

What It's Like to Be a Librarian in the Galápagos

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What is it like working as a librarian in the Galapagos? What does your job entail?

I'm the coordinator of the Library & Archive of the Charles Darwin Foundation, a scientific NGO working for the preservation of Galapagos' biodiversity (<https://www.darwinfoundation.org/en/>). CDF was created in 1959, to help protecting the Galapagos Islands, and it manages a Research Station (Charles Darwin Research Station) near Puerto Ayora, the biggest town in the archipelago, in Santa Cruz Island. There, at CDRS, it is located the library / archive.

The CDRS is the place where an international team of scientists and conservationists work, researching the unique species that populate the islands – like the emblematic giant tortoise, the marine iguana or the flightless cormorant. Therefore, the library I coordinate is aimed at providing them all the material they need – which turns the library into a "specialized" one. However, being the biggest, oldest and practically the only one in Galapagos, the library also serves the local community.

I also coordinate the archive, where the entire social and scientific memory of CDF (and a part of Galapagos') is preserved. And right now I'm creating a new space – a museum, in order to display and take care of a handful of archaeological / historical pieces related to Galapagos' past.

Even if I am the only professional librarian in the islands, I am the head of a small, amazing team of Galapagos-based staff who is learning the profession by putting it into practice.

Galapagos is a very special place in many ways. Besides being a sort of "paradise" in the middle of the eastern Pacific Ocean, and a "living laboratory" for evolution, it is also a very isolated place – despite being a tourist destination with a heavy regime of

visits all year long. Internet service is weak, there are no cultural activities (e.g. no bookshops), and movements are strongly limited to a very small land surface. Since Galapagos are a National Park, a Biosphere Reserve and a UNESCO's Heritage Site, they are quite protected, and a lot of "normal" activities are not allowed there.

Isolation makes life a little bit hard for the permanent population of the islands. Food and almost any other thing arrive from the continent by boat – which means that sometimes there are shortages in the archipelago. And prices are really high. Water supply is a problem, and creates a number of health issues. Massive tourism is another topic that should be discussed – but nobody seems to be willing to tackle.

As with many other things in our world, every light has its shadow. And Galapagos is no exception to that rule.

How did you come to work in such a unique setting?

I applied to an international call for librarians, to fill the position. A number of conditions were asked, as previous experience working with biological sciences, and a good command of languages. Since I studied Oceanography and Biology before being a librarian, and I speak several languages fluently, I considered I had a chance. And I did – I was selected among 60 candidates from all over the world.

Of course, I had to move to Galapagos and start a new life in the islands – which was probably the biggest challenge of all.

What do you like most about your job?

The environment, of course. I work yards away from the sea, and the marine iguanas usually walk in front of the library's door. I can hear the waves (and the Darwin's finches) from my desk. Of course, half of the year we have what we call "garua weather": cloudy, cold, and with a never-ending drizzle wetting everything. But that's also lovely, at least for me.

Also, I love being in charge of the biggest and oldest library in my territory. That is absolutely challenging, especially considering that I don't have a lot of resources and I have to use all my knowledge to improvise solutions and projects.

And taking care of the archive and the future museum is wonderful, too. Because I have in my hands the social and scientific memory of this place.

Is there anything that has surprised you/that you didn't expect about working as a librarian in the Galapagos?

Almost everything I found here since I arrived surprised me. I came to Galapagos with no expectations, and I found so many things along the way that amazed me that I wouldn't know where to start. But if I should choose one and only one thing, I'd go for the tameness of local fauna. I had read about it before travelling, but witnessing it here, in the field, is absolutely surprising. Giant tortoises, sea lions, finches, iguanas lizards, sea birds, and even the butterflies seem not to fear the human presence: they live their lives just two yards away from my eyes. That closeness to the local natural world is something that I hadn't experienced before, anywhere else.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Since I have this opportunity, I invite all my colleagues to consider supporting the work I do here.

Right now I'm developing an outreach project to bring libraries to all the inhabited islands by means of a mobile library service. There is one island (Floreana) that never had a library (our mobile library is the first one to arrive there) and others that don't have a library since at least a decade.

Also, I'm trying to enlarge / enrich the collection of the library in order to provide better services to the local community, since the current collection is mainly focused on science and scientific endeavors.

And finally, we're putting a lot of effort in preservation / conservation tasks. Local weather and the proximity of sea is our #1 enemy in a library / archive building that was never thought to be a library / archive. Dealing with humidity and sunlight is an absolute nightmare, and a lot of material is needed.

Those interested in supporting the CDF's Library & Archive can contact me to get further information.