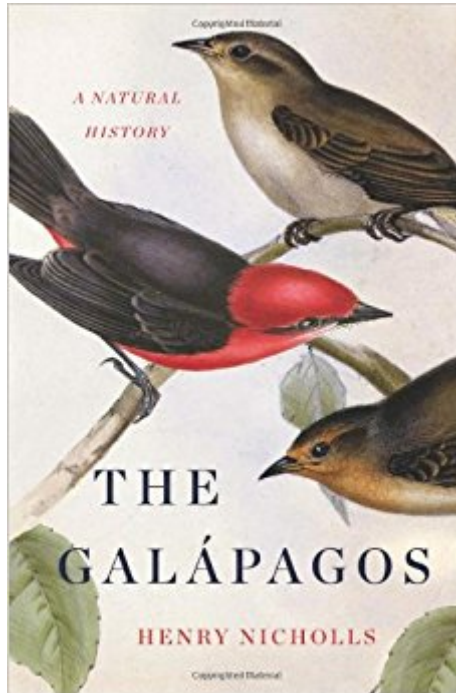


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The Galápagos: A Natural History



Synopsis

Charles Darwin called it "a little world within itself." Sailors referred to it as "Las Encantadas"; the enchanted islands. Lying in the eastern Pacific Ocean, straddling the equator off the west coast of South America, the Galápagos is the most pristine archipelago to be found anywhere in the tropics. It is so remote, so untouched, that the act of wading ashore can make you feel like you are the first to do so. Yet the Galápagos is far more than a wild paradise on earth; it is one of the most important sites in the history of science. Home to over 4,000 species native to its shores, around 40 percent of them endemic, the islands have often been called a "laboratory of evolution." The finches collected on the Galápagos inspired Darwin's revolutionary theory of natural selection. In *The Galápagos*, science writer Henry Nicholls offers a lively natural and human history of the archipelago, charting its course from deserted wilderness to biological testing ground and global ecotourism hot spot. Describing the island chain's fiery geological origins as well as our species' long history of interaction with the islands, he draws vivid portraits of the life forms found in the Galápagos, capturing its awe-inspiring landscapes, understated flora, and stunning wildlife. Nicholls also reveals the immense challenges facing the islands, which must continually balance conservation and everencroaching development. Beautifully weaving together natural history, evolutionary theory, and his own experience on the islands, Nicholls shows that the story of the Galápagos is not merely an isolated concern, but reflects the future of our species' relationship with nature; and the fate of our planet.

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Customer Reviews

Nicholls's first visit to the Galápagos Islands changed his life and inspired his first book, *Lonesome George* (2006). In this biography of the treasured archipelago "the inspiration for Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and a UNESCO World Heritage Site" Nicholls explains why it's a perfect "testing ground" for the dream of sustainable development. In an enticingly structured, thoroughly enjoyable, rolling narrative, he discusses the islands' volcanic origins, native flora and fauna, and human explorers and residents. He also describes with firsthand excitement and surprising detail what it's like to be in the presence of the islands' remarkably tame wildlife, from the playful red-footed boobies to Pacific green turtles and the enormous tortoises for which the archipelago is named and which were slaughtered to the brink of extinction. Nicholls tracks growing acceptance of the need to preserve the islands' ecological integrity versus fierce opposition to conservation efforts. It remains to be seen if lucrative tourism will ensure the islands' protection or pose a threat. There is no question, as Nicholls eloquently reveals, that we all have a stake in protecting the Galápagos. --Donna Seaman

Nicholls describes the natural life of the Galapagos with both knowledge and zest: its rocks, the ocean and the sea life that surround it, its seabirds (including the famously small Galapagos penguin), its plants, its invertebrates, its land birds and its reptiles. The human element is a big part of the Galapagos story too, not only Darwin but also that of naval officers, explorers, privateers and, later, conservationists. The book is a fascinating portrait of the archipelago's natural and human history. "Chicago Tribune"; The Galápagos: A Natural History is a book that should be on the reading table of all those interested not only in the natural history of the Galápagos Islands but by everyone who wishes to expand their perspective upon the subject of natural history itself "as well as, of course "those who simply enjoy reading interesting and well-written books in general." "The Well-read Naturalist"; Anyone planning or just dreaming of a trip to the famed islands will get a preview of their natural history in this engaging volume. "Science News"; Mr. Nicholls, entertaining in his own light, keeps things lively with lots of human observations.... As protective as Mr. Nicholls is of these strange islands, the reader gets the distinct feeling that he wants you to see for yourself these animals that "show no prejudice, no fear" "an experience that will do no less than "transform the way we think about our place in the world." "The New York Times"; In this natural and human history of Darwin's living laboratory, Henry Nicholls surfs from geology, oceanography and marine biology to resident land species, not least

the burgeoning population of Homo sapiens. Throughout, he intertwines key accounts such as Darwin's inspired musings on geological uplift and the piscine encounters of pioneer diver William Beebe. One for the scientific isomane with a sense of the bigger picture.â •#151;Nature

I read this prior to visiting the Galapagos. It's an excellent book. In an easy to read and well organised style, the book introduces the reader to the history, geology, fauna and flora of the islands. It touches on the political and funding issues in a quaintly English and very polite way toward the end which is amusing, whilst allowing the reader to read between the lines as well as the lines themselves. It informed where I needed to read more widely, revealed the multiple layers of the Galapagos for the visitor, and is the best introduction to the Islands I've read. Well worth reading whether you're going or not. But go, it is one of the most enchanting places on this small planet.

I read this on the way to the Galapagos. It provided comprehensive "interested general public" information about this very special place. Sadly, the current level of Natural Guides in the islands is not that high, and this book was important to fill in the gaps.

I read this while I spent several weeks in the Galapagos last month--this book provided a really firm foundation for my time there all told in an informative, entertaining way. I highly recommend this book to anyone with even a passing interest in the past, present, and future of these remarkable islands.

Great introduction to a set of islands where geologic and biologic evolution are both laid out in front of you. Our family trip there was more interesting having read this book before hand.

The book was very readable; it explained Darwinism through examples in easy, non-pedantic terms. The focus on human history as well as the fauna created more complete understanding of the islands. I especially appreciated the nod given to Ecuador's efforts at preserving the environment through conservation efforts and by limiting the human population.

A great little read if you are traveling to the Galapagos or have done so. Also alarming to think about how much the human footprint impacts the world. Fascinating information about Darwin & other scientists' discoveries as well.

Detailed, nitty-gritty descriptions that came to life as I toured the islands. Well-written and never dull. Made my trip much more enjoyable.V.Refer

I read this book when we were in the Gal pagos Islands and finished right after we finished our trip, the book is a great read, has lots of detailed information.

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