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Galapagos sealions & seals



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This document, dedicated to the sealions and seals of the Galapagos Islands, combines a series of photographs by the British researcher Godfrey Merlen, preserved as slides in the audiovisual collection of the Library, Archive & Museum of the Charles Darwin Foundation, with a selection of texts about the archipelago that are part of the "Historical Bibliography" of the *Galapagueana* digital project.

Using both resources, and connecting the visual works with fragments of narratives and chronicles, a comprehensive approach to two of the most iconic Galapagos species is sought. An approach that goes beyond mere scientific knowledge and that places these species in a broad and comprehensive framework. The minimalist design reinforces the importance of the images, which are already part of the audiovisual heritage of the Galapagos.

The texts included in these pages are quoted in their original version and language. At the end of the book, whenever necessary, a possible translation of them is offered.

Our thanks to Godfrey Merlen for the images, and to all the chroniclers, travelers and scholars who left, in their field notebooks, testimony of the natural wonders they found on their way through "The Encantadas".

Edgardo Civalero | Charles Darwin Foundation



"...e porque el navio no abia mas agua que para dos días, acordaron de echar la barca e salir en tierra por agua e yerba para los caballos, e salidos no hallaron sino lobos marinos, e tortugas e galápagos tan grandes, que llevaba cada uno un ombre encima, e muchas higuanas que son como sierpes."

Tomás de Berlanga. *Carta a Su Majestad de Fray Tomás de Berlanga, describiendo su viaje desde Panamá á Puerto Viejo, e los trabajos que padeció en la navegacion*. Portoviejo, 1535.



"A very large one [a sealion bull] made at me, three several times, and had I not happened to have a pike-staff pointed with iron in my hand, I might have been killed by him; (one of our men having narrowly escap'd the day before). I was on the level sand when he came open-mouth'd at me out of the water, as quick and fierce as the most angry dog let loose. I struck the point into his breast and wounded him all the three times he made at me, which forced him at last to retire with an ugly noise, snarling and showing his long teeth at me out of the water. This amphibious beast was as big as a large bear."

Woodes Rogers. *A Cruising Voyage Round the World*. London: A. Bell & B. Lintot, 1712.



"We saw but few seals on the beach, either of the hairy or furry species. This circumstance, however, might be occasioned, by its not being the season for whelping; as those, which were killed by us, had some time to go with young; but a few hundreds of them, might at any time be collected without difficulty, and form, no inconsiderable addition, to the profits of a voyage."

James Colnett. *A Voyage for Whaling and Discovery round C. Horn into the Pacific Oceans...* [S.d.]: [s.d.], 1795.



"...the penguin and seals also, some of which latter I understood were of that tribe which are considered to be of the fur kind, were seen, as likewise some [i]guanas and snakes; these, together with a few birds, of which in point of number the dove bore the greatest proportion, were what appeared principally to compose the inhabitants of this island."

George Vancouver. *Voyage of discovery to the North Pacific Ocean, and round the world in the years 1791-9*. Volume 3, book 6. London: [s.d.], 1798.



"We found on the beach a few seals ... Several of the seals were killed by our men, and proved of that kind which do not produce the fur. Nothing can be more sluggish or more inactive than this animal while on the sand; it appears incapable of making any exertions whatever to escape those in pursuit of it, and quietly waits the blow which terminates its existence. A small blow on the nose will kill them in an instant, but when they are in the water, or even on the rocks, nothing can exceed their activity: they seem then to be a different animal altogether; shy, cunning, and very alert in pursuit of their prey, and in avoiding pursuit, they are then very difficult to take."

David Porter. *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean by Captain David Porter in the United States Frigate Essex in the Years 1812, 1813, And 1814*. Philadelphia: published by Bradford and Inskeep, 1815.



"There are some seals of both the fur and hair kind."

Amasa Delano. *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, Comprising Three Voyages Round the World...* Boston: printed by E. G. House, 1817.



"This island is often visited by great quantities of seals."

John Shillibeer. *A narrative of the Briton's voyage, to Pitcairn's Island*. Taunton: printed for the author by J. W. Marriott, 1817.



"The place is like a new creation: the birds and beasts do not get out of our way; the pelicans and sea-lions look in our faces as if we had no right to intrude on their solitude; the small birds are so tame that they hop upon our feet; and all this amidst volcanoes which are burning around us on either hand. Altogether it is as wild and desolate a scene as imagination can picture."

Lord Byron. *Voyage of H. M. S. Blonde to the Sandwich Islands in the Years 1824-1825*. London: John Murray, 1826.



"The only mammiferous animal [on James Island] is a species of seal, with very short ears and short brown hair. We killed one individual, but it soon became so putrid, that we were unable to make a description, a circumstance that prevented us from examining, in a detailed manner, many other animals."

John Scouler. Account of a voyage to Madeira, Brazil, Juan Fernandez, and the Gallapagos Islands, performed in 1824 and 1825, with a view of examining their natural history, &c. *The Edinburgh Journal of Science*, 5 (11), October 1826, pp. 195-236.



"Seals frequent the coast in considerable quantities; ten or twelve were shot during our stay, but none of the fur kind."

Berthold Seeman. *Narrative of the voyage of H.M.S. Herald during the years 1845-51, under the command of captain Henry Kellett, R.N., C.B.; being a circumnavigation of the globe, and three cruizes to the arctic regions in search of sir John Franklin*. Volume II. London: Reeve and Co., 1853.



"Of indigenous terrestrial mammals none are known to exist in any of the islands, but before passing to the birds it seems desirable to recall the fact that a species of sea lion (Otaria) was once common in the Galapagos. In the accounts of various visitors to the islands at the end of the last and beginning of the present century, allusion is not unfrequently made to the numbers of Otaria, but I have seen none in recent records. It seems therefore most probable that these animals were exterminated by the crews of the whaling ships which thronged these seas prior to Mr. Darwin's visit. The Galapagos Otaria is usually supposed to be the same as that found on the coast of California; but this point has, I believe, never been satisfactorily determined, and specimens of this animal and bones of it, especially crania, should be carefully sought for by future explorers."

A. H. Markham. *A Visit to the Galapagos Islands in 1880. Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, 2 (12), December 1880, pp. 742-755.



"The only other species of mammals thus far reported from the Galapagos Islands are two species of Eared Seals, namely, *Otaria jubata* (Forst.) and *Arctocephalus australis* (Zimm.), specimens of which were obtained in 1872 by the Hassler Expedition ... The list of known indigenous species thus numbers only five."

J. A. Allen. On a small collection of mammals from the Galapagos Islands, collected by Dr. G. Baur. *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History*, 4, 1892, pp. 47-50.

Zalophus wollebaeki

The adult male is large and has a robust body, especially in the pectoral region and neck. The muzzle is slender and long, the forehead in the adult male is notoriously pronounced due to the development of the sagittal crest of the skull, the female and juvenile have a little pronounced face. The adult female and juvenile are much smaller, with a slender body. The adult male is dark brown, grayish brown to blackish gray. The adult female and juvenile individuals are grayish brown, light brown or yellowish brown. The pectoral fins are broad, with hairs on the upper side. The hind fins are slender, with digits unequal in length, fleshy tips and short, narrow claws.

Arctocephalus galapagoensis

It is the smallest pinniped species in Ecuador and the one with the smallest sexual dimorphism. This species has a relatively thin neck. Males have very slight forehead protuberances. Females are thinner and considerably smaller than males. Large eyes, small nose. Muzzle short and not very pronounced, the nasal openings are at the tip of the muzzle. The head is robust in the male. The face is flat, and the ears are prominent. The front, sides of the muzzle and ventral part of the body are pale brown, and contrast with the grayish brown fur on the back and sides of the animal. The ears are pale brown up to the margins. The skin of the flippers is blackish. The dry hair is dark brown and fluffy. The animals when wet look almost black. The anterior fins are large and broad, while the posterior fins are narrow. The digits of the hind fins are approximately equal in shape and length.

Bioweb. 2023.

Translations

"...and because the ship had no more water than for two days, they agreed to launch the boat and go out on land for water and grass for the horses, and when they arrived they found nothing but sea lions, and turtles and tortoises so large that each one could carry a man on top, and many iguanas that are like serpents."

Tomás de Berlanga, p. 3.



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