

e-Edition Plus

A current events feature for teaching with electronic editions.

By Sara Shahriari

As they grow more popular, Galapagos Islands face threats

The Galapagos Islands are some of the most famous islands in the world.

It was on these dry and sunny islands off the coast of South America that Charles Darwin began to formulate his theory of natural selection in 1835.

One-hundred-seventy-six years later, the islands of the Galapagos continue to fascinate people around the world.

Yet the delicate ecosystem of the Galapagos' 18 main islands and its smaller islands is in danger from pollution, illegal poaching of wildlife and species "introduced" to the Galapagos from other places.

The islands are also now endangered by their very popularity as a place to visit.

The Galapagos are part of the South American country of Ecuador. They are located about 600 miles west of that country's coast in the Pacific Ocean and are Ecuador's most famous tourist attraction.

Many people travel there by boat or plane to see the wildlife of the place where Darwin made his famous discovery about how animals change over generations.

One of the most amazing things about the islands' wildlife is that many animals are not afraid of people. Visitors are not allowed to touch or get close to the sea lions, tortoises and marine iguanas of the Galapagos, but the animals do not mind being around humans.

Of course, tourism also brings problems to the islands. Hotels need fresh water, food for visitors and places to put their garbage. The people who visit the islands each year also affect fish, animals and plant life with boat

tours and walking trips across the island landscape.

Taking steps

The Ecuadorian government and international scientific groups are working to protect the islands. The number of people who can visit each year is now limited, and programs to safeguard plants and animals are constantly being developed.

Beyond visitors, the animals of the islands are threatened by poaching and by "introduced" species transported to the Galapagos from other places.

Poaching is the illegal killing of a protected animal. In the Galapagos, for example, sharks are sometimes poached for their fins, which are used in soup in China and Japan.

Perhaps the most dangerous side-effect of more people visiting the

islands are introduced species.

Introduced species compete for food and space with the native wildlife. Some researchers estimate that more than 30 vertebrate species and more than 500 species of bugs have been introduced accidentally to the islands.

Darwin's impact

The Galapagos Islands earned a place in scientific history when the famous British naturalist Charles Darwin visited there in the early 19th century.

While in the Galapagos, Darwin began to study birds, and he noticed that there were small differences between similar types of birds living on different islands.

This led Darwin to think that animals were capable of adapting and changing over generations. His idea of natural selection meant that the environment influenced those changes.

That idea eventually led Darwin to publish his famous book "On the Origin of Species," which introduced the idea of evolution to many people in 1859.

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Sea lions and their babies are among the many kinds of wildlife that tourists seek to see when visiting the Galapagos Islands.

Talk About the News

- Many people want to visit the Galapagos Islands, and tourism provides much needed money for Ecuador's economy. At the same time, tourism can damage the islands. Imagine that your class is in charge of protecting the islands. As a group, think of five rules you would make so that tourism does not damage the islands or threaten wildlife.

Learning Standards: Describing positive and negative effects of humans on wildlife and the environment; engaging peers in constructive conversations about topics of interest or importance.

Explore Your e-Edition

- The Galapagos Islands have a delicate ecosystem because they are an island habitat set aside from other areas. For that reason, any change or introduction of new species can endanger the balance of the ecosystem. Find a story in the e-Edition about an ecosystem that you think could be in danger. Or find an example online. Describe three dangers to the ecosystem, and three things people could do to address them.

Learning Standards: Explaining ecosystem concepts and processes; describing ways in which humans alter the environment; posing public policy issues as questions; evaluating possible resolutions of a public policy issue.

- Wildlife is a great attraction for people visiting the Galapagos Islands. As a class, talk about the wildlife that live in your city or state that visitors would most like to see. Pick one species and design an ad for the e-Edition that would "advertise" this species as an attraction. Explain why this species is interesting or significant to the area, and offer guidelines for protecting the animal from people who visit.

Learning Standards: Comparing regions with respect to cultures, economy, governmental systems, environment and communications; reading and writing fluently, speaking confidently, listening and interacting appropriately, viewing strategically and representing creatively.

- Charles Darwin learned about nature and wildlife by observing the Earth and its creatures. Find a story in the e-Edition or online about people learning something from observing the Earth. Write a paragraph summarizing what is being learned, and how.

Learning Standards: Explaining how scientists decide what constitutes scientific knowledge and how science is related to other ways of knowing; using reading for multiple purposes, such as enjoyment, gathering information, learning new procedures, and increasing conceptual understanding; writing fluently for multiple purposes.



How Well Did You Read?

Understanding what you read is a skill that will help you all through life. Review the story about the Galapagos Islands by answering the questions below.

1. What year did Charles Darwin start forming his views on natural selection?
A. 1859
B. 1835
C. 1959
D. 1935
2. Which book introduced the idea of evolution to many people?
A. "On the Origin of Penguins"
B. "Charles Darwin"
C. "On the Origin of Species"
D. "Natural Selection"
3. What country are the Galapagos Islands a part of?
A. Peru
B. Galapagos Islands
C. Great Britain
D. Ecuador
4. According to the story, what are some of the animals you can see on the Galapagos Islands?
A. Lions, bears and tortoises
B. Sea lions, tortoises and marine iguanas
C. Marine iguanas, zebras and tortoises
D. Zebras, bears and sea lions
5. What is currently one of the biggest threats to the plants and animals of the islands?
A. Introduced species
B. Floods
C. Air pollution
D. Bears