

# Ecuador & the Galapagos Islands

Naturetrek Tour Report

24 January - 14 February 2018

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Swallow-tailed Gull



Marine Iguana



Blue-footed Booby



Common Dolphins

Report compiled by Rita Maning with advice from Tony Chandler  
Photographs by David Hammond, Chris Lewis and Rita Manning

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Tour participants: Rissel Moretti (Guide) with 16 Naturetrek clients  
Vessel 'The Beluga' with a crew of Captain, 2 first mates, 2 engineers, 1 chef, 1 steward

## Introduction

Report was kindly compiled by client Rita Maning with advice from Tony Chandler and assistance as follows:  
Snorkelling by David Hammond, Antisana by David Hammond and Birding at Sacha Lodge by Chris Lewis  
Travelling around the Galapagos Islands for a total of 721 miles in 14 days.

A 14 day trip gave us the opportunity to visit and see birds on the remoter islands which you are not able to do on shorter 5 or 7 day trips.

Flights to Quito are offered by KLM and Avianca. The Avianca flights go via Bogota and arrive earlier in the day than the KLM flights giving a few hours in Quito to wander the streets or to go to the shopping mall for any items you have forgotten. There is a good outdoor shop where we purchased a walking pole which was invaluable. On the return to the UK the KLM and the Avianca flights left at the same time but KLM arrived in London at least three hours later than Avianca, which meant the onward journey home for some was at the height of the rush hour. The crew on Avianca were as good as most airlines and the food was excellent.

The crew on the Beluga were professional, very friendly and took great care for our safety whilst getting on and off the panga, sending an extra crew member to help if needed. The chef in a small galley, produced three substantial meals a day with snacks available during the day, tea, coffee and water were on tap at any time. Plenty of choice of food.

The public areas on the Beluga were comfortable with plenty of space to relax either in the lounge or on the sun deck. The cabins varied, some had large picture windows whilst others had port holes and all had en-suite facilities. All cabins had limited storage space. Ear plugs were provided for anyone disturbed by engine noise whilst travelling between islands during the night, not everyone found this a problem.

Why visit in January, February? Although the Galapagos Islands are an all year round destination there are several reasons for travelling at this time of year, not least the cold and wet in the UK. The sea tends to be calmer, although we had some choppy seas (travel sickness pills a must if you suffer) Sunny blue skies and less rainfall means easier viewing and better light for photographs. Snorkelling in warmer, clearer water makes for a better underwater experience and photography.

## Day 1

**Saturday 24th January**

### Quito -Ecuador

Our long flights arrived in Quito at different times so we did not have chance to meet our fellow travellers until the following day, We arrived early and had chance to visit the Botanical gardens and saw, eared dove ,red capped cardinals and humming birds.

## Day 2

Sunday 25th January

### Quito

Our first full day in Quito, our group split into two, so again we would only meet part of the group.

### Otavalo

Ten members in group one visited Otavalo. The weather was sunny, warm with light cloud. We left Quito by coach and drove along the PanAm highway through spectacular scenery as we travelled through the Andes to Otavalo.

As we came closer to our destination the scenery changed, the land was very fertile and mountains gave way to valleys where a variety of crops were grown and where large poly-tunnels were seen everywhere, this was the rose growing capital of Ecuador.

We soon arrived at the Otavalo market, good quality clothes, blankets and trinkets were on offer. It was a pleasure to walk around and admire the handiwork of the local traders, the market appeared smaller than we had imagined and it was very quiet.

Leaving Otavalo we climbed high to the crater at Cotacachi Reserve. A beautiful view of the crater-lake and surrounding volcanoes. Spectacled bears and Condors can be seen in this area but we did not have time to walk any of the trails.

Our next stop was for lunch, a superb location and an excellent lunch was enjoyed by all before our journey back to Quito.

### Antisana

A second group of six travelled to Antisana, List by David Hammond.

#### Antisana Birds List

Andean Condor	Tawny Antpitta	Black Vulture
Black-faced Ibis	Stout-billed Cinclodes	Silvery Grebe
Black-winged ground dove	Andean Gull	Bar-winged Cinclodes
Andean Lapwing	American Kestrel	Ecuadorian Hillstar
Shining Sunbeam	Chestnut-winged Cinclodes	Carunculated Caracara
Giant Hummingbird	Andean Tit-Spinetail	Sparkling Violetear
Many-striped Canastero	Yellow-billed Pintail	Tufted Tit-Tyrant
Andean Teal	Plain-capped Ground Tyrant	Ruddy Duck
Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant	Neotropic Cormorant	Blue-and-white Swallow
Cattle Egret	Brown-bellied swallow	Variable Hawk
Sedge Wren	Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle	Great Thrush
Slate-colored Coot	Páramo Pipit	Eared Dove
Spectacled Redstart	White-collared Swift	Cinereous Conebill
Ecuadorian Hillstar	Black Flowerpiercer	Black-tailed Trainbearer
Plumbeous Sierra-Finch	Tyrian Metaltail	Plain-colored Seedeater
Shining Sunbeam	Rufous-collared Sparrow	Great Sapphirewing
Golden Grosbeak	Blackish Tapaculo	

## Day 3

## Monday 26th January

### Galapagos Islands

Our morning started early (4.15am), a packed breakfast provided by the hotel, and a short drive to the airport for our flight to the Galapagos Islands. Although it was early we were all a little excited. We arrived at Baltra airport and we were transported to the port where we boarded Beluga, our home for the next fourteen days.

After a short briefing and lunch we were taken to our cabins and prepared for our first island visit.

### Santa Cruz

The boat sailed to Dragon Hill, we were all fascinated by the Greater and Magnificent Frigatebirds which surrounded the boat and hitched a ride, we counted eighteen in all. Santa Cruz is the second largest of the islands and is the most populated.

After a dry landing at Dragon Hill, we walked over fairly uneven lava, we would soon get used to this terrain. Walking poles proved very useful and perhaps a necessity for some. We observed sea and land iguanas, mocking birds, yellow warblers, lava heron, great blue heron and our first large ground finch. There are thirteen species of Darwin Finch, and they require careful study to identify each species.

## Day 4

## Tuesday 27th January

### Santa Fe Island

Weather, warm, sunny light cloud. One of the smallest and oldest islands with a variety of flora and fauna. Palo Santa, Saltbush and thorn scrub are found here.

Our first wet landing on the island, we would soon get used to these, boots on and we started our hike. The ground was uneven and steep in places. We spotted Galapagos Hawk, Sea Lions, Mocking Birds, and various finches.

Back on the Pangas for our trip back to the Beluga for lunch.

### South Plaza Island

A Panga (dinghy) ride and snorkelling was on offer around this island. We observed Swallow Tailed Gulls, Red-Billed Tropicbirds and Brown Noddy. The Red Billed Tropicbirds aerial display is always fascinating to watch.

Back to the Beluga for dinner and an early night for all.

## Day 5

## Wednesday 28th January

### San Christobel Island

Weather: Sunny and warm. San Christobel is one of the oldest islands and lies in the eastern part of the archipelago. The landscape in the north is made up of eroded volcanic peaks, and rich vegetation in the south. This island is the home to the Chatham Mockingbird.

We started our morning with a panga ride around Leon Dormido, an area made up of volcanic ash. We viewed our

first Blue-footed Booby, turtles and Sally Light-foot crabs. Back to the boat for breakfast.

Our next visit is to the beach at Cerro Bruyo, a white sand beach on the west of the island of San Christobel with a lagoon behind the beach. Here we could walk along the beach, snorkel or swim, the sea was a little rough so no one took to the water. We saw Lava Gull, Blue-footed Booby, Sea Lions, American Oyster Catchers and yellow warblers.

Back to the Beluga for lunch whilst the ship sailed to our next port of call.

## Puerto Baquerizo Moreno

This port is the provincial capital of the Galapagos. We arrived by panga at the port, from here we were taken to the Highlands by coach. Our walk in the Highlands was extended as we were searching but to no avail for the *Galapagos Rail*. We visited a tortoise project and some of the group walked to the top of a volcano and down towards the lake. The mist came down over the crater. We spotted Whimbrel, mocking birds, Striated Heron, and a Frigatebird drinking from the lake before we headed back to the coach.

A short time in the port for shopping before returning to the Beluga, shower, dinner and bed after a busy day

## Day 6

Thursday 29th January

### Espanola Island

Weather: sunny and warm. This island is situated in the southernmost part of the Archipelago. It is a very remote island and a range of endemic species evolved here. It is the only island where the Waved Albatross can be seen during the breeding season

Located on the northeast of the island, Gardner Bay, with its long white sandy beaches and colonies of Sea Lions, loafing around was our next stop. A wet landing on the beach where we were the only humans surrounded by Sea Lions, Lava Lizards, Wandering Tattlers, Cactus Finch, and Galapagos Hawk.

A Panga ride around the Gardiner Islet was enjoyed by all, we saw mating turtle, tuna fish, Brown Pelican and Wandering Tattler.

After lunch we stopped at Suarez point. This should have been a dry landing but the waves were very high and we needed to be very careful. The terrain was very rocky and uneven but both the bird life and the views of the blow hole were well worth the effort. Amazing walk amongst marine iguanas and breeding colonies of Swallow-Tailed Gulls, and Red-Billed Tropicbirds, all very relaxed. We were able to get quite close. The Espanola mocking birds follow us everywhere looking for water. Tempting to give them water but this is definitely not allowed. To complete this visit we saw the last of the Wandering Albatross flying above us.

We boarded the Beluga and the Captain circumnavigated the island so we could see the cliffs and the blow hole from the sea.

## Day 7

Friday 30th January

### SANTA CRUZ ISLAND

Weather: Cloudy start with some mist clearing to be a sunny day. Our second visit to this island.

#### Puerto Ayora and Ceza Messa

We disembarked after breakfast and were taken by coach to El Puntado looking for eight species of finch and the *Galapagos rail*. The more ardent bird watchers are able to distinguish the finches, some of us need more help. We journeyed through mostly farmland and banana plantations, the volcanic soil being very fertile. We searched patiently for about 3 hours but could not find the rail all though we did hear its call.

We went back down to have lunch at a restaurant by a lagoon at Ceza Messa. After lunch we were able to wander around looking for Giant Tortoise.

We travelled to look at the crater close to the restaurant and then to a viewing point on Ceza Messa where we had amazing views of the surrounding area.

Back to the port where we had the opportunity to shop before going back to the Beluga. Puerto Ayora is possibly the best port for shopping for souvenirs and post cards. Good quality and reasonable prices.

## Day 8

Saturday 31st January

### Santiago Island

Weather: sunny morning, light cloud later. Santiago also called James Island used to be a favourite island of pirates and whalers and is the 4th largest island. Vegetation includes lava cactus, purslane, carpet weed and puncture weed.

After breakfast a wet landing on Sombrero Chino (Chinese hat), a small island just off the top of Santiago island, gave us chance to look at the lava formations and the effects of the latest volcanic eruption, 125 years ago. Distinctive differences in the colour of the rocks could be seen. A leisurely walk was followed by either a panga ride, snorkelling or kayaking. Whilst on the panga we saw reef shark, heron, frigatebirds, Galapagos Hawk, iguanas, and to our joy one penguin, looking very bedraggled as he was moulting.

After lunch about twelve of the group went snorkelling or swimming from the beach at Sullivan Bay, the water was warm and quite clear. We walked along the lava fields, quite tricky in places not all of the group joined this walk.

## Day 9

Sunday 1st February

### Genovesa Island

Weather: light cloud, hot and humid. This is a small island in the northeast of the Galapagos Islands but is well worth the long journey to get here. The vegetation consists of Prickly Pear, cactus, Palo Santo, salt bush and heliotrope and attracts thousands of birds here to nest and rear their young.

As we landed on Darwin beach we were surrounded by Swallow-tailed Gulls, Red-footed Boobies, Nazca Boobies and Greater Frigatebirds, some sitting on eggs and some with young. We saw a Genovesa Mockingbird fishing in a

rock pool and from the top of the hill we saw four Hammerhead Sharks. Wherever we looked there were birds flying overhead

A short panga ride around the bay followed. We encountered our first Fur Seal and mating turtles. There were a lot of turtles in this area. Back to the boat for lunch

Our afternoon trip took us to Price Phillip Steps, very uneven steep rocky steps but with a very useful handrail. Well worth the climb. More Nazca Boobies on their nests. Some young looking like fluffy balls of cotton wool. We also viewed quite a few Red-Billed Tropicbirds flying around and also nesting, one very close to the path. The Magnificent Frigatebirds were showing signs of their mating display with their red pouches partially inflated. We were looking specifically for Short Eared Owls, they spend their day in crevices among the rocky lava. We soon found our first one but it was well hidden and before long a second one was seen which was much easier to view as it was close to the path. A third was spotted out in the open but a little way off. The Mockingbirds followed us looking for water. With thousands of birds flying around us we head back to the boat for a final look at the cliffs and their inhabitants from the sea.

Approximately 7pm tonight we crossed the Equator. We all crammed into the Captains Bridge and counted down to 00000, celebrating with a colourful cocktail.

## Day 10

## Monday 2nd February

### Santa Cruz

Weather: Sunny, hot and humid. Black Turtle Cove is a unique habitat with lagoons and red mangroves. We were up early, 6am, for a panga ride. We were all fascinated as we watched the sunrise over the lagoon and its red mangroves with its rich variety of wildlife.

This area is very lush and perhaps the most green we have seen so far. We watched an abundance of white tipped reef shark, turtles, some mating, and a baby hammerhead shark passing by the panga. Brown Pelicans were also in abundance due to the rich variety of marine life to feed from. A truly magical place, well worth the early start.

Back on the Beluga we headed to Baltra so the boat could be refuelled. On arrival at Baltra we leave the boat and travel to the Itabacca Channel via the airport shuttle service to catch a ferry to the other side where a coach is waiting to take us to the Chato Reserve where we see our first Tree Finch.

We then visited Darwin Ranch for lunch. Free time after lunch was spent walking amongst the many tortoises, many different sizes could be seen quite easily. The tortoises here seemed to be living in a natural and wild situation, and were able to roam quite freely including stopping vehicles as they crossed the road.

We drove back to the town where some of the group visited the Darwin Research Station, which was set up to further the scientific work and conservation in the Galapagos. A very interesting visit. It was hot and humid so nearly all found themselves stopping for a drink or ice cream before going back to the Beluga.

## Day 11

Tuesday 3rd February

### Floreana

Weather: sunny, light cloud. One of the oldest islands whose volcanoes have long been extinct. Erosion over years has given the island nutrients and soil to support vegetation. The island is populated with a few hundred inhabitants.

Our first stop is at Punta Cormorant was Green Sandy beach, the sand is dark and coarse with elements of Olivine crystals which has eroded out of the basalt (lava) flows giving the green colour. A short walk over this narrow stretch of the island brought us to a very sandy beach. We hoped to see turtles heading back to sea from their nesting sites but all we saw were tracks and signs of new nesting sites.

On our way back we stopped at a lagoon surrounded by black mangrove. Here we spotted about 12 flamingos in the distance.

Our second stop was at the town of Puerto Valasco Ibarra, this is the most populated area on the island. We were driven to the highlands by charabanc (a lorry with rows of seats in the back) looking for the medium tree finch.

The islands first European inhabitants arrived in 1929, the Ritters, and later in 1932 the Wittmer family. Rolf Wittmer was the first baby to be born on the island. Later in 1932 Baroness von Wagner Bosquet and her companions arrived, this was the start of an ongoing mystery. The disappearance of the Baroness has never been solved and all secrets pertaining to this are kept by the island never to be shared.

We climbed the hill to the caves where the families lived when they first arrived on the island, close by is the only natural water source. There are also remnants of tortoise traps which the whalers used to trap tortoises for ships food. It rained briefly, the first rain of the season for Floreana. Back to the port and the Beluga for lunch.

We landed on the beach at Post Office Bay and we took a short walk inland to look for the barrel which has been used by sailors and today by tourist to leave their mail. We checked the postcards to see if we could hand deliver any on our return to the UK. We then had a panga ride around the bay accompanied by sharks, Sea Lions, turtles, American Oyster Catcher and lots of large Iguanas.

## Day 12

Wednesday 4th February

### Isabella Island

Weather: very hot and humid. Isabella has six volcanoes, five of which are still active, making this one of the most active places on earth.

We walked on the AaAa lava fields, this is a smooth surface with undulating folds and rolls. We were looking for baby iguanas and there are hundreds. We arrived at the Lastintoreras fissure, part of the protected lava fields, here a sheltered narrow sea inlet protects Shark, Four-eyed Blenny, and baby iguanas amongst others.

We went back to the port, the main port of the island, where a coach was waiting to take us to the highlands. The coach stopped for us to look at a Vermillion Flycatcher perched on an overhead cable. We then continued to the parks office where we left the coach to start our walk to the crater of Sierra Negro Volcano, one of the five active volcanoes. This was about a 4k walk each way, more than any of us expected, but the view of the 9km wide crater was

worth the effort.

After lunch on the Beluga we went back to Puerto Villami to visit the Tortoise Project followed by a walk to a lagoon close by hoping to see flamingos. The group split, some visiting another lagoon and the remainder hitting a local bar. Today was Election Day, a referendum, so most places were closed. We chose a bar by the beach, unfortunately they had lost their licence, so it was orange juices all round. We were pretty exhausted that evening

## Day 13

Thursday 5th February

### Isabella Island

Weather: sunny, light cloud. Today we split into two groups. Group one, seven members, went on a long panga ride around the bay where we soon found the Flightless Cormorant, Pelican and in one spot at least ten Golden Rays and an equal number of Diamond Rays. Blue footed Boobies and Giant Iguanas were on most rocks. Then we spotted Penguins and more Flightless Cormorant, some swimming and others silhouetted on the black lava rocks.

Group 2 of nine members went on a walk along the lava fields, slippery in places but not too bad. The treat was to find brackish lagoons with Flamingoes and waterbirds notably White- Cheeked Pin Tail and Blue Winged Teal. Before returning to the Beluga they also had a short panga ride to see the Penguins etc.

After lunch we all went on a panga trip around Elizabeth Bay lagoon. In 1954 a 6km coastal strip, in some places over 5m high was pushed 1km into the sea by volcanic action.

We were escorted into the lagoon by four penguins swimming and playing in front and around the panga. Once in the lagoon two Sea Lions took over from the penguins and went between the pangas, splashing and playing, marvellous to watch them so close. On our way back out of the lagoon the Penguins joined us again.

A wonderful end to our day

## Day 14

Friday 6th February

### Isabella Island, Urbina Bay

Weather: Hot and sunny. This area is located at the foot of Alcedo Volcano. This area was uplifted from the sea in 1954 by volcanic activity, and is relatively flat. Corals and other marine formations can be found. We landed on the black coral beach at 6.30am. We could see where the Turtles had climbed the beach to lay their eggs but yet again we were too late to see the turtles. We walked inland looking for the cuckoo, a couple of us saw one briefly. We found a Galapagos Hawk and lots of finches. Tortoise and Land Iguanas. We walked back to the beach where a group snorkelled and the remainder went back to the Beluga.

After lunch the weather was very hot and we visited Targus Cove where we saw the names and dates of previous visitors to the cove, such as pirates and whalers who used to call here regularly. Tourist are not allowed to follow this tradition. We climbed the many steps (approx. 125) to reach Darwin Lagoon. These were wooden steps, purposely built with a solid handrail, it was very hot and some of the group took a steady walk back down the steps whilst the others walked around the lagoon for a little way before being defeated by the heat and returning to the shade of the rocks at the base of the steps.

Back on the pangas and a ride around the cove. The waters under the cliffs were very quiet and we were enthralled by Penguins, Sea Lions, Turtle, Blue-footed Boobies. Flightless Cormorant and nesting Brown Noddies. We tried but failed to see the Mangrove Finch and the Galapagos Martin. Another great day.

## Day 15

## Saturday 7th February

### Fernandina Island

Weather: Clear skies, sunny. Hot. This is a domed shield volcano with AaAa lava flows and is the most active volcano with eruptions occurring ever few years.

We disembarked at 8am for a walk along the beach and lava. Amazing scenery and thousands of Marine Iguanas, some sitting on top of others, some nesting. There were lots of Iguanas swimming with the Sea Lions and a few Green Turtles. Along this stretch of beach we spotted a Galapagos Hawk and Flightless Cormorant. We were all amazed at the breathtaking beauty of this spot.

Back to the Beluga and we sail again for Isabella Island. Soon we hear from the bridge the shout of Dolphins. A very large pod of Common Dolphins, estimated at 100+, were feeding on tuna. They performed spectacularly before us for some time, leaping out of the water several feet, completely unaware of the Beluga.

Back on Isabella we visited this ancient volcano which has partly collapsed and eroded to make a bay and two coves, sheltered from the ocean swells.

No landing here so a panga ride was taken around the bay, as we got close to the entrance of the bay the wind strengthened and the sea became very choppy. We had seen Swallow-tailed Gulls, Nazca Boobies, Noddies and a young fur seal, the decision was made to turn back to the Beluga. On our way back we were thrilled when a Mola Mola (sunfish) about 2.1/2 metres long, swam close to the pangas before disappearing.

The Beluga sailed and we spent a couple of hours surveying the ocean before enjoying a cocktail as we re-crossed the Equator. Another magical day.

## Day 16

## Sunday 8th February

### Santiago Island

Weather: cloudy start, sunny later. We headed to Puerto Egas which has a black beach with eroded rock formations in the background, Remains of a salt mining enterprise can be found amongst the Palo Santa trees, cactus and the heliotrope. We walked along the beach where we encountered American Oystercatchers, Lava heron, and a Yellow Crowned Night Heron, which is often seen sitting motionless under a rocky outcrop or similar sheltered space. Black lava flows showing different lava formations full of Sally Lightfoot Crabs, which are an amazing contrast of red against the black lava. Hiding amongst the sheltered ledgers on the lava observed fur seals sleeping. We also spotted Whimbrel, Blue Heron, Ruddy Turnstones and Wandering Tattlers.

Just off the east coast of Santiago Island lies Bartolome Island and some beautiful landscapes. It consists of an extinct volcano with a volcanic cone which can be climbed, by 365 wooden steps. Although this looks daunting and 365

steps seems a lot, the climb is steady well worth the climb. A famous and distinctive characteristic of this island is the Pinnacle Rock. Most of the group climbed to see the amazing views at the top of the cone whilst four members opted for a panga ride. Seeing lots of Red sun Sea Stars, pelicans, herons and penguins, which are always delight.

We sailed to Daphne Minor where we sailed around the rock looking for the Galapagos Martin, our last chance to see this very small bird. We were fascinated by the sight of a Peregrine Falcon flying close to the cliffs, giving a spectacular display of his speed and agility in flight whilst hunting. We almost forgot we were looking for the Martin and thought perhaps the Falcon had spoilt any chance of seeing one, but two people spotted a martin briefly on the tree line right at the top of the cliff.

We sail a short way for our final stop prior to departing in the morning.

## Day 17

Monday 9th February

### North Seymour Island

Weather: sunny. This island lies very close to Baltra and is covered by low growing vegetation, Palo Santa, salt bush and yellow cordia.

Five of the group decided on a short walk prior to breakfast and our departure to Baltra airport. We made an early start for our short visit to this amazing small island. There is a large colony Blue-footed Boobies and Magnificent Frigatebirds. Blue-footed Boobies are quite common but their bright blue feet make them stand out among the crowd and we were lucky enough to see them doing their very special mating dance, amazing.

Not to be outdone we observed the male Magnificent Frigatebirds displaying, their scarlet pouches fully inflated hoping to attract a passing female, this display is something special.

We said our farewells to the captain, crew and our guide Rissel before flying to Quito.

We arrived in Quito at the San Jose de Puenbo hotel, Situated in its own well established gardens where you can sit and relax while watching a large variety of birds about 32 different birds can be seen. The humming birds flash between plants and are quite difficult to photograph. Tomorrow we leave for the rainforest.

## Day 18

Tuesday 10th February

### Sacha Lodge

Guides; Diego and Benji Santiago and Victor Miguel and Shanshu

Today we start our next adventure. All sixteen members of the group travelled to Sacha Lodge, which is situated by a lake in the Amazon Rainforest. We arrived at Coca airport where we were met by Sacha staff who escorted us to Sacha house for a quick lunch before boarding the motorised canoes for the trip up the Rio Napo River to the lodge. Due to the lack of rain, the river is very low at the moment, so we zig zag between the sand banks for nearly two hours to reach the Sacha river port. We now start a 30minute walk to the canoe port and then a short canoe ride across the lake to the lodge.

A welcome drink and a short induction, our group of sixteen become three groups. Group One - ardent birdwatchers and two groups of general interest.

## Day 19

Wednesday 11th February

### General Interest Group

The two groups set off this morning for a walk to the skywalk. The Canopy Walk is an amazing structure made up of a bridge, 36m high, supported by three towers. The world looks very different from the top of the trees, amazing views. From the walkway we observed Plumbeous kite, Blue Dacnis, several Toucans and lots of other birds whilst the Howler Monkeys could be heard but not seen. On our way back to the lodge we saw a pair of Crested Owls, black fronted nun birds and a social flycatcher. There were a lot of Spider monkeys high in the trees and as we approached the lodge we saw a large troop of Tamarin, some with babies, very close to the walk way. Our Native guide introduced us to a lot of plants, some medicinal and others such as a palm leaf which can be used for roofing.

Our afternoon walk took us along various paths in the forest. We were thrilled to see in the distance Pygmy Marmoset, an endangered species. Back to the lodge for a BBQ tonight

### Birding Group

By Chris Lewis (from Chris's blog) Group 1 Ardent Birdwatchers

Early morning we made our way to the Kapok Tower, This involved a 4.30am breakfast and a pre-dawn paddle across the lagoon and a narrow waterway and then a 20 minute walk through the forest - during which time we heard and saw a Common Potoo amongst other things.

Later we set off for another walk through the forest - 3pm until after dark and saw more birds as well some education about the medicinal properties of some of the plants.

## Day 20

Thursday 12th February

Both groups went by motorised canoe to the Salt Lick in the Yasuni National Park. Our first stop was the salt lick by the river where there were three different types of parrot. It rained briefly, our first rain in the rainforest! We then visited a second salt lick, supported by the local community. This was a short walk from the river and before we reached the hide we could see, quite close to us, in the trees a troop of Woolly Monkeys.

We were instructed to be extremely quiet in and around the hide. Seated in the hide we could not miss the Yellow-footed Tortoise in a small cave by the salt lick. No parrots would fly in whilst he was there so one of the guides relocated him.

After sitting quietly for nearly 1 1/2 hours we all got excited when a group of White-lipped Peccaries come to the lick, we thought there would be no chance of seeing the parrots but eventually two or three were brave enough to fly down, followed by lots more, an amazing sight. Something spooked them and they flew directly at us in the hide and out the other side. We had been watching a Scarlet Macaw in the trees and as soon as the parrots had flown he came down to drink. We eventually tore ourselves away and walked back to the canoe for our picnic lunch.

Relaxing in the lodge gave us the opportunity to spot birds and mammals that frequented the area. A Cayman seemed to like the lake around the Balsa House and Spider Caiman Lizard, Snakes and Spider monkeys kept us amused whilst relaxing. Howler monkeys were heard frequently but not all the group saw them.

Our last trip for the day was on a canoe along one of the canals to the Kapok Tower. This is a 43m high tower with a large platform built on the highest branches of a giant Kapok Tree. Our guides carried a scope to the top and we soon observed toucan, heron and then something most unexpected, a Three-toed Sloth in the distance.

## BIRDING GROUP

Another pre-dawn start. This time we had a 30 minute walk through the forest to the Canopy walkway, while the walkway swings a bit, the towers provide a stable platform from which to view birds...which we did for 3 hours. After descending back to the forest floor we spent another 2-3 hours seeking out whatever wildlife came our way.

We spent the latter part of the afternoon being paddled by Miguel (mainly) and Shanshu (occasionally). Here we had close encounters with several new species of birds

This is our last evening as we leave after breakfast. Four of us with our guides decided to do a night walk after dinner. This was a very exciting walk, we had only gone a few yards when we saw a very large Tarantula with another close by. We saw four types of Stick Insect and a Praying Mantis. Then Benji spotted a snake in a tree, it was shedding its skin so we were not able to identify it. Benji has fantastic eyesight and he spotted a Mouse Oposum close by the trail, sitting on a branch just watching us. To finish the walk we saw two frogs, one the size of a little finger nail, the other the size of a football. A couple of us caught sight of a Danta (Tapir) before it disappeared into the undergrowth. So glad we made the effort to go on this last walk

## Sacha Lodge bird list

Great Kiskadee	Wire-tailed Manakin	Crested Owl	Green Honeycreeper
Pink-throated Becard	Straight-billed Hermit		Striated Heron
American Pygmy Kingfisher	Rufescent Tiger-Heron		Straight-billed Woodcreeper
Hoatzin	Plumbeous Kite		Common Potoo
Blue Dacnis	Black-fronted Nunbird		Social Flycatcher
Scarlet Macaw	Red-capped Cardinal		Cobalt-winged parakeet
Russet backed Oropendola	Yellow-rumped cacique		Slender billed kite
Many Banded Aracari	Double toothy Kite		White throated Toucan
Paradise Tanager	Boat Billed Heron		Snowy Egret
Black Vulture	Black tailed Trogon		Squirrel Cuckoo
Speckled Chachalaca	Puff bird		Violaceous Jay
Smooth billed Ant	White-winged Swallow		Greater Ani
Cream-colored Woodpecker	Pygmy Kingfisher		Lineated Woodpecker
Amazon Kingfisher			

## Sacha Lodge list of mammals, reptiles and insects

White-fronted Capuchin	Crying Beetle Spider Monkey	3-toed Sloth Squirrel Monkey
Danta (Tapir)	Woolly Monkey	White-lipped Peccary
Howler Monkey	Praying Mantis	various stick insects
Black Mantled Tamarin	Yellow-footed Tortoise	Mouse Opossum
Orange-bellied Tarantula	Spix's Night Monkey	Amazon River Turtle
Pygmy Marmoset	Caiman Lizard Caiman	Centipede
Poison Frog	Horned Toad	

## Day 21

Friday 13th February

After breakfast we say our farewells to Sacha Lodge (we all would have liked an extra day) and make the return journey to Coca airport and Quito

## Day 22

Saturday 14th February

### Quito

We arrived back at The San Jose de Puenbo hotel for the afternoon and tomorrow morning. We have chance to enjoy the gardens and the many birds before departing early afternoon for our flights to the UK. A lovely hotel to relax in.

### Hotel Gardens and Quito Birds List

Golden-rumped Euphonia	Sparkling Violetear	Eared Dove
Rufous collared sparrow	Southern Beardless Tyrannulet	Vermillion Flycatcher
Crimson-mantled Woodpecker	Broad-winged Hawk	Great Thrush
Red-capped Cardinal		

## Day 23

Sunday 15th February

Arrival back in the UK after an amazing tour enjoyed by all, where strangers became friends, fun and laughter was shared by all.

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## Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!

## Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; bold = endemic or near endemic)

	Common name	Scientific name	January/February													
			26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	<b>Galapagos Penguin</b>	<b><i>Spheniscus mendiculus</i></b>							✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	<b>Waved Albatross</b>	<b><i>Phoebastria exulans</i></b>				✓										
3	<b>Galapagos Petrel</b>	<b><i>Pterodroma phaeopygia</i></b>			✓								✓		✓	✓
4	<b>Galapagos's Shearwater</b>	<b><i>Puffinus iherminieri</i></b>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Elliot's Storm-petrel	<i>Oceanites gracilis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
6	Wedge-rumped Storm-petrel	<i>Oceanodroma tethys</i>							✓		✓					✓
7	Red-billed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon aethereus</i>		✓		✓				✓						✓
8	Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Great Frigatebird	<i>Fregata minor</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓			✓			✓	✓
10	Blue-footed Booby	<i>Sula neboxii</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	<b>Nazca Booby</b>	<b><i>Sula granti</i></b>		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
12	Red-footed Booby	<i>Sula sula</i>							✓							
13	<b>Flightless Cormorant</b>	<b><i>Nannopterum harrisi</i></b>											✓	✓	✓	
14	Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	White-cheeked Pintail	<i>Anas bahamensis</i>			✓		✓					✓	✓			
16	Blue-winged Teal	<i>Anas discors</i>											✓			
17	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>									✓	✓	✓			
18	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	✓		✓		✓				✓		✓			✓
19	Cattle Egret	<i>Bulbulcus ibis</i>		✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓			
20	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striatus striatus</i>			✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
21	<b>Lava Heron</b>	<b><i>Butorides sundevalli</i></b>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
22	Yellow-crowned Night-heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>				✓		✓	✓		✓	✓				✓
23	<b>Galapagos Hawk</b>	<b><i>Buteo galapagoensis</i></b>		✓	✓	✓		✓				✓		✓	✓	✓
24	Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓		✓			✓		✓	✓			
25	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>podilymbus podiceps</i>						✓				✓		✓		✓
26	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
27	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularia</i>	✓													
28	Wandering Tattler	<i>Heteroscelus incanum</i>				✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	January/February														
			26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
29	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓	✓						✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>										✓	✓				✓
31	Semipalmated Sandpiper	<i>Calidris pusilla</i>	✓									✓					
32	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>	✓									✓					✓
33	Red ( Grey) Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>										✓					
34	American Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus palliatus</i>				✓		✓				✓	✓			✓	✓
35	Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	✓		✓							✓					
36	Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>	✓	✓				✓				✓				✓	✓
37	<b>Lava Gull</b>	<b><i>Larus fuliginosus</i></b>	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓					✓
38	Laughing Gull	<i>Larus atricilla</i>										✓		✓	✓	✓	
39	<b>Swallow-tailed Gull</b>	<b><i>Larus furcatus</i></b>		✓		✓				✓						✓	✓
40	Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>						✓						✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Royal Tern	<i>Sterna maxima</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
42	<b>Galapagos Dove</b>	<b><i>Zenaida galapagoensis</i></b>		✓			✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Dark-billed Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus melacoryphus</i>									✓	✓					
44	Smooth-billed Ani	<i>Crotophaga ani</i>										✓					
45	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus galapagoensis</i>							✓			✓					
46	Vermillion Flycatcher	<i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i>										✓					
47	<b>Galapagos Flycatcher</b>	<b><i>Myiarchus magnirostris</i></b>	✓		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
48	<b>Galapagos Mockingbird</b>	<b><i>Nesomimus parvulus</i></b>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	<b>Hood Mockingbird</b>	<b><i>Nesomimus macdonaldi</i></b>				✓											
50	<b>Chatham Mockingbird</b>	<b><i>Nesomimus melanotis</i></b>			✓	✓											
51	<b>Galapagos Martin</b>	<b><i>Progne modesta</i></b>															✓
52	<b>Large Ground Finch</b>	<b><i>Geospiza magnirostris</i></b>	✓			✓			✓	✓				✓			
53	<b>Medium Ground Finch</b>	<b><i>Geospiza fortis</i></b>	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓			✓			
54	<b>Small Ground Finch</b>	<b><i>Geospiza fuliginosa</i></b>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	<b>Sharp-beaked Ground-finch</b>	<b><i>Geospiza difficilis</i></b>							✓				✓				
56	<b>Common Cactus-finch</b>	<b><i>Geospiza scandens</i></b>	✓	✓													
57	<b>Large Cactus-finch</b>	<b><i>Geospiza conirostris</i></b>				✓			✓								
58	<b>Vegetarian Finch</b>	<b><i>Platypiza crassirostris</i></b>								✓							
59	<b>Large Tree-finch</b>	<b><i>Camarhynchus psittacula</i></b>					✓					✓					

	Common name	Scientific name	January/February													
			26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
60	Medium Tree-finch	<i>Camarhynchus pauper</i>					✓				✓	✓				
61	Woodpecker Finch	<i>Cactospiza pallida</i>									✓		✓			
62	Mangrove Finch	<i>Cactospiza heliobates</i>				✓										
63	Warbler Finch	<i>Certhidia olivacea</i>		✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
64	Yellow Warbler	<i>Dendroica petechia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

## Reptiles

	<b>Giant tortoise:</b>	<i>Geochelone elephantopus</i>														
1	Santa Cruz sub-sp	<i>G. e. porteri</i>					✓			✓						
2	San Cristoba sub-sp I	<i>G. e. chatamensis</i>			✓											
3	Alcedo sub-sp	<i>G. e. vandenburghi</i>												✓		
4	Sierra Negra sub-sp	<i>G. e.guntheri</i>									✓	✓				
5	Green Sea Turtle	<i>Chelonia mydas agassissi</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Lava lizard (S. Cristobal)	<i>Microlophus bivittatus</i>			✓											
7	Lava lizard (Floreana)	<i>Microlophus grayi</i>									✓					
8	Lava lizard (Espanola)	<i>Microlophus delanonis</i>				✓										
9	Lava lizard (W & central)	<i>Microlophus albemarlensis</i>	✓				✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Galapagos Land Iguana	<i>Conolophus subcristatus</i>	✓	✓										✓		
11	Santa Fe Land Iguana	<i>Conolophus pallidus</i>		✓												
12	Marine iguana:	<i>Amblyrhynchus cristatus</i>		✓												
13	Fernandina sub-sp	<i>A. c. cristatus</i>	✓				✓			✓						
14	Isabela sub-sp	<i>A. c. albemarlensis</i>										✓	✓	✓		
15	Santiago/S Cristobal sub-sp	<i>A. c. mertensis</i>			✓			✓								✓
16	Espanola sub-sp	<i>A. c. venustissimus</i>				✓										
17	Genovesa sub-sp	<i>A. c. nanus</i>							✓							

## Mammals

1	Galapagos Sea Lion	<i>Zalophus wollebacki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Galapagos Fur Seal	<i>Arctocephalus galapagoensis</i>				✓			✓						✓	
3	Galapagos bat	<i>Lasiurus brachyotis</i>			✓											



Galapagos Hawk



Galapagos Penguin



Scarlet Macaw at Sacha Lodge



Flightless Cormorant

