IUCN Conservation Outlook Assessment 2017 **(archived)**
Finalised on 09 November 2017

Please note: this is an archived Conservation Outlook Assessment for Galápagos Islands. To access the most up-to-date Conservation Outlook Assessment for this site, please visit https://www.worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org.

Galápagos Islands

SITE INFORMATION

Country:
Ecuador
Inscribed in: 1978
Criteria:
(vii) (viii) (ix) (x)

Site description:
Situated in the Pacific Ocean some 1,000 km from the South American continent, these 19 islands and the surrounding marine reserve have been called a unique ‘living museum and showcase of evolution’. Located at the confluence of three ocean currents, the Galápagos are a ‘melting pot’ of marine species. Ongoing seismic and volcanic activity reflects the processes that formed the islands. These processes, together with the extreme isolation of the islands, led to the development of unusual animal life – such as the land iguana, the giant tortoise and the many types of finch – that inspired Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection following his visit in 1835. © UNESCO

SUMMARY

2017 Conservation Outlook

Significant concern

The main globally significant values of the property are in overall good condition as a result of an improved management and governance regime. However, continued pressure to the site's natural phenomena, natural beauty, ecological processes, biodiversity, endemic and threatened species is of significant concern, despite important management and investment efforts to address the threats from introduced species, uncontrolled tourism and development, commercial fisheries and extreme weather events. These efforts will be in vain if further action regarding global threats such as climate change and illegal fishing pressures from outside the property are not addressed at the regional and international level.

Current state and trend of VALUES

High Concern
Trend: Deteriorating

The only values unthreatened are the geological values. All other values (natural phenomena, ecological processes, biodiversity, and threatened species) are threatened by invasive species and human activities, although remarkable management measures are being undertaken to systematically reduce the impacts of these threats. Climate change is also a major threat, but one which cannot be addressed significantly at the local level. Taken together, the general trend is towards deterioration, although major progress in restoration of some values is evident.

Overall THREATS

Very High Threat

Although proven improvement in the fields of invasive species and tourism/migration control is evidence to management efficiency, the overall level

of current threats remains very high in particular due to the illegal fishing activity in and around the marine reserve, long-term effects of invasive species on native ecosystems due to re-introduction or re-appearance, extreme whether events and climate change pose significant challenges to the site’s OUV; local and new tourism development impacts also need to be carefully observed.

Overall PROTECTION and MANAGEMENT

Mostly Effective

Overall programmes for the protection and management of the Galapagos National Park and Marine Reserve can be ranked as mostly effective. Greatest concern relates to the capacity of local and national institutions to prevent and control global threats such as over-exploitation of marine resources and introduction of invasive species to the islands. Governance and enforcement demonstrate major advancements in the recent years.

FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

► Unique underwater wildlife spectacle

Criterion:(vii)

The Galapagos Marine Reserve is an underwater wildlife spectacle with abundant life ranging from corals to sharks to penguins to marine mammals. No other site in the world can offer the experience of diving with such a diversity of marine life forms. The diversity of underwater geomorphological forms is an added value to the site producing a unique display, which cannot be found anywhere else in the world (SoOUV, 2013).

► Unique geological and geomorphological features

Criterion:(viii)

The Galapagos Islands constitute a hot spot located over a triple bond of tectonic plates: Nazca, Cocos and Pacific, converting it on one of the greater and more active volcanic zones in the world as evidence by the western shield like volcanoes with calderas of extensive diameters as those of Alcedo and Sierra Negra with 8 and 10 km respectively. In comparison with the majority of oceanic archipelagos, Galapagos is very young. Apparently, the oldest among the actual islands originated in the last 3-5 millions years. Fernandina and Isabela, the largest and youngest islands have less than one million year, even Fernandina might have only 60 000 years. Some of the central islets may even have less than 10 000 years. The oldest islands have bared lava flows demonstrating very recent eruptions, sample of its permanent activity. Since the speleological point of view is one of the

volcanic regions more important in the world presenting for example 35 volcanic cavities registered only on Santa Cruz Island, among them a lava tunnel of 3 km long. The amount of scientific
articles written and in developing remarks its geological importance in general. (SoOUV, 2013)

► **Unique example of how ecological, evolutive and biogeographic processes model islands flora and fauna**
Criterion:(ix)

The origin of Galapagos flora and fauna has aroused the interest of humanity since the publication of the Beagle trip on 1835 by Charles Darwin. The islands constitute and almost unique example of how ecological, evolutive and biogeographic processes model the flora and fauna on particular islands and an entire archipelago. Thus, Darwin’s finches, mockingbirds, land snails and giant tortoises represent some of the best examples of adaptive radiation on different ecological niches in a geologically recent place that has allowed the survival of intermediate species. Under this dynamic scenery, many other biotic components have evolved on isolation, converting themselves in organisms not
found anywhere else on Earth. This includes birds, insects, trees, rodents, iguanas and other endemic reptiles. Likewise, the Marine Reserve is a dynamic example of species interchange influenced by the climatic phenomena such as
El Niño, observed on the islands and providing important clues about how species evolve under changing conditions. (SoOUV, 2013)

► **High species diversity, including endemic and endangered species**
Criterion:(x)

The islands have relatively high species diversity for such young oceanic islands, and contain emblematic taxa such as giant tortoises and land iguanas, the most northerly species of penguin in the world, flightless cormorants as well as the historically important Darwin’s finches and Galapagos mockingbirds. Endemic flora such as the giant daisy trees Scalesia spp. and many other genera have also radiated on the islands, part of a native flora including about 500 vascular plant species of which about 180 are endemic. Examples of endemic and threatened species include 12 native

terrestrial mammal species (11 endemic, with 10 threatened or extinct) and 36 reptile species (all endemic and most considered threatened or extinct), including the only marine iguana in the world. Likewise the marine fauna has an unusually high level of diversity and endemism, with 2,909 marine species identified with 18.2% endemism. High profile marine species include sharks, whale sharks, rays and cetaceans. The interactions between the marine and terrestrial biotas (e.g. sea lions, marine and terrestrial iguanas, and seabirds) are also exceptional. Recent exploration of deep sea communities continues to produce new additions to science (SoOUV, 2013).

Other important biodiversity values

► Other designations

Área Marina Ecológica y Biológicamente importante (EBSA); Birdlife International Important Bird Area; Alliance for Zero Extinction site; CI Hotspot; WWF Global 200 region.

Assessment information

Threats

Current Threats

Very High Threat

Although proven improvement in the fields of invasive species and tourism/migration control is evidence to management efficiency, the overall level of current threats remains very high in particular due to the illegal fishing activity around the marine reserve, as well as the still existing impact to native ecosystems caused by invasive species and the trends in the composition of tourism markets targeting the islands, and the extensive impacts of climate change in the long run.

▶ Temperature extremes

High Threat
Inside site, throughout(>50%)

Climate change has already had major impacts on the islands ecosystems. Rises in sea temperatures and ocean acidity have significantly affected coral reefs around the islands. Rising ocean surface temperatures reduce the upwelling of nutrients around the islands that are essential to the food chains that nourish sea mammals and birds. Increased precipitation and temperatures affect a host of native species and in some cases favour invasives. El Niño and La Niña patterns that cause extreme weather events have become more intense (Smithsonian, 2015), impacting species as well as agriculture, fisheries, and tourism. Plans are under development to assist the island residents and park managers to adapt to climate change, but the impacts of climate change are the most difficult of all threats to deal with successfully. (McLennan, 2009)

▶ Invasive Non-Native/ Alien Species

High Threat
Inside site, extent of threat not known

Invasive species are the most immediate threat to terrestrial environments of the islands. Sophisticated biosecurity, invasive species eradication, and ecosystem restoration programs are in place and are constantly being improved. Several major successes have been achieved over the years, especially in the eradication of feral goats, cats, rodents, and fruit flies. Still, the number and extent of existing invasive species, and the ever-present threat of new introductions or re-introductions, means that invasive species remain a very high threat for the site’s values (36COM.Galapagos.SPreport; Mission Report, 2010; draft mission report, 2017). Current local human development patterns make it easier for invasive species to spread.

▶ Shipping Lanes

High Threat
Inside site, scattered(5-15%)
Outside site

International marine routes and marine traffic between the islands and the

mainland pose a significant threat to the species and their habitats due to potential damage on reefs, species individuals –especially migratory mammals and turtles- and overall environmental damage from oil spills, invasive species/organisms in ballast waters, sound pollution and illicit activities undertaken beyond national jurisdiction.
In general, pressures in the Eastern Tropical Pacific are associated with tourism, trade and fisheries needs, as well as with the global commercial fleet (CMAR draft, 2017). Navigation in the Galapagos marine reserve has gradually increased, largely due to tourist demand but also for research, food and materials, income for instruction and forced arrivals (PNG, 2014). Traffic between islands as well as control of tourist vessels has been strengthened through the formalization of environmental licensing in the different categories established by law (IUCN draft mission report, 2017).

► Tourism/ visitors/ recreation

High Threat
Inside site, widespread(15-50%)

Both tourism and immigration increase the rate and cumulative effects of anthropogenic change through the every growing footprint of man in a limited island environment. Programs and systems are in place to monitor and reduce immigration, and to lower the impact of tourism, like the Tourism Observatory and the Migration Card; nevertheless, trends in large and increasing markets (e.g. China) could mean a change in the tourism flow and composition, posing a challenge to the desired model of tourism for the islands (Draft mission report, 2017).
The board of the Governing Council of the Special Regime of Galapagos have aproved a ministerial agreement to establish the necessary measures in order to achieve zero growth of tourism and migration, which is accompanied by regulations to limit the number of hotels and use of existing capacity - no new building licenses will be issued (mission draft report, 2017).

► Fishing / Harvesting Aquatic Resources

High Threat
Inside site, scattered(5-15%)

Sophisticated, hi-tech programs are in place, and are continually being improved, to study, monitor and enforce fishing regulations that are designed to foster sustainable fisheries levels that benefit local fishermen

(36COM.Galapagos.SPreport; Mission Report, 2010, IUCN draft mission report 2017). No sports fishing activity is permitted within the reserve and the new zonation bans commercial fishing in non-designated areas, defined in a participatory process with local fisher communities (IUCN draft mission report, 2017; PNG, 2016). Also, the expansion of protected marine zone through the creation of the Darwin and Wolf marine sanctuary is seen as a strategy to organize the fishing activity. Continuous presence of industrial fishing fleet outside the site increases the likelihood of poaching activities, as demonstrated by the recent incident with a Chinese vessel entering the marine reserve with 300 tons of illegally caught shark meet; although this sets a particular precedent in regards to illegal activity in the Eastern Tropical Pacific, more and more of these events could be foreseen as this falls into a global dynamic already evident in other zones like the Indo-Pacific.

Potential Threats

High Threat

Overall potential threats must for the moment be considered high because of the significant threat from the introduction or reintroduction of invasive species.

▶ Other

Low Threat
Inside site, throughout(>50%)

Sea level rise can be expected to impact the islands in coming years, threatening especially nesting beaches for penguins and sea turtles through coastal erosion and flooding (MacLennan, 2009).

▶ Invasive Non-Native/ Alien Species

Very High Threat
Inside site, extent of threat not known

All island systems face the threat of introduction and/or re-introduction of invasives that can have devastating effects on native flora and fauna. A major biosecurity programme for Galapagos is in place, and under constant improvement. It enforces strict regulations for cargo leaving the mainland (Guayaquil) to Galapagos, for ships introducing cargo into the islands, for ports receiving cargo in the islands, and for aircrafts entering the islands.

These measures, together with educational campaigns for island residents and visiting tourists, should serve to reduce considerably the influx of invasives in the long run, although proper protocols and facilities for cargo management once in the islands are needed and therefore the threat remains very high (draft mission Report, 2017).

Protection and management

Assessing Protection and Management

► Relationships with local people

Mostly Effective

The Galapagos National Park Directorate (DGNP) has worked in setting stakeholder participation processes for several topics: tourism, research, illegal activities, fishing, etc. With the new 2015 law, an advisory body comprised of NGOs and other local organizations is envisioned, although its regulation is still to be completed, hopefully, taking into consideration good participatory practice from the former consultative bodies (draft mission report, 2017); the GNPD works with several community associations (e.g. fishermen, tourism) in the design of planning instruments to implement the institutional guidelines and needs (LOREG, 2015). The organization and relations with other instances through the Galapagos Government Council is a break-thought in governance to secure the Special Regime is supported both politically and by local populations.

► Legal framework

Mostly Effective

The legal framework for management and enforcement have continued to improve over the years with the establishment of the Marine Reserve and the declaration of the new marine sanctuary Darwin and Wolf; the Galapagos Special Regime Law – LOREG and multiple inter-institutional arrangements for cooperation. While the LOREG provides a legal framework, it relies heavily on follow-up regulations to spell out in detail exactly how the law is to be applied; in two years time, the DGNP has managed to put in place regulations for public use zonation and the Environmental Regulation

ministerial agreement for quality and licensing. (36COM.Galapagos.SPreport; Mission Report, 2010, draft mission report, 2017).
The creation and allocation of all sanitary – phyto, agro- and quarantine competencies within the archipelago to the Galápagos Biosecurity Agency represents a milestone in the trajectory of law enforcement required to undertake biological control in and outside the islands.

► Enforcement

Some Concern

Particularly in environmental quality control, the regulation of permits has allowed the DNPG to better control the utilization of public areas such as ports, through the proper licensing and fining processes. Also, through the establishment of the Biosecurity Agency the Directorate has been able to more quickly identify infractions and act appropriately. Although coordination with the Navy is recurrent and sanctions are appropriate for the most important infractions, prosecution for poaching beyond the property's borders are still to be re-evaluated in terms of enforcement, as well as patrols within the marine reserve.

► Integration into regional and national planning systems

Mostly Effective

As a result of the interinstitutional management within the framework of the Governing Council of the Special Regime of Galapagos, there is the "Galapagos Plan 2015 - 2020", a commitment for territorial planning and sustainable development of both protected areas and municipalities confluent in the territory.

► Management system

Mostly Effective

Many institutions have decision-making powers that affect conservation values on the Galapagos. Since the Special Regime law of 2015, competencies and planning instruments have been more clearly defined; the overall "Plan Galápagos" and the 2014 Protected Areas Management Plan come as a result of an integrated management vision between several Ministries, taking into account lessons learned from the interaction with the NGOs and local communities. The management plan will be revised and

updated in 2018.

A number of NGOs, including the Charles Darwin Foundation that has worked on scientific and
management research on the islands since the inception of the Park, local chambers of tourism which promote and regulate tourism, as well as a number of fishing cooperatives also participate in
management decisions.

Four Management Plans for the Park were in place since 1974 (Mission report, 2010). The most recent Management Plan for Protected Areas of Galápagos was prepared in 2014 (Plan de Manejo de las Áreas Protegidas de Galápagos para el Buen Vivir, 2014).

► Management effectiveness

Mostly Effective

The 2014 management plan considers the results of the 2011 management effectiveness study, which responds to the overall national guidelines for ME evaluation and the RAPPAM tool; 5 main “macro-problems” are assessed for the short, mid and long term and in conclusion, the national park and marine reserve were in need of a spatial approach for integrated and successful management (PNG, 2014). The current management plan is structured on the bases of the assessment areas, introducing decision-making alternatives to specific gaps in management.

► Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations

Mostly Effective

Progress has been made in implementing all of the recommendations that have come out of the Committee in recent years. The main challenge remains around controlling processes derived from a biological threat from invasive species re-appearance and global threats, such as illegal fishing, over-exploitation of marine resources and climate change.

► Boundaries

Mostly Effective

Boundaries are clear and no issues have been identified.

(36COM.Galapagos.SPreport; Mission Report, 2010). Zonation within the marine portion has to potential to significantly improve use control within the property’s boundaries, including for patrol with the Navy.

► Sustainable finance

Mostly Effective

Galapagos has served as a model for sustainable finance with the early establishment of a market- based entrance fee system; and trust funds for Park and Reserve management, general conservation activities and for marine biodiversity. Current funding levels appear adequate for core management activities. Considerable international funding has been mobilized over the years for multiple activities both within the Park and Marine Reserve and in the non-park areas of the islands, particularly to address the most important threats to the OUV (I.e. invasive species, illegal fishing). (36COM.Galapagos.SPreport; Mission Report, 2010; draft mission report, 2017).

► Staff training and development

Some Concern

Important increases in staff numbers and training have been identified during the past years in the DGNP, especially aimed at control measures (e.g. sanitary controls in ports, vessel monitoring). The park has a volunteer programme for 3-month trainees to support key processes within their areas of expertise, and new departments and posts have been created; for tourism, there is a growing force of naturalist guides well trained to lead the maritime and terrestrial tours.
Nevertheless, it seems that field activities such as boat interventions and inland control (e.g. ports) are still short of personnel, especially in the most populated islands.
The Biosecurity Agency has also managed to secure, in only 5 years, a remarkable amount of fixed-term specialized staff to deploy biological and agricultural procedures inside the islands; nevertheless, more personnel and conditions (e.g. proper locations for storage) are required on the mainland, e.g. in Guayaquil- (draft mission report, 2017).

► Sustainable use

Mostly Effective

The only permitted uses of Park and Reserve resources are for artisanal fishing and tourism. In both cases, major efforts are underway to assure that these uses are sustainable, particularly through the Plan Galápagos and the Management plan. (36COM.Galapagos.SPreport; Mission Report, 2010; CGREG, 2015; PNG, 2014).

► Education and interpretation programs

Mostly Effective

Educational reforms are underway for the Galapagos school system to prepare students for work in conservation, tourism, and fisheries. These programs are in some instances supported by the tourism industry. Environmental education programs are already a component of current programs that are supported by the GNPS, the CDRS, and various environmental NGOs. (36COM.Galapagos.SPreport; Mission Report, 2010). The newly launched interpretation path of “Tortoise Route” is a remarkable example.

► Tourism and visitation management

Some Concern

Tourism and associated migration are being managed through the Zero Growth policy and moratorium, and controlled through the Visitor Management System - SIMAVIS. Also, public use zonation and identification of tourism services, routes and providers has helped management and control within the properties limits, and there is strict control for both tourism and other vessel circulation within the site through approved itineraries. Interesting community partnerships for local operations have been organized to comply with law requirements such as the Centro Comunitario Floreana, where local communities have embarked on business opportunities based on an equitable distribution of costs and benefits. However, it is still unclear if such models will be sustainable. SIMAVIS also provides information for monitoring and evaluation not exclusive to visitation but also in regards to the property’s condition and values.

▶ Monitoring

Mostly Effective

Monitoring of natural and introduced species; visitor use and impacts; and fishing activity are key components of management programs. (36COM.Galapagos.SPreport; Mission Report, 2010). Also, there are a number of monitoring procedures related to biosafety on the islands and in the ports.

▶ Research

Highly Effective

Research is coordinated by the CDRS in cooperation with the GNPS, and has for many years provided scientific data to inform management decisions. (36COM.Galapagos.SPreport; Mission Report, 2010); there are a number of international and local organizations conducting very important studies comprising scientific basis for many of the internal management decisions such as tourism data management, species inventories and census, and agriculture practices, among others (draft mission report, 2017).

Overall assessment of protection and management

Mostly Effective

Overall programmes for the protection and management of the Galapagos National Park and Marine Reserve can be ranked as mostly effective. Greatest concern relates to the capacity of local and national institutions to prevent and control global threats such as over-exploitation of marine resources and introduction of invasive species to the islands. Governance and enforcement demonstrate major advancements in the recent years.

▶ Assessment of the effectiveness of protection and management in addressing threats outside the site

Some Concern

Threats originating outside of the site include transportation links, alien invasive species and commercial fisheries. In each case, management measures and programmes have been put in place or are being strengthened, to address these threats on a systematic basis; a

comprehensive governance and institutional system has also been enhanced through the establishment of legal and planning instruments envisioned for the mid and long term.

▶ **Best practice examples**

Ecosystem restoration, regulation and scheduling of cruise ships, tracking of vessels in the Marine Reserve, and tour guide certification.

State and trend of values

Assessing the current state and trend of values

World Heritage values

▶ **Unique underwater wildlife spectacle**

High Concern
Trend:Deteriorating

Invasive species have the potential to replace native fauna, with their amazing docility, and to decimate native plant communities that are the basis for the singular beauty of their associated landscapes. Rising sea temperatures and ocean acidification associated with climate change have already decimated the island’s coral reefs, one of the major components contributing to the natural beauty of near shore marine environments. Corals were also severely impacted by the 1982-1983 El Niño. Extreme weather events, made more frequent and severe by climate change, will impact the natural beauty by creating landslides and erosion from flooding, and scarring of the landscape by fires. Due to beyond-border over-exploitation activity affecting many marine species, this value of the property is being compromised (Draft mission report, 2017).

▶ **Unique geological and geomorphological features**

Good
Trend:Stable

The geological features of the islands are not threatened.

► Unique example of how ecological, evolutive and biogeographic processes model islands flora and fauna

High Concern
Trend:Deteriorating

The ecological processes of the site are severely threatened by invasive species, climate change, and human activities, especially over-fishing and tourism. While much is being done to eradicate invasive species, restore ecosystems, and control and reduce the human footprint, there is little that can be done in the short to medium term to reverse the impacts of climate change (36COM.Galapagos.SPreport; Mission Report, 2010).

► High species diversity, including endemic and endangered species

High Concern
Trend:Deteriorating

The same threats that impact ecological processes (invasive species, climate change, and human activities) also produce significant negative impacts on biodiversity and threatened species, although evidence of restoration is available for a number of species and habitats. Mitigation and restoration programs are countering most of these threats except climate change; in turn, there is still a lot of coordination efforts and effective legal attention from the international community in regards to illegal fishing and over-exploitation.

Summary of the Values

► Assessment of the current state and trend of World Heritage values

High Concern

Trend: Deteriorating

The only values unthreatened are the geological values. All other values (natural phenomena, ecological processes, biodiversity, and threatened species) are threatened by invasive species and human activities, although remarkable management measures are being undertaken to systematically reduce the impacts of these threats. Climate change is also a major threat, but one which cannot be addressed significantly at the local level. Taken

together, the general trend is towards deterioration, although major progress in restoration of some values is evident.

► **Assessment of the current state and trend of other important biodiversity values**

High Concern

Trend: Deteriorating

Additional information

Benefits

Understanding Benefits

► **Outdoor recreation and tourism**

The Galapagos Islands are one of the iconic tourism destinations of the world. The site is of great economic importance nationally, regionally, and globally. There is, however, an unequal distribution of tourism benefits.

► **Fishing areas and conservation of fish stocks**

The Marine Reserve is an important source of fish both locally and nationally and is a major source of income generation for the local community.

Summary of benefits

This iconic site is highly valued globally for its conservation and tourism values, and locally for the livelihoods generated by tourism and fisheries.

Projects

Compilation of active conservation projects

№	Organization/ individuals	Project duration	Brief description of Active Projects
1	Charles Darwin Foundation		Numerous projects for science and research, and technical assistance.
2	WWF		Projects focusing on sustainable tourism, regulating migration, innovative fisheries management, governance and enforcement of the Marine Reserve, renewable energy, and waste management.
3	Galapagos Conservation Trust		Funding of multiple projects in ecosystem restoration, climate change, and social issues.
4	Galapagos Conservancy		Multiple projects to conserve endangered species, develop support of local communities, ecological restoration, and coastal monitoring.
5	Wild Aid		Support to the GNPS for control and execution of marine surveillance; biosafety
6	Conservation linternational		Project focus on sustainable agriculture, fisheries and green development.
7	Migramar		Shark conservation: monitor and systematize data on whale and hammerhead sharks in the Eastern Tropical Pacific; inform policy-makers for threat addressing strategies

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