

HD8M DXpedition to the *Galapagos Islands*



This DXpedition managed to make a sizable donation toward the preservation of this precious ecosystem. Here's how they did it.

Jim Millner, WB2REM

The Galapagos Islands are located on the equator off the coast of Ecuador and consist of 17 larger islands, and hundreds of smaller islets and rocks. The HD8M team visited two of the islands — Santa Cruz and Isabela. The archipelago was formed by underwater volcanic activity three to five million years ago. In geological terms, these islands are considered relatively new.

In 1835, Charles Darwin was one of the first naturalists to observe the unique nature of the Galapagos wildlife. The animals are not afraid of humans because they evolved in isolation from them or other large predators, so had no reason to fear them. After a couple of the tortoise species were hunted to near extinction, 97% of the land and surrounding water was designated a national park to protect the Galapagos wildlife and flora.

The group of amateur radio operators that participated in the HD8M 2017 and 2019 DXpeditions traveled to the Galapagos for different reasons. Ellis, N1MWJ (SK), a retired park ranger, had a keen interest in wildlife. Mark, WY1G, a birdwatcher, was excited about observing new avian species. Bill, W2WCM, was on his first DXpedition. The rest of us, including Nancy, KGØYL, ARRL Section Manager for North Dakota, were amateur photographers and world

travelers. Ham radio was the glue that bound us together, and the adventure is what excited us.

Isabela

The HD8M team traveled to Isabela Island in 2017. Isabela is the largest of the Galapagos Islands. It is easily reachable by small twin-engine prop planes, which fly daily from Baltra Island Airport. It is also possible to get to most major islands by ferry.

Isabela Island was chosen because of its beautiful volcanoes, abundance of wildlife, and limited develop-



The hexagonal beam antenna that was used for the HD8M operation on Isabela Island. [Jim Millner, WB2REM, photo]

ment. In our free time, we explored the island's nature trails, walked the rim of a volcano, and swam with marine iguanas. We stayed in the quaint village of Puerto Villamil on the southern end of the island. It had unpaved sand roads, a few restaurants that lined the main street, and a friendly atmosphere. On the beach in front of the house, sea lions frolicked in the water, bright red Sally Lightfoot crabs crawled over lava rocks, and blue-footed boobies dove into the water for fish. In the wetlands behind the house, flamingos gracefully played in the water while giant Galapagos tortoises slowly traversed the landscape.



Jim Millner's, WB2REM, operating position in Santa Cruz. [Bill Mims, W2WCM, photo]

Santa Cruz

The 2019 HD8M DXpedition took place on Santa Cruz Island. The most populated island of the group, Santa Cruz is close in proximity to the Baltra Island Airport, just across the Itabaca Canal. Operation took place in a modern two-bedroom house located on the side of the Cerro Crocker volcano at an elevation of 1,500 feet. The numerous full-length windows in each room gave us a panoramic view of the ocean, distant islands, and the surrounding environment. As we operated the radios, it was easy to spot giant Galapagos tortoises roaming the property and numerous Galapagos finches flying by our windows. In our spare time, we walked through a mile-long lava tube, toured the Charles Darwin Research Station, and visited Puerto Ayora, its main city.

Galapagos Conservancy

On both islands, we operated from enchanting environments. We were keenly aware that the flora and fauna that surrounded us — which we greatly loved — wouldn't have been there if there wasn't an active effort to protect the islands' fragile ecosystems.

The Galapagos Conservancy (<https://www.galapagos.org>) is a United States-based organization that aims to preserve, protect, and restore the Galapagos ecosystem. They have a record of successfully restoring existing tortoise populations, repopulating tortoises on islands where they had gone extinct, and helping to mitigate damage to both flora

and fauna. In addition to the Galapagos National Park and Charles Darwin Research Station, we visited the Isabela Island Tortoise Breeding and Rearing Center, where we saw firsthand the work that the Galapagos National Park Directorate was doing in rearing and releasing tortoises back to the islands. The Directorate was even able to close their tortoise breeding center on San Cristóbal Island, because their goal of tortoise repopulation had been met. The Galapagos Conservancy has also been actively involved in educating and training volunteers to help further protect the ecosystems of the Galapagos.

The HD8M team felt compelled to find a way to help. Given more time, volunteering for one of the numerous island preservation projects would have been considered. We decided to donate a portion of our QSL card funds to the Galapagos Conservancy that would have normally reimbursed our expedition costs.

Prior to the 2017 DXpedition, we contacted Johannah Barry, President of the Galapagos Conservancy. She was excited to hear about our unique approach to fundraising. Through her connection, the Galapagos Conservancy's services department created a link for donations to be placed through our website, www.hd8m.com. (For clarity, no donations were directly solicited over the radio.) Our DXpedition's success led to a \$3,400 donation to the Galapagos Conservancy. Ms. Barry and the Galapagos Conservancy's team were so impressed with our effort that they fea-



A Sally Lightfoot Crab, one of the most common crabs found in the Galapagos Islands. [Jim Millner, WB2REM, photo]



Sea lions sunbathing on the shores of Isabela Island. [Jim Millner, WB2REM, photo]

Conclusion

We, as amateur radio operators, do a lot to help in emergencies and thus bring positive attention to our hobby by doing so. I suggest that we search for other avenues to creatively help the communities in which we live and from where we go on DXpeditions. Although it was exciting to operate from the Galapagos Islands, we felt even more fulfilled by giving back to the islands through our donations to the Galapagos Conservancy. In turn, we challenge you to find a way to do the same in your community or on your next DXpedition.

tured HD8M and amateur radio's approach to fundraising in their Spring/Summer 2019 Galapagos Conservancy Newsletter. We have received many positive comments from hams around the world about our operation and goal to support the Conservancy. Likewise, Ms. Barry reported that members of the Galapagos Conservancy had developed a better appreciation of amateur radio and the generosity of our community.

Jim Millner, WB2REM, has been an amateur radio operator for 56 years. He is an avid DXer, world traveler, and licensed psychologist. He first began experimenting with remote-control linking in the 1980s, and has published several articles on the subject in *QST*, *73*, and *CQ* magazines. Jim would like to thank Gene, K5PA, and Mark, WY1G, for their assistance with the article.

For updates to this article, see the QST Feedback page at www.arrrl.org/feedback.



Coming up in the March/April 2020 and future QEX issues are articles and technical notes on a range of amateur radio topics. These are at the top of the queue.

- Joseph M. Haas, KE0FF, adds DTMF capability to popular transceiver microphones.
- Jacek Pawlowski, SP3L, describes a wide range of new broadband wire antennas in this Part 1 of a longer article.
- Ralph J. Crumrine, N0KC, designs a lightweight 3 kW power supply to

support state-of-the-art switching MOSFET amplifiers.

- Eric P. Nichols, KL7AJ, in this first of a series, reveals the simplicity and many uses of the double-balanced mixer.
- Michael P. Hasselbeck's, WB2FKO, technical note describes anchors for a 3D-printed lid.
- Wilton C. Helm's, WT6C, technical note explores receiver step attenuators.
- Kai Siwiak's, KE4PT, technical note explains why typical small HF loop antennas are not magnetic loops.
- Steve Stearns, K6OIK, explores the general uniform transmission line having complex characteristic impedance and propagation constant.

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