

PRESS RELEASE

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Expanded marine protection around the Galapagos Islands will increase their resilience



Galapagos Conservation Trust (GCT) is pleased that the President of Ecuador, Guillermo Lasso, announced today, Monday 1 November, at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) that Ecuador has committed to expanding the marine protection around the Galapagos Islands by 60,000km² in order to increase their resilience to climate change.

This is essential to safeguard endangered species including sharks, turtles and whales in addition to supporting commercially important species such as tuna. It will also directly help local people as they benefit from spill-over effects in surrounding fisheries and the enhancement of eco-tourism opportunities provided by a healthier marine ecosystem.

GCT has been working with partners for several years to gather the evidence needed to protect the unique marine resources surrounding Galapagos, and particularly the Galapagos-Cocos Swimway between Galapagos and Cocos island in Costa Rica, which will help to conserve vulnerable migratory species such as sharks, turtles and whales, from threats such as illegal and overfishing, and plastic pollution, as well as helping to preserve the livelihoods of thousands of people.

One of GCT's partners, Jonathan Green, founder and director of the Galapagos Whale Shark Project, commented, "We hope that the research carried out by groups such as ours with the long term support from GCT and the Galapagos National Park can continue to provide the scientific data so necessary for the implementation of such Marine Protected Areas and will help with future actions and legislation to protect the ocean for the future of the planet."

Sharon Johnson, GCT's Chief Executive, said, "This is very welcome news and a great step in the right direction, we applaud President Lasso on taking action. But there is more to be done to ensure that the resources are in place to properly enforce these new protected areas, so that millions of vulnerable migratory species can travel safely between the important feeding and breeding grounds of the Galapagos Marine Reserve and Cocos Island National Park. We must continue to strive for collective global action to ensure 30% of our ocean is protected by 2030."

Sharon is at COP26 this week to meet the Ecuadorian President and discuss our activities with other members of the Ecuadorian delegation and key influencers from the UK and Ecuador. GCT will also have a stand in the Green Zone on Saturday 6 November, sharing messages of concern, hope and opportunity from the Galapagos Islands.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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

GCT at COP26

- GCT will be hosting a stand at COP26 on Saturday 6th November (Nature Day) to amplify this message – we need to keep fish in the ocean, and pollution out.
- GCT has been calling on the government of Ecuador to make significant progress towards achieving 30% ocean protection by 2030 by extending the Galapagos Marine Reserve and implementing the Galapagos-Cocos Swimway, a vital protected highway between marine reserves in Ecuadorean and Costa Rican waters to safeguard a key migratory route for species including whale sharks, hammerhead sharks and green and leatherback turtles.
- We've created an animation that sums up our key messages for COP26 which you can see here: <https://youtu.be/laXIC3uOqYI>.

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

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Images are available on request