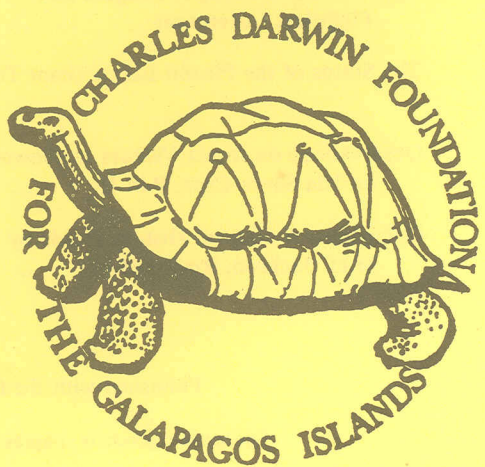


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PRESIDENT FEBRES CORDERO SUPPORTS THE CDF ENDOWMENT FUND CAMPAIGN

At a ceremony held in January at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., His Excellency, President León Febres Cordero announced his enthusiastic support for the campaign mounted by The Nature Conservancy to raise an 1,500,000 U.S. dollar endowment fund for the Charles Darwin Foundation. In a speech accepting the post of Honorary Chairman of the appeal, he said:

“The Government of Ecuador wishes to thank The Nature Conservancy for taking this initiative in defending the natural environment of the Galapagos Archipelago. The Charles Darwin Research Station is already functioning in the islands and does honour to the man for whom it was named. There, contemporary scientists continue to work in the great tradition that Darwin inspired and with devotion to the conservation of Nature for the future.

Much remains to be done and what has to be done implies much scientific research and great expense. We appreciate the efforts of The Nature Conservancy and its valuable support for this noble goal. Many thanks to you all in the name of Ecuador and in the name of the Galapagos Islands which have been declared a Patrimony of Mankind and are worthy of that appellation.”

In spite of the current economic problems of his country, President Febres Cordero, on behalf of the Government of Ecuador, pledged a contribution of 150,000 U.S. dollars to the Fund. This was immediately matched by an offer of the same amount from the U.S. Agency for International Development. While these two magnificent donations do not yet reach the target, they do bring it into sight on the horizon. If enough of our faithful supporters now rally to the appeal, the Darwin Foundation's finances can at last be given a firmer basis.

It may seem miraculous that, without any reliable and predictable source of income, the Darwin Foundation has been able to achieve so much in the last quarter of a century. But we ought not to be dependent on miracles. Moreover the uncertainties have resulted in the inefficient use of even the inadequate funds available because of the interruptions imposed on conservation projects by unpredictable fluctuations in receipts. The Endowment Fund will not solve all problems but it will provide a stabilizing factor and reduce the waste caused by “stop and go” procedures.

So now is the time for supporters to carry the appeal over the target. Contributions earmarked “for the Campaign for the Galapagos Islands” may be made through any national W.W.F. organization or directly to The Nature Conservancy, International Program, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue N.W., Washington D.C. 20036.

NEWS FROM ACADEMY BAY

CONSERVATION PROBLEMS AND PROGRAMMES

Lack of funds at the Charles Darwin Research Station (CDRS) has compelled a reduction in the number of the staff scientists, whose primary function is conservation. Consequently there has been some redistribution of responsibilities. Marcia Williams, who arrived with her husband in 1985, has taken over the direction of ornithology and entomology as well as herpetology. Mario Hurtado combines the duties of assistant station director with his familiar speciality of marine biology. Jonas Lawesson has recently taken charge of botany, including forestry and the eradication of introduced plants. Luis Calvopiña continues to lead the team devoted to the study and control of the introduced mammals which do so much damage to the native wildlife. This delineation of duties does not interfere with the close co-operation between the various disciplines: for instance, the herpetologists, when repatriating captive-bred Land Iguanas to their natural homes, require the help of the predator controllers on account of the marauding cats, and of the botanists on account of the supply of plant food. Similarly almost all conservation projects are planned, researched and carried out in the closest collaboration with the Galapagos National Park Service (GNPS).

THE GIANT TORTOISES

The captive-breeding of tortoises at the CDRS was begun twenty years ago and batches of the young animals have been regularly restored to their respective ancestral islands for the last fifteen years. As these long-lived reptiles mature slowly, none seems so far to have reached reproductive state. (Nobody yet knows when Galapagos tortoises begin to breed nor how long they live). When Marcia Williams recently visited Española (Hood) Island, where the entire population consists of captive-bred juveniles as the few surviving adults were taken to the CDRS in 1965 for breeding purposes, she found that the tortoises were not in very good shape. This was probably due to the effect of the prolonged drought on their food supply, which was temporarily deficient in spite of the fact that the introduced goats, formerly so destructive to the vegetation, had been eliminated some years ago. Two tortoises, aged 6 and 13 years, were dead; these were the first captive-bred losses to be recorded on the island. Another disappointment was the discovery of 4 carapaces of adult tortoises by her assistant, Cruz Márquez, while he was making a census of the tortoise populations on Cerro Azul and Sierra Negra (Isabela). There can be little doubt that they had been killed by poachers, a practice that had largely ceased since the establishment of the CDRS. More encouraging tortoise news is given by Susan Metzger & Ron Marlow elsewhere in this issue, and in spite of the occasional setbacks the tortoise programme remains an outstanding success.

Because of the advantages of operating with the natural climate and food (or by sheer good luck?) the CDRS has always been more successful than the great zoos in hatching and raising giant tortoises. But there have been ups and downs; deaths of hatchlings in their first year have occurred from a number of causes and methods have been tried to counteract them. The latest experiment has been to hatch half the 1985 eggs of the Cerro Azul, Santiago and Española races in open-air incubators while hatching the other half as usual inside the tortoise house. The results are awaited with interest. With Swedish support, a comprehensive survey involving both laboratory and field studies will be launched in 1986-87 to investigate the present status of the tortoise and land iguana populations in the wild and the captive breeding and restocking programmes of the CDRS & GNPS.

THE LAND IGUANAS

Ten years ago the wild dogs came close to extinguishing the important Land Iguana populations on Santa Cruz and at Cartago Bay on Isabela. There are of course other populations on other islands but variation is one of the outstanding characteristics of the Galapagos and it was decided that every effort should be made to save all of them. The few survivors were taken to the CDRS where, after trial and error, methods of breeding these peculiar animals were successfully developed in the Station's pens. However the level of hatchings and first year survivals fell off in 1984 and new solutions were sought. With the help of Howard and Heidi Snell, old friends of the CDRS who have been involved with the rescue operation from early days, a new "air-conditioned" incubation system was devised under which 74 hatchlings were produced from 79 Cartago Bay eggs: a remarkable achievement. This system will be applied experimentally to some of the tortoise eggs in the next breeding season.

