

*Impact Report*

# GALAPAGOS BIODIVERSITY AND EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY FUND

Showcasing the results from  
Ecoventura's long-standing  
commitment toward the conservation  
of the Galapagos Islands



  
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Fundación  
**Charles Darwin**  
Foundation  
GALAPAGOS

## *Letter from our CEO*

**Dear fellow travelers,**

Since our inception, Ecoventura has been committed to high-quality customer experience and responsible tourism. However, we always wanted to go further and ensure our vision extended beyond our operations. This led us to join forces with the Charles Darwin Foundation and establish the Galapagos Biodiversity and Education for Sustainability Fund (GBESF) in July 2017. The objective was to reinforce our commitment to preserving Galapagos' unique ecosystems and biodiversity by providing financial support to key programs dedicated to research and conservation.

Now, seven years since the Fund's creation, we are able to showcase a series of impact stories that demonstrate our commitment to Galapagos. From tracking shark migration routes to better protect these vulnerable species to engaging young Galapagueños with conservation through experiential education camps, our involvement in Galapagos conservation has been both inspiring and rewarding.

### **Looking ahead**

The GBESF reflects an understanding of the challenges facing Galapagos and the need for long-term research and conservation efforts. Ecoventura is dedicated to



continuing our endeavors with the Charles Darwin Foundation to help safeguard this extraordinary treasure for years to come.

For us, it is important to show our travelers the impact you create through your journeys with Ecoventura. Therefore, I invite you to explore the Impact Report we've prepared in collaboration with the Charles Darwin Foundation, to learn more about our shared legacy and achievements.

Sincerely,

**Santiago Dunn**  
CEO of Ecoventura



# *Note from the Charles Darwin Foundation's Executive Director*

Dear fellow travelers,

I am delighted to highlight the outstanding partnership the Charles Darwin Foundation has with Ecoventura, an organization that over the years has demonstrated an unwavering dedication to responsible tourism and environmental stewardship. This partnership, established in July 2017 through the creation of the Galapagos Biodiversity and Education for Sustainability Fund (GBESF), reflects their commitment.

When conducted responsibly, tourism can be a powerful force for conservation. Through the GBESF, we have achieved significant milestones, not only in supporting our research and conservation projects, but also by establishing innovative and much-needed educational initiatives. For us at the Charles Darwin Foundation, the GBESF is a testament to the positive impact that responsible tourism can have towards a sustainable future for the Galapagos Islands.

As we celebrate seven years of working together, I am confident that many more years of fruitful collaboration lie ahead. I



invite you to learn more about the initiatives we are building together through our Impact Report. For now, I hope you have an extraordinary visit to the Galapagos Islands.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dr. Rakan Zahawi".

**Rakan Zahawi**  
Executive Director of the Charles Darwin Foundation





## *The Galapagos Biodiversity and Education for Sustainability Fund (GBESF)*



Galapagos Biodiversity & Education Sustainability Fund



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The Galapagos Biodiversity and Education for Sustainability Fund was established on July 31, 2017. It is rooted in the shared values of Ecoventura, the Galapagos National Park, and the Charles Darwin Foundation to conserve the Galapagos Islands' rich marine and terrestrial biodiversity.

As a socially and ecologically responsible tour operator based in Ecuador, Ecoventura has worked with numerous organizations dedicated to enhancing conservation efforts in Galapagos. We are especially proud of our ongoing collaboration with the Charles Darwin Foundation (CDF), the oldest and largest scientific institution in the islands, established in 1959. CDF's mission is to protect Galapagos through scientific

research and conservation action. Their work aims to deepen our understanding of the natural systems, their relationship with those living in the archipelago, and the delicate balance between climate, mankind, and nature.

To date, **Ecoventura has awarded \$476,872 to the fund**, supporting CDF's scientific research and conservation projects, along with monitoring and surveillance initiatives by the Galapagos National Park. The Fund also acknowledges the vital role of local children and young people as future guardians of the islands, supporting innovative educational projects and providing scholarships to outstanding youth.



# SCIENCE

## *Sharks in the Galapagos Marine Reserve and beyond*




Understanding how sharks use marine protected areas, like the Galapagos Marine Reserve, and where they go when they are outside the reserve boundaries, is essential to assess how vulnerable they are to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing – their major threat. This information is fundamental for designing management and conservation strategies that will protect shark populations and give them a chance to recover. Therefore, describing sharks' movements and migratory routes has been an important research line of the **CDF's Shark Ecology and Conservation Program**.

The scalloped hammerhead sharks are categorized as Critically Endangered on the Red List of Threatened Species issued by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Tagging and monitoring this shark species was crucial when considering the creation of the Hermandad Marine Reserve as their movements highlighted the areas where protection was still needed.

One of the 15 sharks tagged with the support of the GBESF was Cassiopeia, a 2.5-meter-long (8 feet) pregnant scalloped hammerhead shark. Cassiopeia provided the first documented round-trip satellite track between Galapagos and the birthing grounds on the continental coasts of Panama, covering more than 4,000 kilometers (2,485 miles). Some sharks tagged by the project were less fortunate, ending up being caught and landed at fishing ports in the region.

These findings underscore the importance of connectivity between Galapagos and mainland coastal areas, where multiple scalloped hammerhead shark nurseries have been registered. They emphasize that while marine protected areas are crucial for shark conservation, enhancing regional management to reduce mortality is equally important.



**KEY IMPACT:** Thanks to the GBESF, 15 pregnant scalloped hammerhead sharks were tagged for the first time and have been continuously monitored to this day, significantly contributing to informed management of marine protected areas.



## *Reintroduction of extinct landbirds in Floreana Island*

The GBESF, through **CDF's Landbird Conservation Program**, has been supporting the efforts of the Floreana Ecological Restoration Project, the largest and most ambitious restoration initiative currently underway in the Galapagos Islands. This project aims to reintroduce twelve species of fauna considered extinct on this island, including six species of small landbirds, following the island-wide rat eradication phase.

CDF's Landbird team, with the support of the GBESF, has been working on recovering and reintroducing threatened terrestrial birds, such as the Little Vermilion Flycatcher. To ensure the success of reintroduction efforts, it is essential to first assess the presence and abundance of pathogens among landbird populations. This step is critical to prevent the translocation of viruses to islands where they have not historically been present. The CDF team has therefore been

establishing a baseline for the landbirds' health status to identify individuals that are fit for translocation from one island to the other. The results will enable the teams to strategize on disease management and mitigation measures to increase translocation success.

In addition to this initiative, the GBESF has supported efforts to improve the survival rate of endangered landbird hatchlings. Galapagos landbirds have undergone severe declines due to nestling mortality caused by the invasive Avian Vampire Fly, whose larvae feed on the blood of the defenseless chicks. As the search for a biological control of this fly continues, the CDF's Landbird Conservation Program has developed and implemented temporary solutions. These include treating nest materials with a bird-friendly insecticide to increase fledgling success. The refined methods the team has developed will soon be replicated on other islands.



**KEY IMPACTS:** Thanks to the GBESF, over 400 samples have been collected to analyze the presence of infectious agents, creating a comprehensive dataset. This data will provide valuable insights for the successful reintroduction of landbird species to Floreana Island and other islands in the Galapagos.

Over the years, the GBESF has supported the program's efforts to gain knowledge on how to increase the hatchling survival, which is threatened by the highly invasive Avian Vampire Fly.





## *Sea turtles in Galapagos*

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a sharp decline in tourism, allowing sea turtles to experience a shift from highly crowded nesting and feeding sites to areas devoid of touristic activities. This prompted the **CDF's Sea Turtle Conservation Program** to begin investigating the effects of recreational activities, such as snorkeling, kayaking, and vessel transit, on sea turtles at Tortuga Bay, a popular beach on Santa Cruz Island. The research involved non-invasive drone surveys over the bay between March 2021 and December 2023, capturing georeferenced photographs to create maps and compare spatial distribution of sea turtles over time as tourism gradually resumed.

The results confirmed that the number of sea turtles in Tortuga Bay decreased as visitors and activities increased. Additionally, their distribution changed – in the absence of activities, sea turtles were more widely distributed and came closer to the beach.

This project has provided a model for assessing the potential impacts of new

tourist sites on sea turtles. It helps authorities determine which activities should be permitted and identify areas where vessel transit should be restricted.

Additionally, the GBESF funds are supporting the team in examining how higher temperatures due to climate change could affect Galapagos sea turtle populations. Elevated incubation temperatures can skew the sex ratio, increasing the proportion of females, as observed in other populations worldwide.

During the 2024 nesting season, the team monitored incubation temperatures for three months at Quinta Playa on Isabela Island, the second most important nesting site in Galapagos. Their data will help identify thermal variations across the beach and determine areas likely to produce more females than males. Overall, this research will enable the design of timely adaptation plans to conserve this iconic marine species.



**KEY IMPACTS:** Thanks to the GBESF, the team consolidated a three-year dataset from 83 drone surveys, providing a model to assess impacts of new tourist sites on sea turtles.

The GBESF has enabled the collection of data from 29 sea turtle nests to help determine incubation temperatures, which may influence the sex of sea turtles.

# SPOTLIGHT

## *Deep-Ocean Exploration and Conservation in the Galapagos Marine Reserve*

Since 2018, Ecoventura has been a supporter of CDF's Deep-Ocean Exploration in the Galapagos Marine Reserve, right from the program's early stages.

The Galapagos Marine Reserve and the Eastern Tropical Pacific region, encompassing the sovereign waters of Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, and Costa Rica, conceal extraordinary and vast deep-ocean ecosystems. These ecosystems plunge from oceanic islands to depths of 3,800 meters (12,467 feet) and remain largely unexplored and poorly understood. They face persistent threats, including overfishing, climate change, pollution, and potential deep-sea mining.

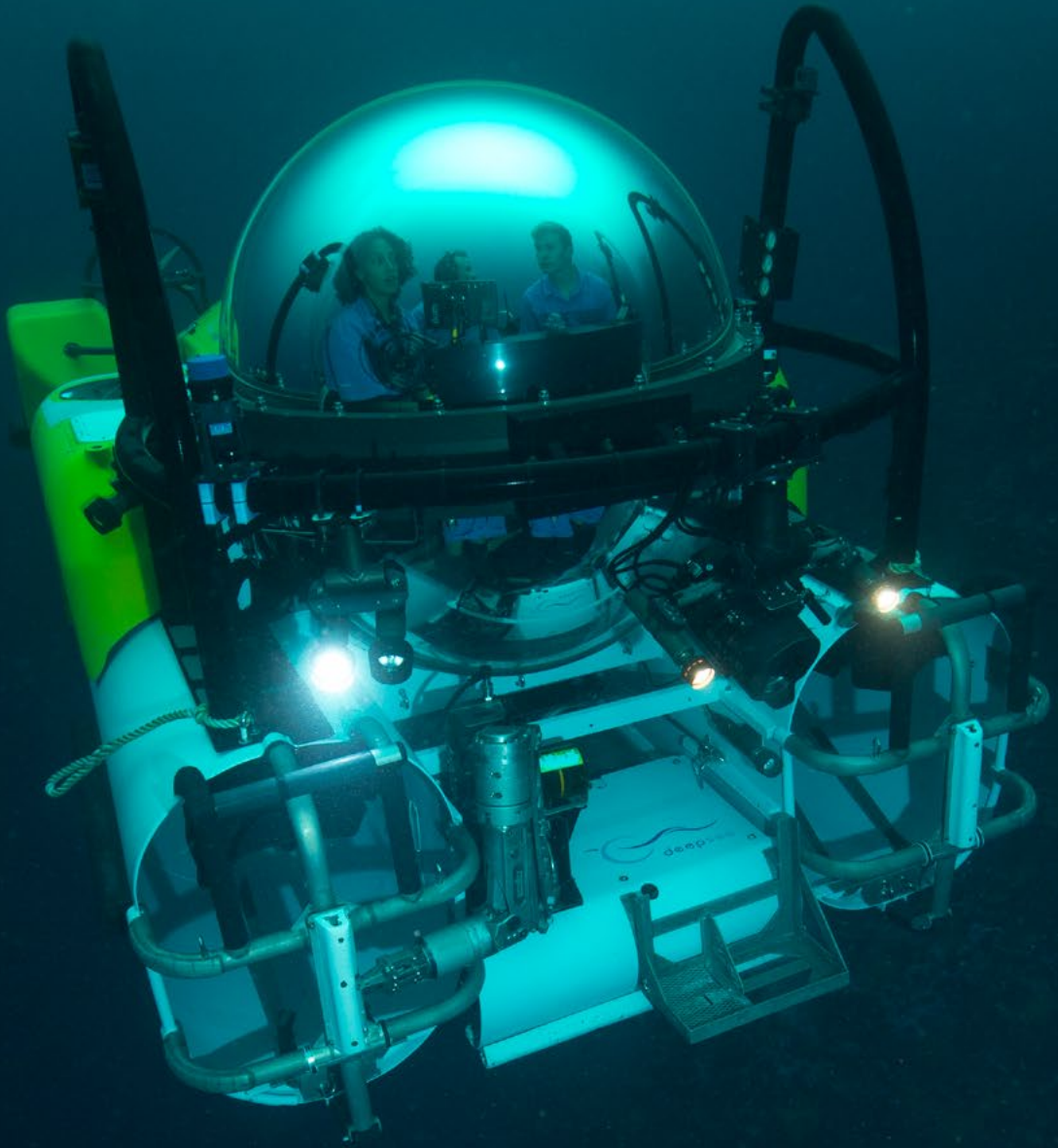
As part of the GBESF's support, CDF researchers made a remarkable discovery in 2018: a thriving kelp forest atop a seamount near Santa Cruz Island at depths between 50-70 meters (164-230 feet). The macroalgae was recently confirmed as *Eisenia galapagensis*, an uncommon deep-water kelp first documented by CDF and the Moss Landing Marine Lab in 2006 and recorded by Dr. Sylvia Earle in the 1990s. This endemic species is rare and endangered, found mostly in the cold, nutrient-rich waters prevalent in the western part of the archipelago.

In 2022, one of Ecoventura's luxury expedition yachts, *Theory*, hosted CDF's second Major Donor Cruise on an expedition voyage funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. Representatives from the Bezos Earth Fund, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, Wyss Foundation, and a major anonymous donor to CDF joined the cruise organized by CDF.

The expedition yielded impressive results. The Bezos Earth Fund and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation committed a generous \$7 million to CDF for deep-sea exploration in Galapagos and the Eastern Tropical Pacific. For CDF, this was the first grant to cover the entire Eastern Tropical Pacific region, positioning the organization as a leader in deep-sea exploration in the area.

A similar voyage took place in 2019 to celebrate CDF's 60th anniversary, raising over \$3.5 million.

Ecoventura is proud to support expeditions like this, as they drive vital conservation initiatives and ensure the preservation of the Galapagos Islands for generations to come.



**KEY IMPACT:** Ecoventura facilitated a cruise that helped secure the first regional grant for CDF, establishing the organization as a leader in deep-sea exploration in the area.

# EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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**KEY IMPACT:** The project, funded by the GBESF, has reached 7 educational institutions, benefiting a total of 94 students.

## ***Educational camps to strengthen local commitment to conservation***

The ECOS Foundation and Scalesia Foundation, with the financial support of the GBESF, established a 2,100-square-meter campsite on Santa Cruz Island to enhance outdoor experiential learning for local children and teenagers, engaging them with the unique nature of Galapagos.

Before initiating activities with students, teachers received training in innovative methodologies and essential knowledge to effectively facilitate on-site programs. These efforts have led to the implementation of educational camps that immerse students in 4-5 day experiences, offering educational activities focused on Galapagos ecology, invasive species prevention, youth leadership development, and other important topics.





## *Traveling Libraries*

CDF was the first organization in Galapagos to launch a formal community engagement and environmental education program. **Their Education and Community Outreach Program (ECO-Program)** promotes a “science-knowledge-and-practice” approach comprising four distinct yet interconnected components: Clubs; Science and Community Encounters; Experiential Science; and Scholarships. The goal is to develop the next generation of environmental stewards, and in doing so building a culture of conservation for the future of Galapagos and its people.

One objective of the ECO-Program is to implement activities that facilitate environmental literacy and bring friendly

and easy-to-understand content related to scientific knowledge about Galapagos to different groups and sectors within the local community. This is achieved through the Traveling Libraries initiative, where the CDF team brings a curated collection of books to educational institutions with limited access to these types of resources. The book collections are assembled based on the needs of teachers and students, followed by workshops designed for educators to guide them on how to effectively implement Traveling Libraries in their work context.





**KEY IMPACTS:** With the support of the GBESF, CDF team delivered 4 suitcases to 5 educational institutions, reaching 190 beneficiaries.

The CDF team has conducted workshops with educators from five educational institutions on the islands of Santa Cruz, Isabela, and Floreana, most of which are located in rural areas.

## *Scholarships*

Since 2021, the GBESF has been awarding scholarships to local students with excellent academic standing to support their university studies in fields contributing to the sustainability of Galapagos. Additionally, all scholarship recipients have the opportunity to volunteer at CDF, applying their academic knowledge while contributing to CDF's research.

The first scholarship was awarded to Andrew Larrea, a local biotechnology student set to complete his degree in 2025. Following Andrew, four local students have received annual financial support from the GBESF, pursuing careers ranging from agricultural engineering to finance.



**KEY IMPACT:** The GBESF provided funding to five students from Galapagos, allowing them to pursue their university degrees.

# SUPPORT CONSERVATION OF THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

Help us safeguard Galapagos, one of the world's greatest natural treasures, by making a tax-deductible donation today via our website [www.darwinfoundation.org](http://www.darwinfoundation.org)

Your gift directly supports our scientists' work at the Charles Darwin Research Station.



And why not become a monthly donor? Join our Wild Club today!

CDF also accept donations via check, bank, and stock transfer. For more information contact our fundraising team at [fundraising@fcdarwin.org.ec](mailto:fundraising@fcdarwin.org.ec)

**Thank you for making an impact with us!**