

# GALAPALOG 2015

## WEEK TWO

One of the first things I noticed about the Marine Iguana when I approached head on, on the ground at their head height, with my camera, was that the mandible was not a regular curve, round or oval, but had a kink in it at the middle, see below.



Mandible of *A. c. hassi* on Santa Cruz (B.M.N.H., London).

I am still trying to figure this out. I can only assume that it makes it easier to graze as it allows closer contact with the rocks. The upper jaw also has this, again see below. I suppose if it was more pointed, then the animal could not get a good graze. The teeth, though obviously iguana teeth from the upper jaw, appear more complex and they are much longer inside of the mouth. All these features must assist in grazing.

The word *amblyrhynchus* is two Greek words: *rhynchus* meaning snout, and *ambly* meaning dull, therefore blunt.

This upper jaw looks astonishingly fierce.



Upper jaw showing teeth, *A. c. hassi*, Santa Cruz (B.M.N.H., London).

Both the upper and lower sets of teeth are extremely extended inside the mouth and very curved.

Compare to *Conolophus* jaws:



Upper and lower jaws, *Conolophus* (unspecified), B.M.N.H., London.

## Monday, November 9<sup>th</sup>

Darwin Beach, 26° C

*Darwin: "To kill an error is as good a service as, and sometimes even better than, the establishing of a new truth or fact."*

Tide coming in. Realized again the Big Reds do dive at high tide; all the smaller ones are drying off from when they fed earlier, at a lower tide.

I had a conversation with a young scientist from Spain who had been here a couple of years running. He also asked about this routine of feeding and diving and high and low tides. After a while of exchanging our views, we both came to the conclusion that it could possibly be random. I'm sure to get a better idea towards the end of my stay.

Once becoming drier and warmer, a male was grabbing a female by the neck and the female was biting the male's tail. They went round in a circle until the female broke free. I saw this a few times today, and the female always did get away. It made me wonder: do they ever get to do anything? They must, of course, as I saw hatchlings and one year-olds popping in and out of spaces between the rocks.



*One year-old Darwin Beach resident.*

I saw several 'communities'. One male, five or so females, and hatchlings from a few months ago, nearby, all in their little 'enclaves'. I discovered one of the 'houses' where one lot lived, a low, cracked and branched tree stump, with holes beneath and no earth, and inside were iguanas, hunched up.

I photographed some close-ups of noses, wondering if males and females have different scale patterns between the nostrils, as sometimes happens. These will be looked at later, on my return. It is necessary to photograph more than one of each male and female, perhaps three of each, larger sizes preferable, to get a good idea of scale configuration.

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Wednesday, November 11<sup>th</sup>  
Darwin Beach, late pm, 25° C

*Darwin: "Great is the power of steady misrepresentation."*

I stayed late at the beach today to get sun-on-wet-lizards photographs. Low sunlight is very good for this kind of thing. There were plenty of photo opportunities here that day and it is actually quite difficult photographing in the middle of the day, as the light is a bit harsh.

So are the tourists. Sometimes I would line up a shot and be just ready to take it and I would see a tourist come into the frame, talking loudly and spooking the lizard. Never mind, they'll be gone soon and I won't.



*A. c. hassi, drying off in the late afternoon.*

There was what looked to be a family squabble between two females and several juveniles, but I think they were just re-adjusting themselves. It's a hard life being a lizard when you can't decide which side of the rock to be on and who you want beside you. But actually, they don't care at all, they happily just lay out all over each other.

My plan of following a group around for a whole day has failed. There would not be enough to write about. I think in a 12-hour period there can be no more than a complete hour of movement, that is eight and a half percent. I'd have to sleep for 11 hours just to keep up. But watching them gives a sense of calm and well-being.

One surprise came late one night, as I took a walk down to the boat ramp. This was a very public area where, during the day, many iguanas clustered, at least four Bosses, though not giant-sized and their harems. I assumed, as on the beach, that they all magically disappeared into wherever they slept at night. As I went down the wide path, trying to spot tails peeping out of the thorny bushes that grew alongside the way, I saw many females, no juveniles, all asleep by the pathway. Just there, laid out flat, arms by their sides, fast asleep in the open. I know that it doesn't get cold at night, in fact the temperature was 22° C that night, but to have no fear like that and to just lay out and sleep was strange, so I thought. But there you are, I was constantly being surprised by their habits, as I was by many of the animals on this unique set of islands. Here, some of the birds have changed day into night and wander

around the streets and the deserted pathways. I saw pelicans, especially, doing this, and realized that it's all to do with food. The pelicans wait for the fishermen to bring in their catches early morning. Some smaller birds hang around, awake, on the branches of trees; sea-lions croak in the distance. All in the dark. This is where the people are, and so that must have changed their behavior. One evening there was a traffic jam in the main street, an unusual occurrence. The reason was further up the road. A female sea lion asleep in the road and atop of her sat an awake pelican, looking at passers-by. The traffic was inching its way around this comical sight.

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Thursday, November 12<sup>th</sup>  
Fundación Charles Darwin

*Darwin: "It is clear, that if several islands have their peculiar species of the same genera, when these are placed together, they will have a wide range of character."*

An intermission here, on a day which found me tired and wanting to stay in. My place has a front and back patio/balcony. I am visited daily by many of Darwin's finches and a pair of very tame mockingbirds. They are so funny, it kills me.

I decided this day to entertain and be entertained by these wonderful birds and their nemeses, the finches.

My first encounter was a tap on my door one day and, upon opening it, there on the tiles outside stood the pair of mockingbirds, staring up at me.

There were not many mockingbirds about, in fact I only saw two pairs on the compound, one pair near me and the other near the office.

I met a researcher who was going to a very small island off Floreana, the only remaining place where the Floreana Mockingbird could be found - it was extinct on the main island due to rats and maybe cats. He said they need a large area as territory and that the youngsters have difficulty surviving.

My ones had a beautiful song and greeted me each day. If I was inside they would be outside calling. If I was outside they would fly down from their tree, sit on the rail, and whistle. My lodgings at the Darwin Station were greatly enhanced by this experience.

Below, for your delight, are the photos of the birds that knock on the door.

*Mimus parvulus - found on most islands:*



*male on right*



*male on right*



*male on left*



*male on right*



female



male in background

There are three other species, from Hood Island (Española), Floreana, and San Cristóbal, with a fifth species expected to be announced, from Tower Island (Genovesa).

On the patio at the back, several finches, different species, were sitting on the wooden rails. A couple had rings on their legs. They obviously all had different beaks, but also different shaped heads, different eyes, different 'faces' in fact. I did a bad thing: I fed a few breadcrumbs to them. More finches flew down and they all fought each other. Their manners were very impolite. It was definitely a mistake for they kept coming to the window shelf to wait for more. I knew they ate seeds and insects; I couldn't get insects but I collected seeds of different sizes that I had seen them eating, went out and laid the seeds on the table, and waited. As if by magic they all set themselves out in a very orderly fashion, and attended to their own particular sizes of seeds. No fighting or squawking. See the photos below.

Funnily enough, when waiting for the boat at the port, or when entering the National Park area at the southernmost volcano on Isabela last

year, the same looking finches were there, looking at me and looking for food. It felt like I was being followed.

Then I thought of the 'bird telegraph'. In England in the 1920s, blue-tits were seen in one small town getting into the milk bottles through the waxed tops, to get at the cream.

By the 1950s, blue-tits, and only blue-tits, were doing the same all over the country. What went on there? The bird telegraph. There was a serious paper written on this:

[http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/article\\_files/V42/V42\\_N11/V42\\_N11\\_P347\\_357\\_A059.pdf](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/article_files/V42/V42_N11/V42_N11_P347_357_A059.pdf)

and a webpage:

<http://www.britishbirdlovers.co.uk/articles/blue-tits-and-milk-bottle-tops>

Anyway, back to the birds. See photos below:



All different finches, no fighting, all eating different sized seeds. This one below landed a bit late.....and there was not much left.





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## Friday, November 13<sup>th</sup> Darwin Beach

*Darwin:* "Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge."

I tried today to get some snort photos. It's so hard. You sit with your finger on the button with the camera set to continuous mode, and wait, and when a snort comes you press the button too late. I thought to watch the nodding displays as there are a good few snorts going on there. I didn't get anything though. Finally I concentrated on this one juvenile and got this high speed shot below, not too much of a snort, rather, an after-snort. A true snort under a slower speed film looks like a geyser. Under high speed like a series of droplets.



*A little after-snort, Darwin Beach.*

I also got these two below, looking like lovers. They are male and female. There are many golden photo opportunities in the Galápagos, and iguanas are always good for that.



*Two on a rock.*

I walked back along the path through the *sessuvium* and came across a branch, or fork, off the path where the vegetation was flattened and thought it was an iguana path. I looked along the length of it and saw a hole, not facing downwards but along, like a tunnel entrance. From where I stood, not wanting to step onto this flattened iguana path, I was able to shine the flashlight into the hole, but it curved around a bit. I noticed that there was a 'dome' of *sessuvium* a little further along.

Stepping on lava rocks to get a little closer, it revealed itself to me as a vegetation 'roof' of *sessuvium* like a cave. Peering through it I saw several grey juvenile iguanas, all wrapped around both each other and a larger female.

Having seen this, I spent more time searching around and found two more of the same set-up. I tried to photograph these, but the results just showed *sessuvium* and nothing else. A very cleverly disguised home, only discoverable if you are jumping around in the vegetation away from the track, which is not allowed here.

I am hoping to go out again and document this more comprehensively, with clearer photos than I have taken so far, at the beginning of next week.

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END WEEK TWO