk through town to our bus. Once onboard the bus we were going to stop at El Junco for a walk to a collapsed volcano but the mist had come down and the visibility was poor, so we carried on to the tortoise centre. Almost straight away we saw small ground finch and yellow warbler and San Cristobal mockingbird and Juan told us about the tortoises that are being hatched here before being released into the wild when

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

they are about eight years old. On our return, we stopped in town to buy a postcard or two and have a quick beer before heading back to the boat.

Dinner followed – everyone was exhausted – and afterwards, Juan ran through a bird list, and gave us a briefing in respect of tomorrow. Mark did a short presentation on photographic tips and tricks, and everyone retired for an early night.

### Day 3: Espanola

Saturday 4 June 2022

*Weather – overcast at first, but clear sunny skies followed.*

It was little overcast when we woke up this morning in Gardner Bay. After breakfast Mark did a short GoPro workshop on the sundeck, we then got ready, donned our life jackets and headed over the beach – most of us barefoot. This was our first wet landing. A pristine white beach on the fringe of an azure-blue sea. There were a few other boats in the bay. We were able to split up and wander along the beach to photograph the sea lions, marine iguanas, Sally Lightfoot crabs and San Cristobal lava lizards. Overhead we had magnificent frigatebirds, brown pelicans, and blue-footed boobies.



After a couple of hours, we took to the Zodiacs and headed back to Beluga for a coffee and some fresh fruit before putting on our wetsuits and heading to the other side of the bay for our first snorkelling trip of the voyage. It's one thing seeing and photographing sea lions on land, quite another being in the water with them and watching them play around us as we snorkelled along the rocky cliff face. For some of the group, this was their first experience of snorkelling and everyone who went in had fabulous views of a whole range of fish. One of the especially playful sea lions kept swimming to the seabed, picking up a shell and taking it halfway to the surface before dropping it and catching it before it reached the bottom. After an hour or so in the water, we returned to Beluga for a well-earned lunch of soup, fish and dessert.

This afternoon's visit was to Punta Suarez – perhaps one of the most wonderful sites in the whole of the Galapagos.

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

The steps were quite wet and the sea quite 'lumpy', but we managed to land safely and as we walked to the end of the landing area we could see sea lions and marine iguanas, which we stopped to photograph, before moving over to the next small section of beach where there were more sea lions and iguanas, as well as a pelican standing on a promontory preening.

As we made our way along the path there were more marine iguanas, an Espanola lava lizard, and a couple of Galapagos doves. Overhead were magnificent frigatebirds, swallow-tailed gulls and Nazca boobies. We also saw our first nesting waved albatrosses – very difficult to pass them by without taking (many!) photographs. We climbed down a particularly rocky section of boulders which was occupied by lots of nesting Nazca boobies, and then walked up to another waved albatross nesting area and their 'runway'.



The whole of this incredible area is really a feast for the senses, and it is difficult to know where to point your binoculars or camera. We were back at the jetty just as the sun was going down after a tremendous landing at one of the Galapagos' most iconic landing sites. Back on board, we met in the bar for a drink and dinner, and then we did our 'homework' with Juan recording everything we had seen during the day. Everyone was exhausted, and it was a good time to get an early night.

**Day 4: Floreana**

**Sunday 5 June 2022**

*Weather – overcast at first, then sunny, and later misty and light drizzle.*

Breakfast was at 7:00 this morning and we were in the Zodiacs and onshore at Punta Cormorant by 8:00. Almost as soon as we landed, we saw a great blue heron in fabulous light sat at the top of the dunes behind the beach – it was a great photo opportunity. We also saw two or three pairs of blue-footed boobies that were nesting and spent some time with one pair that were doing their mating dance. The sand at our landing site was a derivative of the volcano and a chestnut brown colour as a result. We walked back along the beach and began along the path to the lagoon and had an excellent sighting of a yellow warbler. As we continued along the track, we could see the large lagoon ahead of us and a flock of Galapagos flamingos very close to

**Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)**

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

the shore. At least one was an immature flamingo although it was just beginning to come into its adult colours and had pink knees and the beginnings of some pink feathers on its back.



As we walked along the track to the white sandy beach, we were photographing tiny blue butterflies, monarch butterflies and a Floreana lava lizard (which was quite different in appearance from the lava lizards that we were looking at yesterday).

We walked along the shoreline looking at stingrays and black-tipped sharks that were coming into the very shallow water. We then walked back across the island to our landing site and were watching blue-footed boobies diving into the water at high speed as we waited for the pangas.

Back to Beluga for a quick coffee and then we got ourselves ready to go snorkelling at Devil's Crown. The currents are quite strong here, so we were 'drift snorkelling', and the water was quite rough, so it didn't work for everyone, but those that took the plunge enjoyed it. There was a white-tipped reef shark on the seabed almost as soon as we got in the water, yellow-tailed surgeon fish, and towards the end of our snorkel a sea lion (not as friendly as yesterday's!) and a green turtle. The Galapagos shearwaters were flying in large numbers around the cliffs too.

As we were getting back into the pangas we spotted some bottlenose dolphins and as we motored back towards Beluga, we realised that they were everywhere. They were very interested in us, and playful and rode the bow wave of the pangas, sometimes five, six, seven or more at a time. Mark estimated there to be 200+ in the group – it was a massive highlight of the day!

Lunch was delicious once again and, after a little time to relax, we were back in the Zodiacs for a cruise around Post Office Bay. The weather was overcast and the sky quite dark which made for some excellent photographs of the nearby wildlife which included a couple of beach master sealions protecting their beaches and their small harems, ruddy turnstone, sanderling, Sally Lightfoot crabs, and of course marine iguanas.

After an hour or so we landed on the beach and went to the post barrel – Ecuador's first ever post office. After posting cards in the barrel and putting our own cards in the barrel we moved up the path, found somewhere to sit and Juan told the story of the toothless, naked, philosopher and the serial killer!

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

Back to the beach for short while, and then we returned to the Beluga to freshen up for drinks and were introduced to the captain and his crew before having dinner. We did our 'homework' with Juan (recording the day's sightings and having a briefing for tomorrow's events), and then everyone retired – exhausted – after an excellent day.

**Day 5: Santa Cruz – Dragon Hill & Santiago – Sullivan Bay**

**Monday 6 June 2022**

*Weather – overcast, muggy*

Breakfast was at 7:00 this morning and we were all ready to head out by 8:00 – our first activity being footfall on Santa Cruz, an island famous for the Charles Darwin Research Center. Today, however, we landed on the north-western side of the island at Dragon Hill (Cerro Dragon) where there is a population of land iguanas. It was an overcast day, and the iguanas certainly didn't disappoint us!

However, first, we walked to the small brackish lagoon and were looking at a yellow-crowned night heron hunting, its shape reflecting in the shallow water. As we walked away from the lagoon we saw our first land iguana, lying out on the path trying to take in as much sun and warmth as possible.



Further along, the trail was a fully grown female, then a male and a female, and then another male that was particularly obliging in terms of allowing us to photograph him. There were at least another three or four along the path to the viewpoint. We also saw cactus finch, medium ground finch and small ground finch as well as sulphur-coloured butterflies collecting nectar, and timber bees filling up their pollen sacs. We also saw evidence of feral cats and we could hear feral goats in the distance – neither of which are good news for the endemic flora and fauna.

We returned to Beluga shortly after 11:00 and a number of us decided to swim in the clear azure-coloured water around the boat jumping off the side of the boat. It was a tremendous way to end the morning – the water was clear and fresh. Lunch followed at midday and then we headed north for Santiago Island and a snorkelling trip in Sullivan Bay.

Mark did a post-lunch presentation about Charles Darwin and shortly afterwards we arrived at Sullivan Bay. We got into our snorkelling gear and headed towards the shore before dropping into the water. The water was fairly quiet in respect of the larger wildlife (although a few of us saw a white-tipped reef shark and a

**Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)**

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

penguin or two swimming past) but there were large numbers of colourful fish including parrot fish and the ever-present yellow-tailed surgeon fish.

After returning to the Beluga and hanging out our wetsuits to dry on the bow we gathered camera gear and went ashore at Sullivan Bay to look at the pahoehoe lava flow that was formed about 120 years ago. It has to be seen to be believed as it looks as though it has only just appeared. We learned about carpet weed, one of the first plants to colonise the area, and the single small cactus that is amongst the seven square kilometres of lava flow. Juan took us to a spot where we lay down for a 'back massage' and had a group photo. The light falling on the island of Bartolome was stunning this afternoon and showed off the rich reds and deep blacks of the rocks and the lava flows.



Unfortunately, as the light was beginning to fade, we needed to get back to the boat for a well-earned drink and dinner. After dinner and after Juan had run through the species checklist and our plan for tomorrow,

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

Mark and Chris showed 20 of each of their favourite photos from the past couple of days and reminisced about what we had seen when. Then it was time for bed.

Next stop Genovesa!

## **Day 6: Genovesa – Darwin Bay and Prince Phillip Steps**

**Tuesday 7 June 2022**

*Weather – sunny, warm and with fairly high winds*

After six hours or so of sailing overnight we awoke in Darwin Bay on the south-western side of Genovesa. We had breakfast at 7:00 and were in the zodiacs by 8:00 for a beach landing and were immediately greeted by a small group of Galapagos sealions. A quick look around and we could see swallow-tailed gulls, red-footed boobies, the occasional lava gull, plenty of Galapagos doves, and most significantly great frigatebirds. Many of the males had their bright red pouches puffed up fully and were pointing their bills skyward in the hope of being the 'most attractive' to the females.

We walked (very) slowly along the track photographing and observing what we could – there was so much to see it was difficult to know where to point the camera! The red-footed boobies have rather untidy nests off the ground in the branches of the mangroves and appear to be completely oblivious to our presence. While mostly brown in colour, the most beautiful of the red-footed boobies are those that are in a white morph – which accounts for about 5% of the population here.

The tide was in, so we took off our shoes and waded through a shallow channel, with a small sea cliff on our left and booby-filled mangrove on our right. Once through the short stretch of water, we came out on a lava flow and walked for another 100 metres or so until we came to a nice viewpoint over the bay. We were onshore for an extended period and returned to Beluga at about 11:00. There was just about time to download images in time for lunch at 12:00.

Post-lunch we got ourselves ready for this afternoon's landing – at El Barranco or Prince Phillips Steps. It was a 30-minute zodiac ride from Beluga and along the way we saw hundreds of Galapagos shearwaters, frigatebirds in flight, some red-billed tropic birds and ... Galapagos fur seals – the first of the trip – relaxing on the rocks and three playing in the water.

El Barranco is another of the Galapagos' most incredible landing sites. Not the easiest place to land – especially when the sea is a bit rough – but once on land, and after climbing the steps that take you to the plateau at the top of the cliffs it is well worthwhile! Nesting frigatebirds, nesting boobies – all three species, and thousands and thousands of Galapagos storm petrels flying round at high speed. In fact, this is the best place in the Galapagos to see them and there are thought to be in the region of 200,000 pairs here. The other bird of great note that lives here is Galapagos short-eared owl – and we saw one at the beginning of our walk and right at the end too! There was plenty of evidence of their hunting processes with storm petrel wings, feathers and bones littering the path.

We retraced our steps as the sun was going down and set off down the steep steps again, where the Zodiacs were waiting for us and returned to Beluga for a drink and dinner.

## **Day 7: Santa Cruz – Black Turtle Cove, the Highlands and the Charles Darwin Research Centre**

**Wednesday 8 June 2022**

*Weather – sunny, warm at sea level, cooler and overcast in the highlands.*

Today we had a very different start (in fact a very different day altogether) – up at 5:30 for a quick coffee and into the Zodiacs at 6:00 for a cruise around the mangroves of Black Turtle Cove. The water was completely still and calm and we could hear the sounds of the birds – it was incredibly peaceful.

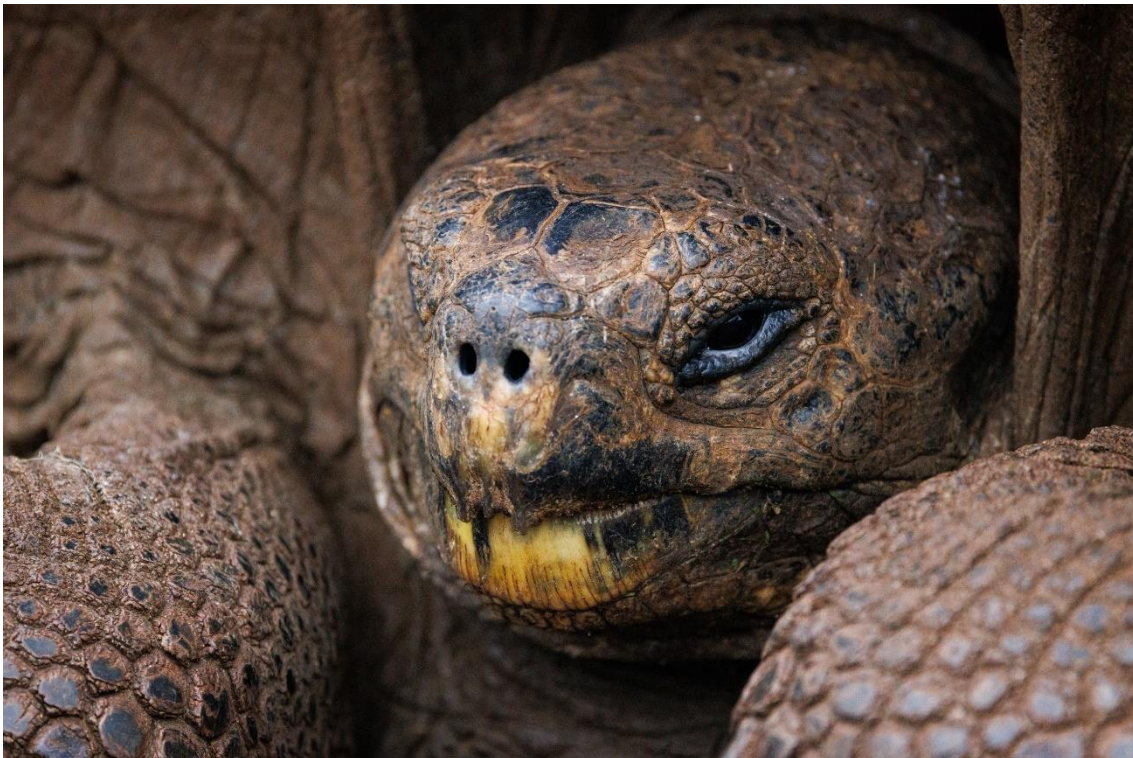
**Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)**

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

We saw the head of a green turtle emerge from the water and across the other side of the lagoon, we could see the wing tips of some rays breaking the surface of the water. As we headed over to them, we saw four spotted eagle rays right next to the panga. Then as we passed through a narrow channel, we saw rays – six or seven golden cow rays swimming effortlessly in a 'squadron'. There were also brown noddies, brown pelicans, yellow warbler, lava heron and even a flamingo flying overhead.

We were back on-board Beluga for breakfast at 7ish and then, breakfast over, we got ourselves ready to head up into the highlands ... that meant putting our life-jackets on again and transferring to shore by Zodiac where we were met by a coach that drove us first to a pair of huge and spectacular sinkholes (or pit craters) each of which is 40-50 metres deep and which were formed nearly 800 million years ago when volcanic magma cooled and contracted. It is home to mosses, ferns, bushes and many trees.

From the sinkhole, we then drove to a private farm which is inhabited by a significant number of giant tortoises. They are completely free to come and go as they please, but the habitat is clearly perfect for them and they are there in significant numbers, and as with all of the other wildlife on the Galapagos, they are completely unconcerned by our presence.



After the tortoises, we went the short distance to some nearby lava tubes where Juan thought there was an opportunity to see barn owl – which sure enough there was!

We headed on to Enchanted Galapagos Lodge for a delicious lunch in very relaxing surroundings and we had an opportunity to chill out for a while before re-boarding the coach and driving to Puerto Ayora and the Charles Darwin Research Centre. Before we went into the centre we photographed marine iguanas on the road. We walked along an avenue of button mangroves to the Centre and Juan talked to us about the conservation efforts of the Centre in respect of the island's giant tortoises particularly. There are a number of different 'pens' that are home to young tortoises from each of the different islands with a view to ensuring that they don't become extinct. Once they reach a certain age and can fend for themselves, they are then released into the wild on their original island. Of particular interest perhaps were the 'giraffe' tortoises that have evolved with much longer legs and a saddle-shaped carapace to enable them to reach up high and feed. We were also able to see Lonesome George – now stuffed! – and hear the story of his last couple of decades.

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

From the Charles Darwin Research Centre, we walked into town where we had some free time to explore (and buy locally produced chocolate!), before returning to the northern part of the island to catch a Zodiac transfer to Beluga for dinner.

It was a tremendous day today, and unlike any of the others so far!

### **Day 8: Sombrero Chino & Rabida**

**Thursday 9 June 2022**

*Weather – warm and overcast.*

This morning was superb (but then they all have been so far!). Breakfast at 7:00 and in the Zodiacs by 8:00 for a wet landing at Sombrero Chino (Chinese Hat), a small island off the south-east coast of Santiago, so named because of its shape. We were in the Zodiacs close to shore on the Santiago side of the small channel that separates the islands, and someone spotted Galapagos penguins swimming.



Sombrero Chino is a small volcanic island with one small white sandy beach made of corals. A short distance inland it quickly turns to black volcanic rocks many of which are covered by beautiful red, orange and green vegetation. It is known as a place of young sea lions and flamingos are found on the brackish lagoon behind the beach.

Needless to say, we were greeted at the beach by a young sea lion and on a nearby rock, a brown pelican was on patrol. We were on land for nearly two hours, photographing groups of young marine iguanas basking in the sun. We also had some beautiful (and plentiful!) Sally Lightfoot crabs looking resplendent on the black rocks.

Back onboard Beluga we had a coffee and a snack before getting kitted out in wetsuits and returning to the channel for the first snorkelling trip of the day. Those of us that snorkelled today were of the view that it was possibly the best snorkelling outing of the trip so far. The water was crystal clear, and it was teeming with fish. Yellow-tailed surgeons, bicoloured and blue-chinned parrotfish, king angelfish, and white-tipped reef sharks were all present.

After an hour of snorkelling, it was time to get back into the Zodiacs and return to Beluga for lunch after which we motored for just over an hour to reach Rabida, the site of our next snorkelling excursion and our next landing.

All in wetsuits, or if not, in lifejackets and onboard the Zodiacs, we headed towards the volcanic red beach of Rabida. We also saw - above the water - brown noddys, marine iguanas and brown pelicans. It was possibly the best snorkel so far ... and then we returned to the Beluga to get changed, have a quick coffee and head out for a landing on Rabida.

**Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)**

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)



The light was magnificent and the contrast between the sandy colour of the sea lions and the rich, rusty red sand was magnificent. We walked inland a little, to a brackish lagoon and almost immediately saw a group of Galapagos flamingos, and the light was getting better and better. A couple of the flamingos were on nests, and one was standing, attending to its egg as we arrived. Staying with the flamingos for some time everyone had an opportunity to get some wonderful photos. We walked the entire loop trail on Rabida as the sun was gradually setting.

Back onboard Beluga there was time for a shower for some, and a beer or two on the sundeck. We then sat down for another delicious dinner, and afterwards went through the species list and had a briefing from Juan about tomorrow. At around 21:00, the skipper pulled up the anchor and we set sail for Puerto Villamil where we arrived the following morning.

**Day 9: Isabela, Puerto Villamil**

**Friday 10 June 2022**

*Weather – clear, warm.*

We woke up in Puerto Villamil – the harbour was full of boats, and the sea was shallow and a spectacular turquoise colour. We jumped in the Zodiacs shortly after breakfast and headed over to the town jetty where we boarded our small bus and headed inland to Volcan Sierra Negra.

Puerto Villamil is a small town – the only town on Isabela – that is home to around 3,000 people. There is a school, a few restaurants and bars and little else. The roads in town are sandy and not tarmacked – it is clearly a fairly sleepy place! We were dropped off at a place called ‘El Cura’ (The Priest) and before we began our walk to the crater Juan took out a selection of plastic toys from his bag, some rocks from the ground, and recreated the Galapagos archipelago and explained to us the system of ocean currents and how the Galapagos formed and how the various animals of the Galapagos arrived here.

It was cool and foggy on the mountain and our 3.5-kilometre walk was a gentle gradient but there was little chance of seeing anything much as we were walking in quite thick mist. We hoped that as we approached the edge of the crater, the mist we had been walking through would have cleared, but alas it wasn't to be, and the crater was shrouded in cloud. The crater itself is about 10 kilometres wide and is second only in size to the Ngorongoro Crater in Tanzania. The last eruption here was only in 2017, so the volcanic lava on the

**Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)**

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

crater floor is extremely fresh. We headed back down the mountain in our bus, but the bus driver stopped on the way as he had seen a vermillion flycatcher – we all got excellent views. Once back in Puerto Villamil the Zodiacs were waiting to take us back to Beluga for lunch. The port was busy with boats coming in and out fetching and carrying tourists and bore resemblance to the Maldives!

After lunch, we came back to Puerto Villamil, this time to go to the tortoise breeding and research centre. Not a zoo by any stretch of the imagination, instead this is where the tortoises were placed after having been removed from the slopes of Sierra Negra following an accidental fire in the 1980s that was accidentally started by a camper, and which raged for some months before it was finally extinguished. We saw tortoises that were two or three years old, 30 or 40 years old and even some that were 100+ years old.



As we walked into the centre along the mangrove boardwalk we had yellow warblers, pintails, black stilts and of course the ever-present marine iguanas. The bus came to collect us from the breeding centre and took us back into town and down to the beach where a number of us were able to enjoy a swim in the turquoise waters and amongst the waves. This was followed by liquid refreshment in the form of a 'Coco Loco' ... a cooled coconut with its top cut off and filled to the brim with white rum. Delicious!

We caught up with Juan, collected our cleaned and ironed laundry and returned to the Beluga for dinner as the sun was setting. Juan ran through the bird and mammal list after dinner and we all retired early in anticipation of another excellent day tomorrow – first stop, Punta Moreno.

**Day 10: Isabela - Punta Moreno, Elizabeth Bay**

**Saturday 11 June 2022**

*Weather – sunny, partly cloudy, warm.*

Six hours of sailing overnight and we awoke in Punta Moreno on the western side of Isabela. After breakfast, we jumped into the pangas and headed towards the rocks and the mangroves to see what was there. We had a spectacular morning of wildlife – brown pelicans (some of which were youngsters that Juan had seen as chicks eight weeks ago), flightless cormorants (at least two sitting on nests), a common tern (which is uncommon here!), a couple of penguins (at least one of which was posing beautifully on a rock), and rays – spotted eagle rays, golden cow-nosed rays and more spotted eagle rays, though this time without their white spots (with long tails at least twice the length of the body, with a white tip).

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

On another face of the 'penguin' rock were scores of marine iguanas basking in the light, recharging their batteries, clambering over one another, sleeping on one another, ejecting salt through their nostrils and constantly adjusting their positions.

We also had an excellent sighting of a common tern – which isn't very common here and is generally only recorded between November and April.



Back to the Beluga for a coffee and fruit, and then we got changed for a snorkelling trip. The water was the coldest it's been when we got in at Punta Moreno – even in wetsuits. But ... it surely ranks as the very best snorkelling any of us have done – and I am not sure we knew quite what to expect. Immediately we got in we saw a turtle, and then a second one. Both feeding on the seaweed right at the edge of the ocean and the shore, on volcanic rock. A quick scan revealed more turtles and none of them seemed even slightly concerned by us being there. It was incredible to be able to float above them, watching them feed and being pushed one way or another by a wave as the turtles were rocking under the water in the currents. Over the area that we were snorkelling, there must have been 50 to 100 turtles – mostly female - it was an incredible sight. There were also a couple of penguins in the water too, and at least one sighting of a sea lion. It was utterly magical. A snorkelling trip that none of us will ever forget and none of us really wanted it to end.

Back onboard Beluga we showered and changed before lunch and then the captain set us on course for Elizabeth Bay. Shortly after we began moving Mark did a short presentation on the sundeck about the ocean currents in the Galapagos archipelago and how they have created such a rich fauna and flora.

After lunch, we jumped into the Zodiacs to explore the nearby mangroves of Elizabeth Bay. Before we got there, we unhooked the four kayaks from the back of the zodiac and four of the group got in and were cast off...They followed the two Zodiacs on into the mangroves, and once we were in the mangroves our Zodiac drivers cut the engines and we just paddled – listening to the sounds of the birds and the rustling of the leaves in the wind.

A young lava heron sitting on a mangrove root just above the water allowed us to get within a few inches and at the foot of the mangroves where he sat was a smallish green turtle – yellow morph. There were so many turtles here, of all ages and sizes! After an hour or so of kayaking, we did a swap, with other group

**Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)**

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

members taking over the kayaks. As we were heading back out of the mangroves, we ducked into one of its remote corners where we could hear a penguin calling – most likely the call of an amorous male to a female. As we went into this protected area of the mangrove forest we saw (what we assumed to be) a female lying on a rock, and a male standing next to her.

One of the group then swapped out of her kayak and gave it to Chris and then all of the kayakers headed back to Beluga which was quite strenuous as the sea was getting choppy as we got closer to the boat, and we had a sideways wind that was pushing us away from where we wanted to go. Everyone made it safely back, however.

We arrived back at Beluga, got changed and then enjoyed a beer upstairs on the sundeck looking at Galapagos Petrel. At 18:30 Mark gave the second part of his two-part lecture on Charles Darwin.

### Day 11: Isabela - Urbina Bay & Tagus Cove

Sunday 12 June 2022

*Weather – sunny, slightly cloudy, warm.*

The beach at Urbina Bay is very steep and landing could have been a challenge if the sea was choppy, but we were lucky today and the water was almost flat and calm. By the time we got to the beach at just after 8:00, a group from one of the other boats had also just arrived. Juan had known about the other group, and not wanting us to clash, he led us on foot around the bay looking at Sally Lightfoot crabs and yellow warblers, and for some, photographing blue-footed boobies diving into the sea at high speed. By the time we had finished our session on the rocks and returned to the beach the other party was disappearing and we had the trail to ourselves.

We couldn't walk to the very top of the beach as it was a turtle nesting area, and we could see from the tracks in the sand that one had been up to the nesting area early this morning. We walked along the track behind the beach and almost immediately saw the giant tortoise endemic to this part of Isabela – in fact, a couple of them, both females. They specialise in eating the small 'apples' from the many trees on this part of the island – as was evident from their droppings!

Further on and we were looking at a colourful land iguana – which although the same species as the one on Santa Cruz, is significantly larger, and is known to be the largest of the land iguanas in the Galapagos archipelago.

Small and medium ground finches, yellow warblers, and the Galapagos mockingbird sang beautifully as they accompanied us on our short walk around this part of the island. We finally got back to the black sandy beach at around 11:00, in time for a quick swim with the occasional turtle head breaking the surface of the water



Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

and even a small group of young brown 'downy' pelicans waiting at the shore. Then it was time to pile into our Zodiacs and return to 'the mothership' for another delicious lunch. Just as we were being served homemade passionfruit ice cream there was a shout of "dolphins" and we all went running out to see a huge number of bottlenose dolphins around the boat – near and far. They spent 10- or 15-minutes bow-riding and we watched some of the more distant dolphins leaping completely clear of the water. Post lunch, as we were motoring the two hours or so to Tagus Cove, Mark did a short session on 'focussing' with cameras.

The snorkelling in the Galapagos is without doubt world-class, and after lunch, we donned our wetsuits and headed for the Zodiacs and went out past the entrance to the cove. Several of us were snorkelling, and one of the group opted to do a Zodiac cruise. The visibility wasn't great, to begin with, but that was largely due to the cooler water and the increased nutrients in the water ... which of course makes it good for many of the sea-dwelling creatures. Almost as soon as the snorkellers got in the water there was a call of "turtle" and we swam over to where the turtle was, then we saw a second, and as with yesterday, realised that there were turtles feeding almost everywhere we looked. In addition, there were flightless cormorants, marine iguanas (on the rocks at the water's edge), pelicans, and a couple of sea lions basking in the sun on a sandy ledge. We also had a very friendly penguin that caught a fish and was swimming back and forth with it in his beak.

We arrived back at Beluga and Ivan brought us hot chocolate to the bow of the boat where we were getting out of our wetsuits. 30 minutes later we were in the Zodiacs again for a dry landing and a walk. The cove itself is named after a warship that came here in 1814 and we were here to see some of the ship's names and arrival dates that have been carved into the rocks – most notably 'Phoenix 1836', a year (or perhaps only a few months) after Charles Darwin landed in this precise spot. As we walked along the ascending trail the views got better and better. At one of the viewpoints Juan was telling us that whilst there were many things named after we in, there was nothing named after Fitzroy (the captain of The Beagle) so we took a couple of rocks and named them Fitzroy Point! After the naming ceremony (!) we continued up, looking out over the incense trees, down into Darwin's Lake and across to the cove.

We climbed to the highest point and could see a huge lava field in front of us – from an eruption in the early 1800s, and in the distance Darwin Volcano (which at 1,646 metres is the second highest volcano in the archipelago), and further on from that Wolf Volcano. In the other direction was the island of Fernandina where we will be landing tomorrow and its peak, which at 1,463 metres was hidden in the mist. As we descended, we saw plenty of mockingbirds and ground finches. Once aboard Beluga, we grabbed a drink and headed up to the sundeck to enjoy the last vestiges of light before another delicious dinner cooked by Charlie.

**Day 12: Fernandina – Punta Espinoza & Isabela – Punta Vicente Roca**

**Monday 13 June 2022**

*Weather – overcast but bright.*

What an incredible morning, what an incredible afternoon, what an incredible day we had!

At about 6:00 our captain moved Beluga across the rich waters of the Bolivar Channel to pull up close to Fernandina. We had wonderful views of the huge domed cone of the volcano, two sets of wisps of cloud that appeared to be halfway up it, and a mackerel sky above ... the sun was beginning to break through the clouds. We had breakfast and boarded the Zodiacs and headed over to our landing site at Punta Espinoza.

The landing steps which were built by the parks department are only useful at high tide due to an uplift of the land in 1975. We arrived at low tide, so there was a certain amount of delicacy required in walking over the rocks in order not to slip. The site was instantly interesting and memorable as our customary sea lion welcoming party launched into the water and playfully danced in the shallows. It wasn't long before we realised that this was going to be one of the very best landings of the trip so far (it seems to be a recurring theme!) as we were quite literally tripping over the marine iguanas that were covering the rocks. Avoiding the expansive areas of marine iguana nests, we watched as a Galapagos hawk (that mainly prey on the marine iguanas here) landed in a low bush, and another landed in a tree just beyond it.

**Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)**

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)



We walked slowly along the path to the rocks beyond and almost immediately saw Darwin's racer snake – probably a metre long. It was moving, hunting, not keen to stop for anything in its path. There were great piles of marine iguanas everywhere, in numbers we've not seen before, some of them marching towards the ocean to feed, some of them marching back out having fed, but most of them just lying flat, recharging their batteries and getting warm in the sun. There were hundreds of Sally Lightfoot crabs, more sea lions and yet more marine iguanas. On a small sandy beach at the end of the peninsular, a sea lion had recently given birth (perhaps a few hours before we got there), and we stopped and watched as the newborn was communicating with its mother and feeding.

Back onboard Beluga there was hardly time to think before we had to get into our swimming gear and wetsuits, jump into the Zodiacs again and head off for a snorkel. The first sighting as some of us jumped in was a sea lion that was fascinated by us. It was obviously blind in one eye and kept coming as close as it could to see who or what we were. It hooked up with a friend and between the two of them, they followed us down the coast as we snorkelled for 15 or 20 minutes, darting backwards and forwards staring into our masks and then heading off at high speed in magical twists and turns. The rocks were shallow and covered in green algae and as we made our way along the coast we saw marine iguanas feeding, and swimming through the surf – what an incredible sight! There were penguins, flightless cormorants whizzing past, and turtles everywhere. Clearly, this spot is a marine animal paradise.

Back in the Zodiacs heading to Beluga, no one could believe that we had been in the water for almost an hour – it felt like a few minutes, and we were mostly stunned into silence by how utterly incredible our morning had been. Lunch beckoned, and then we headed off to Punta Vicente Roca almost on the northern tip of Isabela.

We moored up in the bay surrounded by high-sided cliffs – in fact, we were within the walls of a caldera with beautiful vertical striations in the rocks that we later discovered were magma extrusions following volcanic activity. There was an hour or so after lunch before it was time to get into the Zodiacs and head over to the cliffs. Lots of brown noddys and blue-footed boobies on the cliff ledges, and the occasional great frigatebird. As we went along the cliff wall, we saw a couple of sealions out on a ledge, and then three large collections

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

of marine iguanas basking on the rocks. Turtles came and went, and as we passed the entrance to a fairly large cave, we saw flightless cormorants and then a young Galapagos fur seal.



It was time to get back to Beluga after an hour or so, and then (only!) 15 minutes later we were back to the same location, but this time in our snorkelling gear. The water was cool and the visibility poor so we had to stay very close to the cliffs in order to see anything, but it was a fabulous snorkel with amazing views of sea lions, brown noddys, a collection of 15 penguins on a small rocky island and a huge stone scorpionfish right at the end of our snorkel.

By 17:30 most of the group was up on the sundeck eagerly anticipating sailing over the equator. The engine slowed and as Ivan brought up drinks we waited for the boat's horn to sound as we touched the equator – 0°00.0000N – and raised a toast to a 'Happy Equator'! Juan – with guitar in hand – began to sing 'What shall we do with the drunken sailor'. The sing-a-long lasted for 20 minutes or so the sun began setting, and suddenly Tina saw something on the horizon which we realised was a gigantic pod of common dolphins – probably 500 or more as they were all around us and spread into the distance.

The perfect end to the penultimate full day of our voyage ....

**Day 13: Santiago – Buccaneer Cove & Bartolome – Pinnacle Rock**

**Tuesday 14 June 2022**

*Weather – sunny and warm.*

Sadly, this was our last full day in the Galapagos – it seems incredible that we had been onboard for 11 nights already. After an early breakfast, we explored Buccaneer Cove in the Zodiacs. This was one of the coves that Charles Darwin landed at, and it is likely that little has changed at this cove since he was here.

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

As we rounded the promontory, we were able to see brown noddys on a ledge close to the water and swallow-tailed gulls. The water was crystal clear. We worked our way along the cliff face, photographing as we went. As ever, our time disappeared far too quickly, and we were back at Beluga preparing for a snorkelling trip. In fact, we returned to the same cliff face and got in the water at the far end of the cove, working our way back to the promontory with the cliff on our left. The water was absolutely crystal clear and whilst there were no obvious turtles, the first thing that most of us saw when we got in was a white-tipped reef shark (good start!). There were countless yellow-fin surgeon fish, lots of parrot fish, sea stars and the occasional sea lion that swam past at high speed. We snorkelled to the end of the cliff and turned to the left, but almost as soon as we turned the visibility changed and the sea was quite rough so we turned back. It was like swimming in a tropical fish tank.

Back on board, there were 45 minutes or so before we had another excellent lunch. After lunch, we went up to the sun deck and Mark chatted about the Galapagos Marine Reserve and how it has recently been substantially increased in size and that the Ecuadorian government are setting a standard for others in the world to follow. As Mark was chatting we were looking out at Elliot's and wedge-tailed storm-petrels, the occasional band-rumped storm-petrel, Galapagos shearwaters, Galapagos petrels and frigatebirds that were following the boat. The weather was sunny and magnificent.

Soon we arrived at Bartolome and at about 14:30 we headed for our landing spot. Here, after Juan had encouraged a sleeping sea lion to allow us past – we walked along the boardwalk and up to the viewpoint from which we were able to see and photograph the classic Galapagos scene with Pinnacle Rock in the distance and the two beaches of Bartolome in the middle distance. It seemed a very fitting end to our last full day in the Galapagos.

As soon as we returned to Beluga a team of snorkellers got ready and went straight out for a final snorkel – this time beginning past Pinnacle Rock and working our way back to Pinnacle Rock with the shore on our right-hand side. Once again, the water was crystal clear. White-tipped reef shark was seen almost immediately and one or two people saw a turtle. There was also a huge stingray, a spotted eagle ray and a plethora of amazingly coloured fish.

Back on board, as the sun was setting, we sat up on the sun deck having sundowners and toasting the wonderful wildlife of the Galapagos and the excellent sightings that we'd had over the course of the past couple of weeks. Before dinner, the captain and some of his crew came to the bar area for a toast to our voyage. The captain said a few words as did Juan, then Chris and Mark – we all agreed that it was an incredible trip. After dinner Mark and Chris reminisced with everyone about the trip and showed some images that they had taken. It was hard to believe that we had really seen and done so much.

#### **Day 14: North Seymour**

**Wednesday 15 June 2022**

*Weather – sunny and warm.*

We were up early today for our last landing – this time it was pre-breakfast at 6:00. North Seymour has many of the special things that we have seen on other islands over the past weeks – great, and magnificent frigatebirds nesting, blue-footed boobies nesting, marine iguanas, lava lizards, sea lions and plenty of other wildlife. What a wonderful way to end our holiday.

After an hour or so, we returned to Beluga for breakfast, packed our bags and headed to the airport for our homeward flight ... With amazing memories, having made new friends and many photographic reminders of the past two weeks.

**Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)**

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

**Sign up to our e-news**

Sign up to our e-news to find out more about our tours, events, late availability, offers and tour reports at <https://www.wildlifeworldwide.com/subscribe>

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com <sup>US</sup> [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

# Checklist



	Common Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12
	<b>BIRDS</b>												
1	Galápagos penguin			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Waved albatross		✓										
3	Galápagos petrel									✓			
4	Galápagos shearwater			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Eliot's storm petrel (white-vented)			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Wedged-rumped storm petrel		✓	✓		✓							
7	Band-rumped storm petrel										✓		✓
8	Red-billed tropicbird					✓	✓	✓					
9	Flightless cormorant									✓	✓	✓	
10	Brown pelican	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Magnificent frigatebird	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Great frigatebird					✓					✓		

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com <sup>US</sup>[www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

13	Red-footed booby					✓							
14	Nazca booby		✓			✓						✓	✓
15	Blue-footed booby	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
16	White-cheeked pintail			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				
17	American (Galapagos) flamingo			✓	✓		✓	✓					
18	Great blue heron			✓			✓		✓			✓	
19	Cattle egret			✓			✓		✓	✓			
20	Lava heron	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Yellow-crowned night heron		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓
22	Galápagos hawk							✓			✓	✓	✓
23	Galápagos rail						✓						
24	Common gallinule						✓		✓				
25	Purple gallinule							✓					
26	Hudsonian whimbrel				✓							✓	
27	Wandering tattler			✓		✓						✓	
28	Black-necked stilt			✓					✓				
29	Ruddy turnstone			✓		✓			✓				
30	Sanderling			✓					✓				

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

31	Semi-palmated plover			✓									
32	Galapagos (American) oystercatcher		✓									✓	✓
33	Grey plover			✓				✓		✓			
34	Lava gull				✓	✓			✓				
35	Swallow-tailed gull		✓			✓							
36	Brown noddy			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
37	Common tern										✓		
38	Galápagos dove		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					
39	Smooth-billed ani			✓	✓		✓						
40	Galápagos short-eared owl					✓							
41	Galápagos barn owl						✓						
42	Vermillion flycatcher								✓				
43	Galápagos flycatcher			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		
44	Galápagos mockingbird				✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		
45	Espanola mockingbird		✓										
46	San Cristobal mockingbird	✓											
47	Yellow warbler			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
48	Large ground finch					✓							

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

49	Medium ground finch			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		
50	Small ground finch		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
51	Sharp-beaked ground finch					✓							
52	Common cactus finch				✓		✓						
53	Large cactus finch					✓							
54	Small tree finch						✓		✓				
55	Grey warbler finch		✓			✓							
56	Green warbler finch						✓						
	<b>MAMMALS</b>												
1	Galápagos sea lion		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Galápagos fur seal					✓						✓	
3	Common dolphin											✓	
4	Bottlenose dolphin			✓							✓		✓
	<b>REPTILES &amp; AMPHIBIANS</b>												
1	San Cristobal giant tortoise	✓											
2	Sierra negra giant tortoise								✓		✓		
3	Santa Cruz giant tortoise						✓						
4	Green sea turtle		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

5	Marine iguana (San Cristobal)	✓											
6	Marine iguana (Espanola & Floreana)		✓	✓									
7	Marine iguana(Santa Cruz)				✓		✓						✓
8	Marine iguana (Santiago)				✓	✓		✓					✓
9	Marine iguana (Genovesa)					✓							
10	Marine iguana (Isabela & Fernandina)								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Land iguana				✓						✓		
12	Isabela lava lizard								✓		✓	✓	
13	Espanola lava lizard		✓										
14	Floreana lava lizard			✓									
15	Santa Cruz lava lizard				✓		✓						✓
16	Santiago lava lizard				✓			✓					✓
17	Western Galapagos racer												✓
18	Darwin's racer												✓
	<b>SPIDERS, BUTTERFLIES, MOTHS &amp; BEES</b>												
1	Silver argiope (spider)			✓	✓								
2	Galapagos blue butterfly			✓			✓						
3	Monarch butterfly			✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

4	Long-tailed skipper				✓		✓		✓		✓		
5	Sulphur butterfly				✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		
6	Hummingbird moth										✓		
7	Hawk moth										✓		
8	Queen butterfly										✓		
9	Galapagos painted locust				✓								
10	Paper wasp								✓				
11	Galapagos carpenter bee				✓		✓		✓				
	<b>CRABS, EELS, FISH, RAYS &amp; SHARKS</b>												
1	4-eyed blenny				✓								
2	Black-striped snapper		✓										
3	Black-tipped reef shark			✓					✓				
4	Blue & golden snapper				✓								
5	Blue-chinned parrotfish		✓		✓	✓							
6	Bullseye pufferfish								✓				
7	Cortez rainbow wrasse					✓							
8	Cow-nosed golden ray						✓						
9	Dusky chubb			✓							✓		

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com <sup>US</sup> [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

10	Galapagos bullseye shark									✓			
11	Galapagos mullet					✓							
12	Galapagos octopus							✓					
13	Golden-rimmed surgeonfish				✓								
14	Green sea urchin												
15	Guineafowl pufferfish (yellow phase)			✓	✓			✓					
16	Harlequin wrasse										✓		
17	Hermit crab										✓		
18	King angelfish		✓								✓		
19	Long-tailed stingray			✓		✓							
20	Mexican chocolate-chip sea star			✓				✓					
21	Mexican streamer hogfish		✓	✓	✓			✓					
22	Needle sea urchin			✓							✓		
23	Panamic sargent major				✓	✓							
24	Pencil sea urchin										✓		
25	Pink cardinalfish		✓		✓								
26	Sally Lightfoot crab	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Spiney sea urchin										✓		

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)

28	Spot-finned blowfish				✓								
29	Spotted eagle ray						✓	✓					
30	White-tipped reef shark			✓	✓			✓					
31	Yellow-striped damselfish		✓		✓								
32	Yellow-tailed surgeonfish		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓					

Find out more about our [Galapagos Exclusive with Mark Carwardine](#) trip or [contact](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com [www.wildlifeworldwide.com](http://www.wildlifeworldwide.com)