

# GALÁPAGOS

POST

## CONSERVATION IN ACTION

Fernanda: A Global Icon of Resilience

New Effort to Protect Endangered Tortoises on Southern Isabela Island

The Island Vet Saving Galápagos Animals in Crisis

GALÁPAGOS CONSERVANCY



SUMMER 2025

# Q&A WITH GALÁPAGOS CONSERVANCY'S NEW CEO, HUGO MOGOLLÓN

Hugo Mogollón became CEO & President of Galápagos Conservancy earlier this year. He is the first Ecuadorian to take the helm of the storied conservation organization in its four-decade history. We asked him the following questions to learn more about his history and his vision for the future of Galápagos.

## YOU WERE BORN IN QUITO, AND NOW YOU ARE LEADING GALÁPAGOS CONSERVANCY. HOW DID YOU MAKE THE JOURNEY FROM THE ANDES TO THE ARCHIPELAGO?

Yes, I am a proud, native-born Ecuadorian. My studies and early career as a tropical forest ecologist allowed me to get to know my country deeply, from the Pacific Ocean to the Amazon basin. In 2011, I moved to the United States for a degree in Natural Resources Management and Leadership and, for the past decade, I've focused on local food systems and nonprofit management, learning strategy, partnerships, and team building.

The Galápagos has always captivated me. Since childhood, it felt like a magical place full of impossible species that sparked my imagination. Leading the Galápagos Conservancy truly combines everything I care about: science, sustainability, and community-based change.



## YOU ARE WRAPPING UP YOUR FIRST HUNDRED DAYS. TELL US HOW THE FIRST ECUADORIAN TO MANAGE THIS ORGANIZATION IS SETTLING INTO THE ROLE.

The past three and a half months have been intense. I've discovered Galápagos Conservancy has a mighty team deeply committed to the future of this special place. I feel proud to continue the vision and hard work of so many people who have stewarded this organization over the years and helped create an impact that has transformed these islands. Galápagos Conservancy is special; beyond our work, we support and collaborate with others. Indeed, we've invested over \$50 million in conservation, science, education, and sustainability efforts – multiplying our impact and reinforcing our shared responsibility.

Being the first Ecuadorian to lead this organization adds another layer of meaning. It reflects how far we have come in recognizing the importance of local leadership in shaping the future of Galápagos. Here I have reconnected with old friends who have dedicated their lives to protecting these islands and found a welcoming community. The sense of purpose here is real, and I feel honored to be part of it.

## HOW DO YOU SEE THE FUTURE OF THE ISLANDS, AND WHAT IS THE ROLE OF GALÁPAGOS CONSERVANCY IN IT?

I believe I have arrived at a very important moment. There is so much history and good work behind us, but there is also a real sense that the future of Galápagos hangs in the balance. Climate change is accelerating, the special species that make Galápagos so inspiring are under mounting pressure, and local communities face complex challenges.

It can feel overwhelming, but it is also a moment full of possibilities. Galápagos is one of the most unique places on the planet. It is fragile, yes, but also full of life, resilience, and lessons for the world. What we learn here, how we respond here,

could help shape how we protect nature everywhere.

Galápagos Conservancy has an important role to play. Not only in science and conservation, but in bringing people together, listening to local voices, and helping build a future that is sustainable and fair. So, I am motivated and ready to roll up my sleeves and do the work. There is so much to protect, and so much worth fighting for. I take this responsibility seriously. There is so much to protect, and so much worth fighting for.

## WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVORITE MOMENT SINCE JOINING GALÁPAGOS CONSERVANCY?

My favorite moment so far was a field trip with the conservation team to Santa Fé Island to collect camera traps and search for tortoise nests. Galápagos Conservancy has been working to introduce tortoises to this island, and the trip was part of the broader effort to monitor how they are adapting.

Our scientists often go to places that are not accessible to tourists, and I was excited to see the rarely-visited interior of the island. But I was also a little worried about being able to keep up over the rocky and demanding terrain.

The landscape was truly breathtaking and the team generous with their knowledge and stories. Ultimately, seeing their expertise and dedication in action gave me deeper understanding of what it really means to protect this place.

And yes, in case you are wondering, I was able to keep up with them. I had the feeling they wanted to see if I was cut out for the job.

When we returned to the coast, we jumped into the clear waters for a swim while sea lions watched. It was unforgettable, inspiring, and energizing. I asked myself, **"Do I really get to do this job? What a remarkable privilege."**

# FERNANDA: LAST HOPE FOR A VANISHING SPECIES

Six years ago, there was a miraculous glimmer of hope for a species long thought extinct. That’s when – following years of rumors of tortoise sightings — Fernanda, a Fernandina Island Giant Tortoise, was found on her native island.

Maybe you’ve heard this story. Indeed, when her species was finally confirmed, it would’ve been a hard one to miss. Overnight, Fernanda became a global celebrity, and the hunt was on to try to find her a mate — so that the species might be rescued from the brink of extinction.

It’s remarkable that stories like this can still happen on our planet. The Galápagos may be a remote archipelago, but it’s also a hub for scientists and researchers, and a draw for tourists. That Fernanda could go unnoticed for so many decades (the last confirmed sighting of a giant tortoise on Fernandina was in 1906!) is astonishing.

In recent years, repeated searches of Fernandina Island for a mate for Fernanda by Galápagos Conservancy and its partners have, sadly, come up empty.

**An Endling’s Legacy, which brings us to Lonesome George.**

Like Fernanda, Lonesome George was the last of his species — an ‘endling’ — and the world watched helplessly as the extinction of a species played out in real time. Similar extensive searches for a mate had been conducted for Lonesome George, ultimately yielding the same heartbreaking results.

When Lonesome George died in 2012, with him went the Pinta Island Giant Tortoise lineage.

This summer, the BBC revisited the poignant story of Lonesome George as part of the podcast ‘Witness History’ — sparking a renewed global interest in this famed tortoise’s legacy. The episode drew heavily on the memories of Galápagos Conservancy’s own Dr. James Gibbs, including decades of dedicated care, the lingering hope for reproduction, and ultimately, the solemn task of escorting Lonesome George’s body to New York for taxidermy after his death.



Scan to listen to BBC’s  
Witness History podcast!



Lonesome George at the Santa Cruz Breeding Center © Tim Saxe  
Opposite: Fernanda at the Santa Cruz Breeding Center © Galápagos Conservancy



**Fernanda: An Icon for a Critical Cause**

Fernanda, much like Lonesome George, has been elevated to ‘icon’ status, embodying something far greater than herself. She is a living testament to the fragility of biodiversity and the profound responsibility we bear to protect it. That significance was underscored when Galápagos Conservancy featured Fernanda as a symbol of hope at a recent event held in partnership with the Ecuadorean Ambassador to the US, at the Ecuadorian Embassy in Washington D.C., highlighting the international commitment to conservation in the Galápagos.

And while the tragic fate of Lonesome George serves as a stark reminder, our commitment is clear: Fernanda’s future must be different.

The years since Lonesome George’s passing have seen significant advancements in scientific understanding and conservation approaches.

Galápagos Conservancy and its partners are dedicated to exploring every avenue to ensure Fernanda’s lineage not only survives but thrives, securing a vibrant future for the Fernandina Island Giant Tortoise.

# WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE

Recently, the dry volcanic landscape of Galápagos seemed to entirely vanish beneath an astonishing green wave. For our conservation team, accustomed to the understated, desert-like beauty of towering cacti against black rocks and dry earth, this transformation was truly breathtaking to behold. A deluge of rain unseen in nearly three decades has swept across the entire archipelago, painting the rugged landscape in vibrant hues of bright green.

Galápagos, a living laboratory of evolution, offered an extraordinary spectacle: a dramatic, real-time illustration of nature's responsiveness to shifting weather patterns. While the transformation was visually stunning, it also required our team to adapt. The replanting of *Opuntia* cacti was briefly paused because overly saturated soil could cause young seedlings to rot. At the same time, the rain brought unexpected gifts. Adult cacti and other native plants are blooming and producing abundant fruit, supporting natural seed dispersal.

For the young tortoises recently reintroduced, including those on Santa Fé Island, this burst of life has meant plentiful food and a promising start to their new lives.

Scientists on the ground have been diligently observing and documenting these changes, recognizing that such significant deviations from the norm warrant careful study in a world increasingly impacted by climate variability.



Above: *Opuntia* Cactus near Wolf Volcano, Isabela Island; Below: Giant tortoises on Cerro Fatal, Santa Cruz Island © Galápagos Conservancy



# GALÁPAGOS CONSERVANCY LAUNCHES BOLD NEW EFFORT TO PROTECT ENDANGERED TORTOISES ON SOUTHERN ISABELA ISLAND

On the wild and windswept slopes of southern Isabela Island, something is going terribly wrong.

Here, across the volcanic landscapes of Cerro Azul and Sierra Negra, two species of Critically Endangered giant tortoise — *Chelonoidis vicina* and *Chelonoidis guntheri* — are facing serious conservation challenges.

Earlier this year, during a field expedition with the Galápagos National Park Directorate, our team surveyed these remote highlands, hoping to find signs of young tortoises. Instead, we found only adults — every tortoise at least 20 years old. Not a single juvenile, not one hatchling. It was a heartbreaking sign that these species are not reproducing successfully in the wild.

We soon found the reason why: shattered eggshells, destroyed nests, and clear signs of disturbance at the tortoises' nesting areas.

The culprits? Invasive pigs. Relentless, adaptable, and devastating.

Pigs were first introduced to Isabela Island in the late 1800s, and over the past century, their numbers have quietly surged. These animals dig up tortoise nests and eat the eggs and hatchlings before they have a chance to grow. In some areas, pigs are known to destroy more than 90% of accessible nests. Add to that the impact of wild cattle — also introduced during the 19th century — and the picture becomes even more grim. Cattle compete with tortoises for food, trample native vegetation, and damage fragile nesting grounds.

This is what a slow extinction looks like.

But this moment marks a turning point.



Left: Wild pig encounter on Cerro Azul Volcano; Right: Wild cattle on Cerro Azul. © Galápagos Conservancy (GC)



Giant tortoises eggs damaged by invasive species. © GC

In close partnership with the Galápagos National Park Directorate and with support from the Fund for the Control of Invasive Species in Galápagos (FEIG), Galápagos Conservancy is launching a major new effort to confront this crisis.

The first phase, already underway, is a detailed assessment of pig and cattle populations on Cerro Azul Volcano. This foundational step will guide a long-term plan to remove invasive species, restore fragile habitat, and give these tortoises a real chance to recover.

It won't be easy. Cerro Azul's steep, isolated landscape is among the most difficult in the archipelago. But

we've seen success before. On other islands, similar efforts have led to the return of native species and the rebirth of entire ecosystems.

This work is only possible because of strong collaboration — and the generosity of supporters like you. Your belief in protecting Galápagos makes urgent, strategic action like this possible.

Together, we're responding to a crisis. And together, we're giving two of Galápagos' most iconic species a chance to thrive once again.

# VETERINARIAN ANDREA LOYOLA RESCUES INJURED AND DISTRESSED ANIMALS IN GALÁPAGOS

During a recent expedition to a remote part of Galápagos, veterinarian Dr. Andrea Loyola faced a critical challenge. She and her team had spotted a large sea lion on the shores of Pinta Island with a fishing rope deeply embedded in its neck — a life-threatening situation.

The ensnared pinniped was lying close to water’s edge and was likely to startle and flee if approached too closely. So, they decided to wait, however long it might take, for the oversized marine mammal to fall asleep.

Hours later, one of her fellow park guards stealthily crept forward with a large net, flinging it over the slumbering sea lion.

It then took four people to immobilize the struggling animal. Finally, they were able to carefully cut the encrusted nylon rope from its neck, providing immediate relief and freedom of movement.

“It was clear that the rope had been coiled around its neck for a long while,” Andrea recalls. “Honestly, I think that if we hadn’t succeeded at that exact moment, the animal would have soon died a very slow and painful death.”

This dramatic intervention was just one of more than 1,500 similar rescues Andrea and her unit — the Galápagos National Park Directorate’s **Rapid Response Network** — have carried out over the past decade to assist injured and distressed wildlife across the archipelago, both on land and at sea.

The unit confronts a multitude of hazards that impact wildlife in Galápagos, from discarded fishing gear and plastic pollution to boat collisions — all of which endanger the

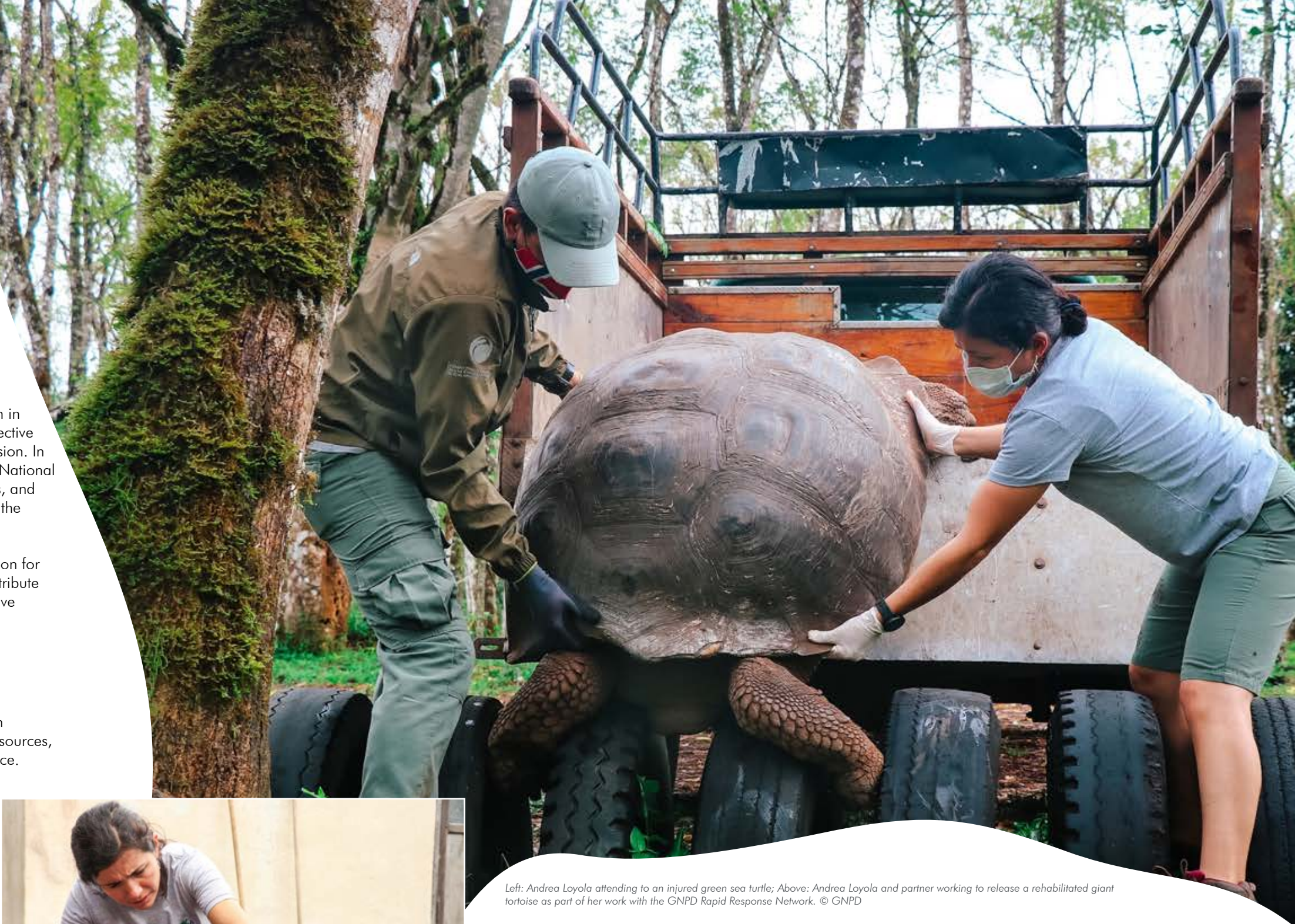
islands’ unique inhabitants. Andrea’s path to wildlife rescue began in her final year of university when an elective course in wildlife care ignited her passion. In Galápagos, she volunteered with the National Park Directorate, completed her thesis, and ultimately became a pivotal leader of the Rapid Response Network.

She says she is driven by a deep passion for caring for wildlife and a desire to contribute to biodiversity conservation in her native Galápagos.

## Sustaining the Work of Wildlife Rescue in Galápagos

In the Galápagos, where conservation challenges often outpace available resources, partnerships can make all the difference. The Rapid Response Network’s critical work relies heavily on the unwavering support of Galápagos Conservancy and its members. This funding ensures timely responses, facilitates the purchase of essential supplies, underwrites comprehensive health assessments, and even covers critical logistical needs like fuel for remote rescues, as well as food and medicine for recovering patients.

The statistics paint a clear picture of the vital work being done by the unit. On Santa Cruz alone, the network responded to 203 wildlife emergencies in 2024. The majority of these incidents — a staggering 70% — were attributable to human activities.



Left: Andrea Loyola attending to an injured green sea turtle; Above: Andrea Loyola and partner working to release a rehabilitated giant tortoise as part of her work with the GNPD Rapid Response Network. © GNPD

The emergencies ranged from stranded dolphins and plastic-entangled Blue-footed Boobies to sea lions injured by fishing hooks and sea turtles harmed by boat strikes.

Recently, Andrea’s tireless work was recognized with the prestigious 'Merit for Ecological Conservation' award from the municipal government of Santa Cruz Canton, a testament to her impactful efforts.

Dr. Loyola’s dream is to one day have a fully equipped and cutting-edge rescue center from which to base her operations.

To Galápagos Conservancy’s supporters, she offers her sincerest thanks for making this dramatic and heroic work possible:

*“Your support is what allows us to do this crucial work. The conservation of the biodiversity of the Galápagos Islands is paramount, and our partnership with Galápagos Conservancy is vital to our success and the protection of these unique species.”*

This partnership underscores our shared commitment to the immediate welfare and long-term survival of Galápagos wildlife. It is with your crucial support that this work is made possible. Thank you.

# NEW LIBRARY IS A BEACON OF LEARNING FOR FLOREANA ISLAND SCHOOL CHILDREN

The project received crucial support from Galápagos Conservancy and Silversea Expeditions

A newly inaugurated library on Floreana promises to ignite minds and foster a deep understanding of sustainability, vital for the Galápagos' unique ecosystem. This dynamic space will empower residents of Floreana Island, especially schoolchildren, with access to knowledge and opportunities for a brighter future.

Floreana, home to around 120 residents, previously lacked a central hub for learning. Now, the island's Escuela Amazonas — a school serving 24 students from early childhood through their second year of high school, along with a handful of preschoolers, has a dedicated library. The idea for the project, which received backing from the Silversea Fund for Galápagos, sprang from a local teacher who deeply felt the absence of a resource she had personally benefited from while studying in mainland Ecuador. Her desire to offer Floreana's children the same enriching experience she'd had became the driving force behind the project. This dream resonated with others, and their conversations blossomed into a tangible plan.

Bringing the library to life was a two-year journey marked by significant hurdles. The island's remoteness presented logistical challenges, from delayed material deliveries to construction setbacks to simply not having a builder. Yet, after nearly a year of determined effort, the library now stands ready, welcoming readers from the school. A recent donation of children's books from Silversea Expeditions is already enriching the lives of these young readers. Galápagos Conservancy remained a steadfast partner from the outset, providing crucial oversight and support throughout the process.

This new space is a testament to perseverance and shared commitment, offering students at the only school on Floreana Island a quiet place to explore the world through the pages of a book.

Above: Paulina Minda, the Floreana teacher who helped bring the library to life; Below: A student peruses the new library on Floreana Island © Galápagos Conservancy



Location of the first library on Floreana Island.

# SHOWCASING OUR IMPACT: GALÁPAGOS CONSERVANCY'S NEW CONSERVATION CENTER OPENS



Mariuxi Farías, former Director of the Galápagos National Park Directorate, Hugo Mogollán, CEO and President of Galápagos Conservancy, and Jean Pierre Cadena, Director of the Biosecurity Regulation and Control Agency, at the inauguration of our renewed Conservation Center. © GC

Galápagos Conservancy is thrilled to announce the grand opening of its new Conservation Center, conveniently located at the entrance to the Galápagos National Park on Santa Cruz Island. This milestone, celebrated on April 29, 2025, marks an exciting new chapter in our ongoing commitment to the unique and precious biodiversity of this irreplaceable archipelago.

This state-of-the-art center is poised to become a dynamic hub for education, outreach, and community engagement. The journey to this opening involved the dedicated rehabilitation of a historic building, transforming it into a welcoming and informative space. Visitors will now be able to immerse themselves in engaging exhibits within the Center, designed to foster a deeper understanding of the natural wonders of Galápagos and the conservation challenges they face.

Cutting-edge technologies, including interactive experiences (even an AI-powered avatar of Charles Darwin!) promise to captivate and educate visitors of all ages. Initial educational programs are already underway, with plans for continued development to reach an even wider audience. The new Conservation Center is a physical space for showcasing the vital work of the Galápagos Conservancy. By creating a central nexus for visitors, residents, scientists, and conservationists, the center aims to foster greater collaboration and a shared commitment to the islands' future.

We extend our deepest gratitude to our dedicated supporters, and especially to the KHR McNeely Family Foundation, whose partnership made this crucial project possible. As we move forward, we are excited to continue developing the center's programs, enhance its exhibits, and expand our outreach to ensure the long-term conservation of the irreplaceable Galápagos Islands.



Ivonne Torres, head of our Conservation Center, receiving visitors. © GC

# THANK YOU FOR 40 YEARS OF SAFEGUARDING ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST TREASURES

## INVEST IN GALÁPAGOS

Your gift protects iconic species, empowers communities, and restores one of Earth's most extraordinary places.

### WAYS TO GIVE

#### Underwrite an Expedition

Fuel urgent conservation missions that reach the most remote parts of the archipelago.

#### Adopt a Giant Tortoise

Sponsor the care of a tortoise raised in a breeding center until it's ready to return to the wild. Includes naming rights, a photo, certificate, and periodic updates.

#### Become a Galápagos Guardian

Join our monthly donor community at \$10/month or more and receive a limited-edition patch each year while underwriting long-term conservation work.

#### Join as a Member or Ambassador

Choose the membership level that's right for you—or join our Ambassador Society with a gift of \$1,000+ for exclusive briefings and special recognition.

#### Honor a Loved One

Celebrate a birthday, memory, or milestone with a donation in someone's name. We'll send them a personalized message to share your impact.

#### Leave a Legacy

Include Galápagos Conservancy in your estate plans to ensure your commitment lives on.

### OTHER WAYS TO GIVE:

#### Donate from Your IRA

If you're 70½ or older, you can make a tax-free gift directly from your IRA.

#### Give Through a Donor-Advised Fund

Recommend a grant from your DAF for impactful giving, leveraging your established tax benefit.

#### Other Gift Types

We accept charitable trusts, stocks, insurance policies, mutual funds, and savings bonds. Let us help you find the right giving solution.



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**For 40 years, Galápagos Conservancy has been the only U.S.-based nonprofit solely dedicated to safeguarding the Galápagos Islands—and we can't do it without you.**

