

PRESS RELEASE

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Easter Eggs in the Galapagos Islands

As the Easter weekend approaches, an aptly timed story of eggs and chicks is unfolding in the Galapagos Islands.

Since January, researchers in Galapagos have, for the first time in history, successfully hand-reared mangrove finches, giving hope to this critically endangered species of Darwin's finch which has just 60 to 80 individuals remaining.

The 'head-starting' conservation project undertaken jointly by the Galapagos National Park and the Charles Darwin Foundation is aimed at avoiding chick predation by rats and the parasitizing effects of an introduced fly, *Philornis downsi*, whose larvae have been decimating populations of Galapagos finches.

Raising chicks at the Charles Darwin Research Station before releasing them back into the wild by-passes the most vulnerable phase of their life-cycle, giving them a 'head-start' in life.

The project team, along with their very important avian cargo of 16 young finches, have recently returned to the small patch of mangrove forest on the island of Isabela where the birds are being released.

Conservation work such as this is expensive. As funding for the project is coming to an end, the UK's Galapagos Conservation Trust (GCT) is looking to the public for help this Easter.

According to Ian Dunn, Chief Executive of GCT, "In the UK alone we consume an estimated 90 million chocolate eggs over the Easter weekend. If everyone was to donate a penny for each egg they ate we could fund the entire mangrove finch project for the next four years, giving this species a really good chance of survival."

To learn more about the project or GCT's Mangrove Finch Appeal, visit mangrovefinchappeal.org.

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A mangrove finch in the wild in Galapagos



One of the mangrove finch chicks raised at the Charles Darwin Research Station

Notes to editors:

- The mangrove finch is the rarest bird in the Galapagos Islands, with only 60 to 80 individuals living in 32 hectares of mangrove forest.
- There have been no Galapagos bird extinctions since before Charles Darwin's visit in 1835.
- The 'head-starting' project was started in January and aims to save the species from extinction. Mangrove finches lay up to five batches of eggs but those laid early in the breeding season don't often survive. Taking advantage of this, project members remove the first batch of eggs, raise them in captivity and then release them back into the wild, adding more fledglings to the overall mangrove finch population.
- Funds for this project are running out, and GCT is running the Mangrove Finch Appeal in response. In the UK alone we consume an estimated 90 million chocolate eggs over the Easter weekend with a value of more than £500 million. Less than 0.05% (£250k) of the UK's spend on Easter eggs this coming holiday weekend would fund the Mangrove Finch Project for a full year.
- The Galapagos Conservation Trust (GCT) is the only UK charity dedicated exclusively to supporting Galapagos. Established in 1995 at the Royal Society, GCT generates income for numerous projects to protect the unique biodiversity of the Islands and meet the challenges of how the human population can live in balance with the unique environment and wildlife of Galapagos. To find out more visit their website www.savegalapagos.org.
- High resolution images available.

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