



# **Friends of Galapagos New Zealand**

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*Providing assistance for the conservation of the natural environment of the Galapagos Islands*

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**December 2012**

**Information on exciting new Galapagos projects and recent events with FOGNZ**

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## **Projects**

### **Giving Practical Help to Galapagos Conservation**

A key theme in the discussions in our recent committee meetings and at the AGM was how to increase the practical support we give to the Galapagos. Galapagos conservation is a little like the quote from Matthew – the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Or in this case, the spirit is willing but the technical capacity is weak.

We have come up with four areas in which we can add the necessary technical capacity, and these will be the focus for our work over the next few years.

Providing technical support through sharing of expertise and facilitating volunteer work can add huge value to Galapagos conservation without needing huge amounts of cash. As well as fundraising from supporters, we will be seeking sponsors from companies and funding from trusts.

We hope that this approach will allow us to greatly increase the range of projects and the amount of support we are providing.

### **Bringing a Galapagos Manager to New Zealand**

This project is now underway. We have had discussions with the national parks authority, and they are keen to send a middle manager to New Zealand to look at a range of conservation management issues. It looks as if they will be able to fund the international airfares, and we will just provide the in-country support. We may be able to extend this to 2 or 3 people.

## Snail Conservation



Nearly 100 species and subspecies of Galapagos land snails have been identified. Like the world-famous Darwin's finches and land iguanas, each species occupies its own preferred habitat (e.g. desert or humid uplands) on its own particular island or islands. Few species are found on more than two or three islands. Some live only in one tiny area - a single valley or small hill, covering just a few square kilometres or less for an entire species. Like finches' beaks, each species looks different - shell shape, colour, and so on.

Many snail species originally on the Galapagos are probably already extinct, or are occupying a much reduced area. Extinctions started in the 19th century, but accelerated in the last century, particularly the last two decades, and are still on-going. For example of the 25 species originally on Santa Cruz Island, perhaps only 8 still exist. This history of extinctions is probably largely due to invasive pests (particularly rats), but, in some cases, also because of habitat loss.

However, because of the understandable focus on the large, more well-known species, there has been relatively little work carried out on snails in Galapagos, despite the high extinction rates.

New Zealand also has highly valued endemic land snails that are affected by similar problems. We have therefore developed significant expertise in evaluation and conservation of land snails, as well as a range of other invertebrates. Even though such species are not highly visible or charismatic, and most are not well known, New Zealand has considerable expertise in generating strong public interest in the urgent need for protection and in involving the community in recovery projects.

We are hoping to generate funds for travel costs and then recruit some New Zealand experts to kick start work on these species. The most urgent need is to work out what species are most at risk of extinction, and what emergency actions must be undertaken to stop that from happening. Once that is done, actions such as habitat restoration and predator control can be designed.

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| <b>Vermilion Flycatcher, <i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i></b> |
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This is one of the most visible birds in the Galapagos, due to the male's bright red plumage. The birds are gradually disappearing from the Galapagos. Some populations are probably already extinct, and others declining rapidly. The cause of this rapid decline is not known. While the species itself is not endemic, whatever is threatening the flycatcher is probably also a threat to other birds only found on the islands. There is an urgent need to work out just what is going on, and how big a problem it is.

New Zealand support could be provided in a number of ways, including:

- providing peer review for a scientific project, with the work undertaken by an Ecuadorean scientist or local student
- sending a NZ scientist to lead the work, supervising an Ecuadorean post-graduate student or Park staff who would do the majority of the field work and be able to continue the work after the NZ scientist left
- providing equipment and analysis capacity for an Ecuadorean project They are keen to work as volunteers in the Galapagos to provide this crucial piece of information.

## Galapagos Storm Petrel



Storm petrels are small seabirds that live in the open ocean, feeding on plankton. Like all oceanic seabirds, they spend most of their lives at sea but must nest on land. The two main threats to oceanic seabirds are bycatch in fisheries and predation of eggs and chicks by introduced predators, such as rats.

The breeding sites for one of the Galapagos endemic species, the white-vented storm petrel, have never been found. Without knowing its breeding sites, it is impossible to ensure that the species remains safe from threats like rats. If there is only one breeding colony, and rats or another pest invade that island, the bird could become extinct before the problem was even recognised.

It is therefore important to identify the breeding sites. This can be done by netting birds at sea at the right time of the year, attaching tracking devices, and then following them to their nests.

New Zealand has experts in storm petrel capture and tracking, and has the necessary equipment for this work. Two New Zealand experts, Chris Gaskin and Karen Baird, have worked on storm petrels in New Zealand and Chile, and have just published a paper describing a new storm petrel species from Chile. They are keen to work as volunteers in the Galapagos to provide this crucial piece of information.

## ***Recent Events & Other Updates***

### **AGM & Presentation by Tui De Roy**



FOGNZ's AGM was held at the Turnball House, Wellington on 20 August 2012. The Minutes, Chair's Report & Annual Accounts are attached.

The AGM was held in conjunction with a presentation by our Patron Tui De Roy, the renowned wildlife photographer and author. Tui gave a talk titled 'Galapagos – The Inside Story' accompanied by many of her wonderful photos of Galapagos wildlife.

The presentation was well attended with a capacity audience for the venue. Raffles and Galapagos books were offered for sale with refreshments being provided by Adventure Travel, Wellington and Wild Earth. It was a most informative evening enjoyed by all those who were able to attend.

The Committee is unchanged as the members were all re-elected at last year's AGM.

### **FOGNZ Committee & Administration Team**

The FOGNZ Committee consists of: Chair - Julian Fitter, Treasurer - Colin Ryder, Secretary - Paula Warren, Mike Britton, Isabel Castro, Warwick Reed, Alan Saunders, Duncan Scott.

The administration team consists of Margie Luby, Susan Shand and Vanessa Green. Margie attends to financial record keeping, project coordination, & oversight of membership files while Susan compiles and sends out membership invitations and attends to the banking, Vanessa looks after the website, facebook page, and e-news.

We welcome any feedback or comments you may have on this newsletter or other Galapagos matters.