

PRESS RELEASE

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World's most important eggs about to hatch in the Galapagos Islands [or Saving the mangrove finch from extinction, one egg at a time]

A batch of mangrove finch eggs are about to hatch at the Charles Darwin Research Station on the island of Santa Cruz in the Galapagos Islands, thanks to funding from the UK's Galapagos Conservation Trust.

The mangrove finch is one of the rarest birds in the world and was recently the subject of the BBC documentary series, *Natural World*. With a population of just 80, a team of experts aim to prevent the mangrove finch from becoming extinct by collecting eggs from wild nests and raising them in captivity.

Thirty eggs were collected last month from mangrove finch nests in Playa Tortuga Negra on the island of Isabela before being transported 130km by boat to the artificial incubation and captive rearing facility at the research station. The first eggs have already hatched and the chicks are being cared for around the clock. Last year, the Mangrove Finch Project team successfully reared and released 15 fledglings back into the wild.

The ambitious Mangrove Finch Project was initiated in 2014 with the aim of restoring mangrove finch populations.

Ian Dunn, Chief Executive of the Galapagos Conservation Trust, said *"with such a small population and continuing pressure from introduced species, the current efforts by the Mangrove Finch Project team are the best short-term solution for the species. We are thrilled to have been able to facilitate this season's fieldwork thanks to the generosity of our supporters but are also keenly aware that still more needs to be done"*.

Only 12 breeding pairs were identified in the wild this year in an area the size of 45 football pitches. This makes them the rarest of what are collectively termed "Darwin's finches", as well as one of the rarest and most range-restricted birds in the world. Research shows that the introduced parasitic fly, *Philornis downsi*, is one of the principal causes of high nestling mortality, with up to 95% of nestlings dying during the first months of the breeding season in natural conditions.

For more information on the Mangrove Finch Project and to help support future efforts to save this species, please visit www.mangrovefinchappeal.org.

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Notes to editors:

- The current **Mangrove Finch** (*Camarhynchus heliobates*) population is around 80 individuals and there are fewer than 20 breeding pairs. They are endemic to the Galapagos Islands where the entire population exists in just 32 hectares of mangrove forest on the North West coast of Isabela, the largest island in the archipelago. They are one of fifteen species collectively known as "Darwin's finches", so named because of their association with the development of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection.

- The **Mangrove Finch Project** is a bi-institutional project carried out by the Charles Darwin Foundation and Galapagos National Park Directorate in collaboration with San Diego Zoo Global and Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust. The project is supported by the Galapagos Conservation Trust, The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, The Leona M and Harry B Helmsley Charitable Trust, Galapagos Conservancy, and the British Embassy in Ecuador.
- The **Galapagos Conservation Trust (GCT)** is the only UK charity to focus exclusively on the conservation and sustainability of the Galapagos Islands. Established in 1995 at the Royal Society, GCT raises funding and awareness for projects in Galapagos which focus on science, education and culture.
- GCT is the lead donor for this season's Mangrove Finch Project work, having provided a grant of £65K to support the project. This grant was made possible thanks to generous donations to GCT's Mangrove Finch Appeal in 2014.
- The **Charles Darwin Research Station** is the operating arm of the Charles Darwin Foundation and celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2014. The research station is located in Puerto Ayora on the island of Santa Cruz, Galapagos.
- Images available here (please credit photographer):
<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/fz81e5bdoj5y5u/AAD-jx4v-fwfe16RW2TpnmtTa?dl=0>

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