

Fundación Charles Darwin

# Land iguanas

dragons of Galapagos







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This document, dedicated to the land iguanas 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 one of the most iconic Galapagos species is sought. An approach that goes beyond mere scientific knowledge and that places this 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.







"Instead of the different species of turtles which are generally found in the tropical, or equatorial regions, these shores, however singular it may seem, abounded with that description of those animals which are usually met with in the temperate zones, bordering on the arctic and antarctic circles: 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 guanacs and snakes."

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







"The land Guana is very similar in shape to the lizard or alligator, having four legs, and is about two feet and a half long. Their shape is like a short thick snake with four legs, but it is a very innocent animal. Its colour is like that of burned rocks, or cinder, and their skin looks almost as coarse as rough. They are tolerably good eating and would be made use of for food were there not so many terrapins and sea turtles to be got at this place."

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.







"In some spots a half acre of ground would be so completely covered with them, as to appear as though it was impossible for another to get in the space; they would all keep their eyes fixed constantly on us, and we at first supposed them prepared to attack us. We soon however discovered them to be the most timid of animals, and in a few moments knocked down hundreds of them with our clubs, some of which we brought on board, and found to be excellent eating, and many preferred them greatly to the turtle."

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.







"The number of guanans we saw here, can alone be conceived; they had regular burrows, and were much more plentiful than I have ever seen rabbits in a preserve in this country. They are of a light red color, about two to three feet long, and when pursued, do not, like those at Charles Island, take to the water."

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





"In returning to the beach, we killed plenty of Iguanas, an animal of the lizard tribe, and esteemed a most delicate kind of food in tropical countries. Although our Iguanas differed very much from the West Indian species, both in size and appearance, being larger and of a yellowish colour, we found them much more palatable food than turtle."

John Scouler. Account of a voyage to Madeira, Brazil, Juan Fernandez, and the Gallapagos Islands... *The Edinburgh Journal of Science*, 5 (11), October 1826, pp. 195-236.







"Like their brothers these a-kind, they are ugly animals, of a yellowish orange beneath, and of a brownish red colour above: from their low facial angle they have a singularly stupid appearance. They are, perhaps, of a rather less size than the marine species; but several of them weighed between ten and fifteen pounds. In their movements they are lazy and half torpid. When not frightened, they slowly crawl along with their tails and bellies dragging on the ground. They often stop, and doze for a minute or two, with closed eyes and hind legs spread out on the parched soil."

Charles Darwin. *Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the countries visited during the voyage of H.M.S. Beagle round the world...* London: John Murray, 1860.







"The terrestrial one, the *Amblyrhynchus Dumerilii*, has never, I believe, been found in Charles Island, though common enough in other islands of the group. Its habitat appears to be confined to the central portion of the Archipelago. My specimen has a short, broad head, and is of a dark brownish colour, striped with yellow across the back; its feet are partially webbed and are furnished with five long claws; the tail is long and flattened at the sides. It bears no resemblance to its ally the iguana, either in appearance or habits, for it is of a very sluggish nature, and may be caught with ease."

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.



***Conolophus subcristatus***

(1) head small, slightly longer than wide; (2) nostril turned upward and slightly outward, slightly closer to end of snout than to orbits; (3) eye and tympanum of moderate sizes; (4) dorsal surface of head covered with large polygonal, convex or subconical keeled scales; (5) occipital slightly enlarged; (6) rostral and mental rostrum moderately large; (7) labials 12; (8) throat longitudinally folded, covered with minute granules; (9) low nuchal ridge of recurved spines continuing as a weakly serrate ridge along dorsum; (10) scales on body very small, keeled posteriorly, smooth and slightly larger on belly; (11) limbs strong; (12) digits very short; (13) V toe no longer than second toe; (14) III toe strongly denticulate to inside of basal joint; (15) 17-21 femoral pores on each side; (16) tail barely longer than head and body, weakly compressed, with slightly serrate crest, covered with small keeled scales.

Bioweb. 2022.

## 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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