

Galapagos Conservation Trust COP26 briefing: Ocean protection for climate resilience

Introduction to Galapagos Conservation Trust (GCT)

GCT is the only UK registered charity to focus solely on the conservation of the Galapagos Islands, one of the most unique and ecologically important, but also one of the most vulnerable, ecosystems in the world. We have 25 years of experience supporting and delivering impactful conservation programmes across the Archipelago, partnering with Ecuadorean authorities, NGOs, local communities and leading scientists. Our projects are focussed on restoring natural habitat, protecting threatened species and driving sustainable solutions for the management of this unique ecosystem.

GCT at COP26: Highlighting the existential threat climate change poses to Galapagos

Across the globe, climate change is the single biggest risk facing biodiversity in the long term and the Galapagos Islands are no exception. Rising temperatures and extreme weather events threaten widespread extinction. In our ocean, the impacts of changing temperatures and currents have serious consequences for the survival of marine species, the functioning of wider ecosystems, and therefore the food and livelihood security of local communities. This is exacerbated by overfishing, which destabilises marine ecosystems and reduces their resilience to changing conditions.

Averting the climate crisis requires that we focus not only on reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the first instance but also on protecting the ecosystems that are already combatting climate change. Healthy ocean ecosystems full of life are one of the most powerful carbon sinks on Earth. A protected ocean confers climate resilience. However, if we continue to haul out unsustainable numbers of fish and pour in vast quantities of plastics and other forms of pollution, the ocean will no longer be able to withstand the impacts of climate change or to mitigate those impacts for us.

Ocean protection *is* climate resilience – rebalancing the scales for the Galapagos Marine Reserve.

The Galapagos Islands have one of the most biodiverse seascapes in the world but, like much of the rest of the planet, it faces severe threats from unsustainable fishing activity and plastic pollution. What happens in the waters of Galapagos matters not just locally but globally: if we can't even protect '[Hope Spots](#)', identified by scientists as critical to the health of the ocean, then we have little chance of conserving marine life or of remaining within 1.5°C warming.

Both the waters and the marine life in the Galapagos Marine Reserve (GMR) play a major role in capturing carbon from the atmosphere. Therefore, by protecting the Reserve's marine biodiversity, keeping the fish in and pollution out, we increase its ability to act as a natural

carbon sink as well as giving it a greater chance of withstanding the impacts of climate change and continuing to provide services and livelihoods to the people of Galapagos.

We are attending COP26 to call for action from grassroots to governments to tackle the greatest threats to the GMR by transforming pledges into collective action.

Protecting marine biodiversity, and ensuring climate resilience, in Galapagos requires that we must:

- ❖ Extend the GMR protected area and implement the Galapagos-Cocos-Swimway.
- ❖ Ensure there are adequate resources for them to be properly managed and enforced.
- ❖ Prevent destructive fishing such as the landing of CITES-listed sharks and long-lining in the Galapagos Marine Reserve.
- ❖ Prevent plastic use and pollution and move towards a circular economy in order to minimise fossil fuel requirements, carbon emissions and waste along supply chains.
- ❖ Ensure that local and underrepresented voices are heard and amplified, that equality and inclusion are prioritised, and that solutions meet local needs including by providing sustainable livelihoods.

How can the UK support conservation and climate action in Ecuador?

As one of the world's top ten 'mega-biodiverse' countries, conservation and climate action in Ecuador must be a global priority. Additionally, many of the threats facing Ecuador's marine environment have an international component and therefore require international solutions. We can support conservation and climate action in Ecuador by:

- ❖ **Supporting Ecuador's achievement of 30% ocean protection by 2030, via:**
 - Implementation of the **Galapagos-Cocos Swimway** to protect critically important migratory routes.
 - Extension of the **Galapagos Marine Reserve**.
 - A **global BBNJ Agreement** to protect key high seas areas.
- ❖ **Supporting action against plastic pollution, via:**
 - **Restoration of pledged funding for Plastic Pollution Free Galapagos** from GCRF or other Government funds such as the Blue Planet Fund. This year we began implementation of a £3.3 million UK Government Global Research Challenge Fund grant for the Plastic Pollution Free Galapagos project but, as a result of the UK's ODA budget reduction, this grant was cut by 64% this year. There is currently no guarantee as to whether future years' funding will go ahead as pledged, leaving the future of this project in jeopardy.
- ❖ **Supporting action against illegal and unsustainable fishing, via:**
 - Support for the trial of new low-cost technology to monitor vessels at sea.
 - Establishment of joint commitments to eliminate the global shark fin trade.
- ❖ **Supporting the development of a sustainable economy in Ecuador, via:**
 - Market opportunities for sustainable fishing products, sustainable tourism, and blue and green financial products.

If you have any questions or require any further information, please contact Clare Simm at clare@gct.org or the office on 020 7399 7440.