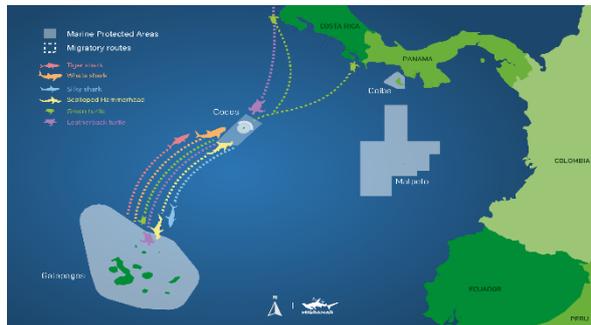


PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 3PM 29 APRIL 2021

2021 Cocos-Galapagos Swimway Expedition aims to protect vital migration route



A scientific expedition between Cocos island, Costa Rica and the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador, will undertake a round trip to obtain sound scientific evidence to advise decision-makers about protecting the Cocos-Galapagos Swimway.

This international multi-partner expedition, led by MigraMar and supported by Galapagos Conservation Trust, will take place between 3 and

23 May 2021 and will cover more than 1,500 nautical miles. It will stop at six defined sites, including important seamounts, where scientists will carry out satellite and acoustic tagging of sharks, fish and marine mammals, undertake remote bait underwater video (BRUV) sampling, record biodiversity counts through sightings and DNA sampling.

Galapagos Conservation Trust (GCT) has been supporting partners to gain protection of the Swimway since 2018. Jen Jones, GCT's Head of Programmes, commented, "The Cocos-Galapagos Swimway is a vital underwater migration highway that connects two Marine Protected Areas - the Galapagos Marine Reserve and the Cocos Island National Park. We believe that it is crucial to protect this route from threats such as illegal fishing, in order to provide a safe migration route for endangered Galapagos marine species."

Outside these protected areas, endangered species are highly vulnerable to industrial and illegal fishing. It is estimated that 100 million sharks are killed globally every year through fishing or accidental deaths caused by humans. The ocean between Galapagos and Cocos is a popular place for industrial fishing fleets to work, including those who focus on harvesting shark fins often destined for the Asian market.

Recent studies by GCT's project partner, MigraMar, have found that at least six threatened marine species – whale sharks, leatherback turtles, green turtles, silky sharks, tiger sharks and scalloped hammerhead sharks – travel between Galapagos and Cocos island, along the Swimway.

Dr Alex Hearn, expedition leader, explained, "The research from this expedition will provide further important scientific evidence on the migration between Marine Protected Areas by marine species such as whale sharks, hammerhead sharks and other sharks, manta rays, whales and other marine mammals, and fish such as billfish and tuna."

Costa Rica's Vice-Minister of Water and Seas, Haydée Rodríguez, will launch the expedition on 3 May through a virtual event, with the participation of the director of the Cocos Marine Conservation Area and the director of the Galapagos National Park of Ecuador. Another event is planned on 12 May when the expedition arrives in Galapagos with Ecuadorian authorities.

Galapagos Conservation Trust is also challenging the public to swim, walk, run, cycle or wheelchair the length of the expedition route – 1,125km or 700 miles – to raise money towards vital projects like the protection of the Cocos-Galapagos Swimway. To find out more visit:

galapagosconservation.org.uk/galapagos-cocos-swimway-challenge

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Cocos-Galapagos Swimway

- The Cocos-Galapagos Swimway links the Cocos Island National Park and the Montes Submarinos Marine Management Area in Costa Rica with the Galapagos Marine Reserve in Ecuador. It has a working area of 240,000 km², equivalent to almost the entire continental area of Ecuador, or about 5 times the continental area of Costa Rica.
- Migratory swimways are biological corridors that link two or more marine protected areas, through which fish, marine mammals and other migratory species move, following the seamounts and ridges. These marine corridors of high connectivity need to be protected to allow migratory species to move safely, ensuring the sustainable use of marine resources and increasing the environmental, social, and economic benefits for the countries of the region.
- Galapagos Conservation Trust is supporting this work as part of our Endangered Sharks of Galapagos programme: galapagosconservation.org.uk/projects/endangered-sharks-of-galapagos

2021 Cocos-Galapagos Swimway Expedition

- The 2021 Cocos-Galapagos Swimway Expedition is a multi-partner research trip that will collect the evidence needed to designate the Cocos-Galapagos Swimway as a new marine protected area. Galapagos Conservation Trust has been supporting partners to collect this evidence since 2018.
- The expedition is a multi-partner research trip including: Área de Conservación Marina Cocos, CIMAR, CMAR, CREMA, Fins Attached, Fundación Pacífico, Galapagos Conservation Trust, Galapagos Science Center, MigraMar, Parque Nacional Galapagos, Popular Cinema, Ocean Blue Tree, Only One, Sea Legacy, Shark Conservation Fund, SINAC, Turtle Island Restoration Network, Universidad de Costa Rica, Universidad San Francisco de Quito.

Galapagos Conservation Trust

- Galapagos Conservation Trust (GCT) is the only UK charity focussed solely on the conservation of the Galapagos Archipelago, one of the most ecologically important places in the world. With over 25 years of experience, we partner with Ecuadorian authorities, NGOs, local communities and leading researchers to support impactful conservation programmes across the Archipelago. As a charity we rely on the generosity of donors in the UK and abroad to raise money to support our work so that we can preserve Galapagos for generations to come. To find out more, visit: galapagosconservation.org.uk

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Images are available on request