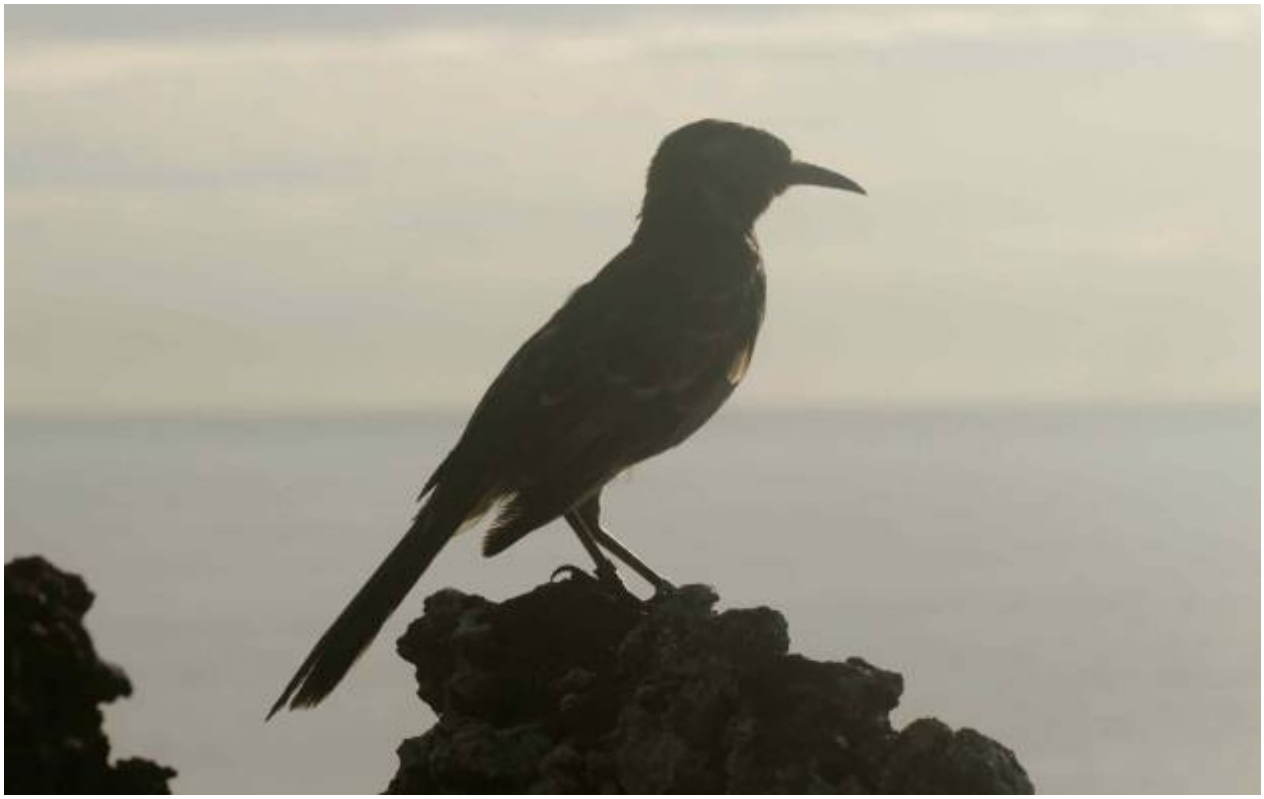
Reintroduction of the Floreana Mockingbird *Mimus trifasciatus*

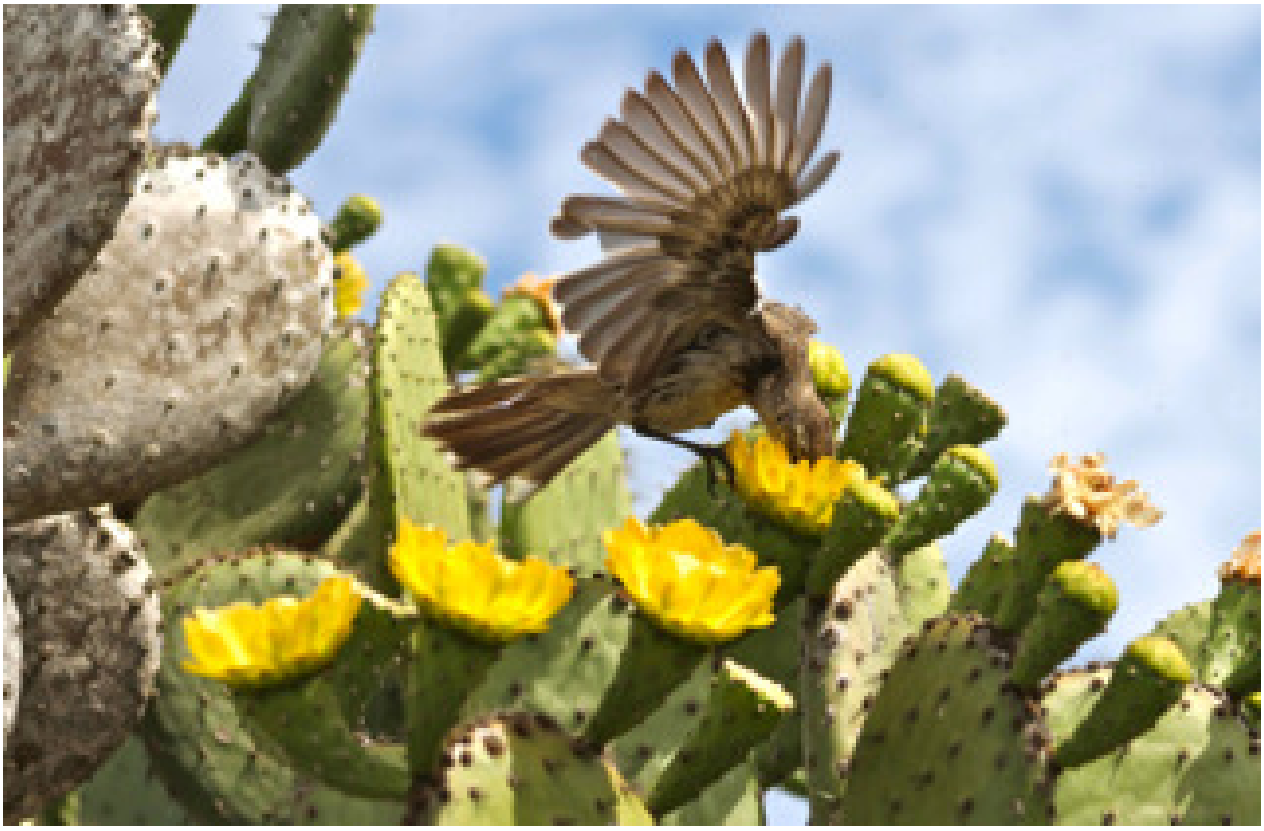
Principal Investigator: Luis Ortiz-Catedral
Reporting Period: 1-31 January 2012



A Floreana mockingbird at sunrise. Champion Islet.
Photo: L. Ortiz-Catedral

Objective 1. Visit Champion and Gardner Islets for signs of nesting activity of mockingbirds

On January 28th I visited Champion Islet accompanied by Patricio Carrera, an Ecuadorian student interested in learning techniques for working with birds in the field. We stayed seven hours on Champion and managed to identify 42 ringed individuals. The goal of this visit was not too census and thus only the most accessible parts of the islet were visited for signs of breeding activities. We encounter one nest with one egg belonging to a breeding group composed of three adult birds and two juveniles hatched to the same group in 2011. We also fund an un-ringed juvenile which was captured, weighed, measured and ringed using ionised coloured metal rings. The following day we visited Gardner Islet and registered 51 ringed individuals and six un-ringed individuals. We surveyed the plateau area of Gardner for signs of nesting activity. No nests were found at this site and no signs of nest building were recorded. On both islets, mockingbirds were feeding extensively on flowers of *Opuntia* cactus. There was evidence of rain on both islets and the vegetation in general looked lush.



An un-ringed Floreana mockingbird on Gardner Islet feeding on *Opuntia* cactus flowers. Photo: L. Ortiz-Catedral

Two mockingbirds feeding on *Opuntia* cactus flowers on Champion Islet (top); Luis Ortiz-Catedral attempting to catch an un-ringed mockingbird using aluminium tags and a plastic centipede as lures (bottom).
Photos: L. Ortiz-Catedral and P. Carrera.

During previous trips to Champion and Gardner Islets, roosting sites and "dust baths" of short-eared owls *Asio flammeus* have been found. These are regularly visited in search of remains of birds, particularly Floreana mockingbirds the rings of which could be recovered from the regurgitated pellets. To date no rings or bones attributable to mockingbirds have been found, but during the January visit we encountered the remains of at least three rats: one on Champion and two on Gardner. It has been suggested that owls hunt for rats on Floreana Island and return to roost on Champion and Gardner. To date there is no evidence of live rats on any islet and the bone remains are confined to a roost site (Champion) and a dust bath (Gardner).

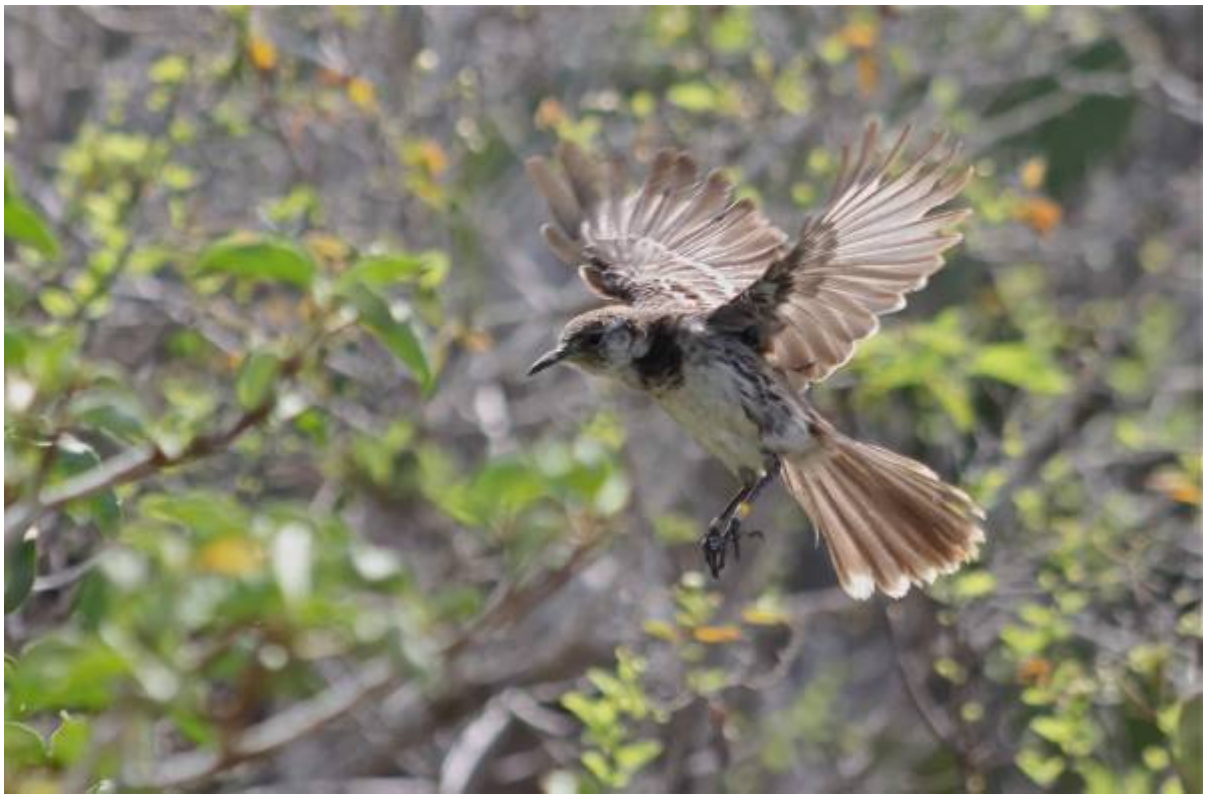
A short-eared owl on Gardner Islet (top) and a rat skull found in a "dust bath" on Gardner Islet. Photos: L. Ortiz-Catedral

Objective 2. Prepare 2nd 6-month report of the project for the year 2011.
The report is currently being finalised.

Other activities:
I assited in meetings with representatives of the Galápagos National Park and Fund for the Control of Invasive Species of Galápagos (FEIG) to discuss the 2012 Annual Operations Plan of the Charles Darwin Foundation. I also attended to a meeting with Francesca Cunninghame, Rachel Atkinson (both CDF), Karl Campbell and Victor Carrion (both Island Conservation) to discuss the potential upcoming rat-eradication on Pinzon Island. Such eradication is relevant for the Mockingbird Project as it will serve as a practice for methodologies likely to be applied later on Floreana Island for eradication of rodents. During this meeting, we also discussed the need for better planned strategies to minimise and assess the effects of rat eradication via poison applications on non-target species, in particular Galápagos hawk *Buteo galapagoensis*.

Objectives for 1-29 February 2012

1. Visit Champion and Gardner Islets to continue monitoring of breeding activities of mockingbirds
2. Attend the workshop "Looking for solutions for the control of the avian parasite *Philornis downsii*"
3. Attend the workshop "Field survey techniques for detection of land birds in the Galápagos Islands"
4. Visit study site of Sarah Knutie (University of Minnesota) on Santa Cruz Island. Sarah studies the effects of *Philornis downsii* on Galápagos mockingbird *M. parvulus* and is focused on on nest and fledging success in Galápagos mockingbird and tropical mockingbird *M. gilvus* in Trinidad. Her study is relevant to the Floreana mockingbird project as it can provide useful information for control of *Philornis* should this parasite be found on Champion or Gardner.



Floreana mockingbird in flight. Gardner Islet. Photo: L. Ortiz-Catedral

Reintroduction of the Floreana Mockingbird *Mimus trifasciatus* is funded by:

Galapagos Conservation Trust

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