


THE GALAPAGOS ARCHIPELAGO
**ENCHANTED
ISLANDS**
PART 2

An unforgettable trip to Ecuador and
the magical place of origin of Darwin's
groundbreaking theory of evolution





Galapagos land iguana ■
Conolophus subcristatus,
Isla Seymour Norte. On the
opening spread, *Galapagos Brown*
Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*
urinator, *Isla Seymour Norte*.

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The second part of our unforgettable and extensive trip to the Galápagos archipelago - which was expertly organized for us by our friends at **Tropical Herping** with the complex logistics faultlessly taken care of by the stupendous **Finch Bay Hotel** - saw the two of us, together with our friend and wildlife photographer Lucas M. Bustamante, explore three more islands of this stunning National Park of Ecuador. These were totally different from each other, but once more immensely interesting and exceptionally rewarding from the point of view of a nature photographer - their names are Seymour Norte, Santa Fe and Floreana. It is important to remind the reader that the first two can only be visited following clearly marked trails - which cannot be abandoned - and for a short period of time only (about two hours for each group of visitors).

ISLA SEYMOUR NORTE

Seymour Norte is a small island rising from the Pacific Ocean near Baltra Island. Named after an English nobleman, Lord Hugh Seymour, it was created by an uplift of a submarine

lava formation and it is entirely covered with low bushes. The island has an area of 1.9 square kilometres (0.73 sq mi) and a maximum altitude of 28 metres (92 ft) and it is home to a large population of Blue-footed boobies and Swallow-tailed gulls. It hosts one of the largest populations of magnificent frigatebirds *Fregata magnificens* and a slow growing population of the Galápagos land iguanas *Conolophus subcristatus*. It has a visitor trail approximately 2 kilometres (1.2 mi) in length crossing the inland of the island and exploring the rocky coast. The stock for the captive breeding program of the Galápagos land iguana is descended from iguanas which Captain G. Allan Hancock translocated from nearby Baltra Island to Seymour Norte in the 1930s. Seymour Norte, which has no people living on it, is only viewable today with an official guide who works for the Galápagos National Park. Seymour Norte was created by seismic uplift, rather than being of volcanic origin. The island has a flat profile with cliffs only a few meters from the shoreline, where swallowtail gulls and tropicbirds sit perched in ledges. A tiny forest of silver-grey Palo

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Magnificent frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*, Isla Seymour Norte.



Red rock crab or Sally Lightfoot crab
Grapsus grapsus,
Isla Seymour Norte.

Santo trees stand just above the landing, usually without leaves, waiting for rain to bring them into bloom. The island is teeming with life. While visiting the island, one may have to give way to a passing sea lion or marine iguana. Flocks of pelicans and swallow-tailed gulls feed off shore, and seasonally, Nazca boobies can also be seen. North Seymour is an extraordinary place for breeding birds, and it is home to one of the largest populations of nesting Blue-footed boobies and Magnificent frigate birds. Pairs of Blue-footed boobies can be seen conducting their mating ritual as they offer each other gifts, whistle and honk, stretch their necks towards the sky, spread their wings, and dance - showing off their bright blue feet. Magnificent frigatebirds perch in low bushes, near the boobies, while watching over their large chicks. The frigates are huge, dark aerobats with a 90-inch (2.3 m) wingspan, and male frigates can puff up their scarlet throat sacks to resemble giant red balloons. Boobies and frigates have an interesting relationship, as boobies are excellent hunters and fish in flocks, while frigates by comparison are pirates, dive bombing the boobies to force them to drop their prey. Then, the aerobic frigate swoops down from the sky and picks up the food, most of the times before it even hits the water.

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Blue-footed booby Sula nebouxii, Isla Seymour Norte.



■ *Blue-footed booby* *Sula nebouxii*, *Isla Seymour Norte*.

ISLA SANTA FE

Isla Santa Fe, also called Barrington Island after admiral Samuel Barrington, is a small island of 24 square kilometres (9.3 sq mi) which lies in the centre of the Galápagos archipelago, to the southeast of Santa Cruz Island. Geologically it is one of the oldest; volcanic rocks of about 4 million years old have been found here. The vegetation of the island is characterized by brush, Palo Santo trees and stands of a large variety of the prickly pear cactus *Opuntia echios*. Barren, rock-strewn and somewhat unwelcoming (but maybe this has something to do with the fact that it was quite and uncommonly overcast when we visited it) Santa Fe is home to two endemic species and two endemic subspecies: the Barrington land iguana *Conolophus pallidus*, the Barrington leaf-toed gecko *Phyllodactylus barringtonensis*, the Santa Fe marine iguana *Amblyrhynchus cristatus trillmichi* and the Santa Fe rice rat *Aegialomys galapagoensis bauri*. The visitor site is a sand beach located in Barrington Bay on the northeastern side of the island. Large numbers of sea lions are found on the beaches in the bay, occasionally hindering access to the two trails leading from the beach but offering wonderful photo opportunities and unique chances of careful approach (without physical interaction).

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Galapagos
Brown Pelican
*Pelecanus
occidentalis
urinator, Isla
Seymour Norte.*



Left, Blue-footed booby *Sula nebouxii*, Isla Seymour Norte; top right, Galapagos land iguana *Conolophus subcristatus*, Isla Seymour Norte; bottom right, Lucas M. Bustamante photographing a Galapagos Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis urinator*, Isla Seymour Norte.





Magnificent ■
frigatebird *Fregata*
magnificens,
Isla Seymour Norte.

ISLA FLOREANA

This was one of the most interesting among the islands of the archipelago we had the opportunity to visit during our trip. Floreana was named after Juan José Flores, the first president of Ecuador, during whose administration the government of Ecuador took possession of the archipelago. It was previously called Charles Island (after King Charles II of England), and Santa Maria after one of the caravels of Columbus. The island has an area of 173 square kilometres (67 sq mi) and it was formed by volcanic eruption. The island's highest point is Cerro Pajas at 640 metres (2,100 ft), which is also the highest point of the volcano like most of the smaller islands of Galápagos. Since the 19th century, whalers kept a wooden barrel at Post Office Bay, so that mail could be picked up and delivered to their destination by ships on their way home, mainly to Europe and the United States. Cards and letters are still placed in the barrel without any postage. Visitors sift through the letters and cards in order to deliver them by hand. Due to its relatively flat surface, supply of fresh water as well as plants and animals, Floreana was a favorite stop for whalers and other visitors to the Galápagos. When still known as Charles Island in 1820, the island was set alight as a prank by helmsman Thomas Chappel from the Nantucket whaling ship the Essex. Being the height of the dry season, the fire soon burned out of control. The next day saw the island still burning as the ship

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Galapagos ■
 Brown Pelican
*Pelecanus
 occidentalis
 urinator, Isla
 Seymour Norte.*



Blue-footed booby
Sula nebouxii on nest
protecting chicks from
the scorching sun,
Isla Seymour Norte.



■ Left,
Magnificent frigatebird
Fregata magnificens
juvenile, Isla Seymour Norte.
Right, *Blue-footed booby*
Sula nebouxii
on its nest with chicks, Isla Seymour Norte.



■ "Photobombing"
Galapagos Brown
Pelican *Pelecanus
occidentalis
urinator* with
National Park
guide, Isla
Seymour Norte.





Far left, Blue-footed booby *Sula nebouxii*, Isla Seymour Norte. Left, Red rock crab or Sally Lightfoot crab *Grapsus grapsus*, Isla Seymour Norte.



Can you spot the iguana? Galapagos land iguana *Conolophus subcristatus* in its habitat, Isla Seymour Norte.



■ Top left, Magnificent frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*; top right, Galapagos land iguana *Conolophus subcristatus*. Bottom left, Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*; bottom right, Nazca booby *Sula granti*. All photos are from Seymour Norte.

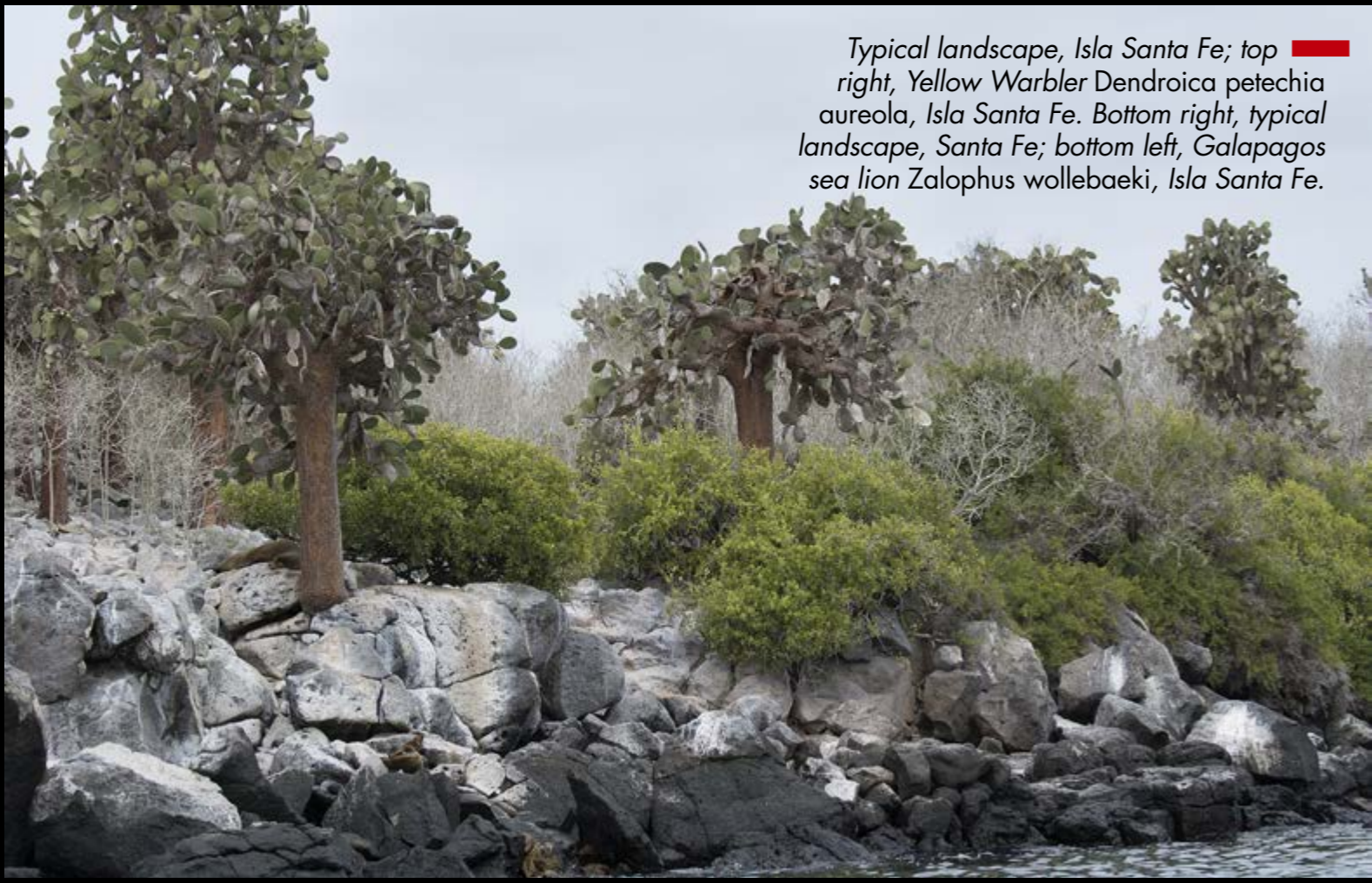
Magnificent frigatebird ■
Fregata magnificens feeding
its young by regurgitation,
Isla Seymour Norte.



■ Ruddy Turnstone
Arenaria interpres,
Isla Seymour Norte.



Typical landscape, Isla Santa Fe; top right, Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia aureola*, Isla Santa Fe. Bottom right, typical landscape, Santa Fe; bottom left, Galapagos sea lion *Zalophus wollebaeki*, Isla Santa Fe.



■ *Barrington Land iguana*
Conolophus pallidus,
Isla Santa Fe.





Santa Fe lava lizard ■
Microlophus barringtonensis,
Isla Santa Fe.

sailed for the offshore grounds and after a full day of sailing the fire was still visible on the horizon. Many years later Thomas Nickerson, who had been a cabin boy on the *Essex*, returned to Charles Island and found a black wasteland: "*neither trees, shrubbery, nor grass have since appeared.*" It is believed the fire contributed to the extinction of some species originally on the island.

In September 1835 the second voyage of HMS *Beagle* brought Charles Darwin to Charles Island. The ship's crew was greeted by Nicholas Lawson, acting for the Governor of Galápagos, and at the prison colony Darwin was told that tortoises differed in the shape of the shells from island to island, but this was not obvious on the islands he visited and he did not bother collecting their shells. He industriously collected all the animals, plants, insects and reptiles, and speculated about finding "*from future comparison to what district or 'centre of creation' the organized beings of this archipelago must be attached.*"

On 8 April 1888 USS *Albatross*, a Navy-manned research vessel assigned to the United States Fish Commission, visited Floreana Island during a 2 week survey of the islands. In 1929, Friedrich Ritter and Dore Strauch arrived in Guayaquil from Berlin to settle on Floreana, and sent letters back that were widely reported in the press, encouraging others to follow. In 1932 Heinz and Margret Wittmer arrived with their son Harry, and shortly afterwards their son Rolf was born there, the first citizen of the island known to have been born in

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■ Galapagos sea lion
Zalophus wollebaeki,
Isla Santa Fe.



■ Antonella with Galapagos sea lion *Zalophus wollebaeki*, Isla Santa Fe. These - obviously - are wild animals, which have always right of way and which must not be approached too closely.





■ Galapagos hawk
Buteo galapagoensis,
feeding on dead sea
lion pup, Isla Santa Fe.



Left, Barrington ■
Land iguana
Conolophus pallidus,
Isla Santa Fe ; right,
Galapagos hawk
Buteo galapagoensis
juvenile, Isla Santa Fe





Galapagos sea lion ■
Zalophus wollebaeki,
Isla Santa Fe.



■ Top, Barrington Land
 iguana *Conolophus*
pallidus, Isla Santa Fe;
 Bottom left, Santa Fe
 lava lizard
Microlophus
barringtonensis, Isla
 Santa Fe; bottom right,
 Galapagos
 Mockingbird
Nesominius parvulus
barringtoni,
 Isla Santa Fe.






the Galápagos. Later in 1932, the self-described "Baroness" von Wagner Bosquet arrived with companions, but a series of strange disappearances and deaths (including possible murders) and the departure of Strauch left the Wittmers as the sole remaining inhabitants of the group who had settled there. They set up a hotel which is still managed by their descendants, and Mrs. Wittmer wrote an account of her experiences in her book *Floreana: A Woman's Pilgrimage to the Galápagos*. A documentary film recounting these events, *The Galapagos Affair*, was released in 2013. The demands of these visitors, early settlers, and introduced species devastated much of the local wildlife with the

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■ Galapagos sea lion *Zalophus wollebaeki*, Isla Santa Fe.



Left, Red rock  crab or Sally Lightfoot crab
Grapsus grapsus,
Isla Santa Fe;
right, Galapagos sea lion *Zalophus wollebaeki*, Isla Santa Fe.





Galapagos sea lion
Zalophus wollebaeki,
Isla Santa Fe.

endemic Floreana tortoise being declared extinct and the endemic Floreana mockingbird becoming extirpated on the island (the few remaining are found on the nearby islands of Gardiner and Champion). When Charles Darwin visited the island in 1835, he found no sign of its native tortoise and assumed that whalers, pirates, and human settlers had wiped them out. Since about 1850, no tortoises have been found on the island (except for one or two introduced animals kept as pets by the locals), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature classified the Floreana tortoise *Chelonoidis elephantopus* sometimes called *Chelonoidis nigra* as extinct. However, it may be that there are pure Floreana tortoises living on other islands in the archipelago. ●

■ Galapagos hawk
Buteo galapagoensis,
Isla Santa Fe.



Santa Fe lava ■
lizard *Microlophus*
barringtonensis,
Isla Santa Fe.






Galapagos hawk *Buteo galapagoensis*, feeding on dead sea lion pup, Isla Santa Fe.

■ Typical coastal landscape with sea lions and Opuntia cactus, Isla Floreana.





■ *Marine iguana*
Amblyrhynchus
cristatus sub.
venustissimus
at sunset,
Isla Floreana.
The bright shades
of pink and
turquoise unique
to the Floreana
Marine iguanas
are still apparently
unexplained.



■ Whimbrel
Numenius
phaeopus,
Isla Floreana.



Galápagos
giant tortoise
Chelonoidis "nigra"
from the government
breeding center,
Isla Floreana.



Lava heron *Butorides sundevalli*, with moray eel prey, Isla Floreana.



Marine iguana *Amblyrhynchus*
cristatus sub. venustissimus,
Isla Floreana.

Red rock crab or Sally
Lightfoot crab *Grapsus*
grapsus, Isla Floreana.





Galápagos giant tortoise ■
Chelonoidis "nigra" from the
government breeding center,
Isla Floreana.



■ Left, typical coastal landscape, Isla Floreana; right, Galápagos giant tortoise *Chelonoidis "nigra"* from the National Park breeding center, Isla Floreana.





Galapagos icon: Marine iguana *Amblyrhynchus cristatus* sub. *venustissimus* basking at sunset, Isla Floreana.

Left, Lava heron *Butorides
sundevalli*, Isla Floreana;
right, Antonella with Marine
iguana *Amblyrhynchus
cristatus sub. venustissimus*,
Isla Floreana.



Marine iguana ■
Amblyrhynchus cristatus sub.
venustissimus feeding on
algae in the surf,
Isla Floreana.

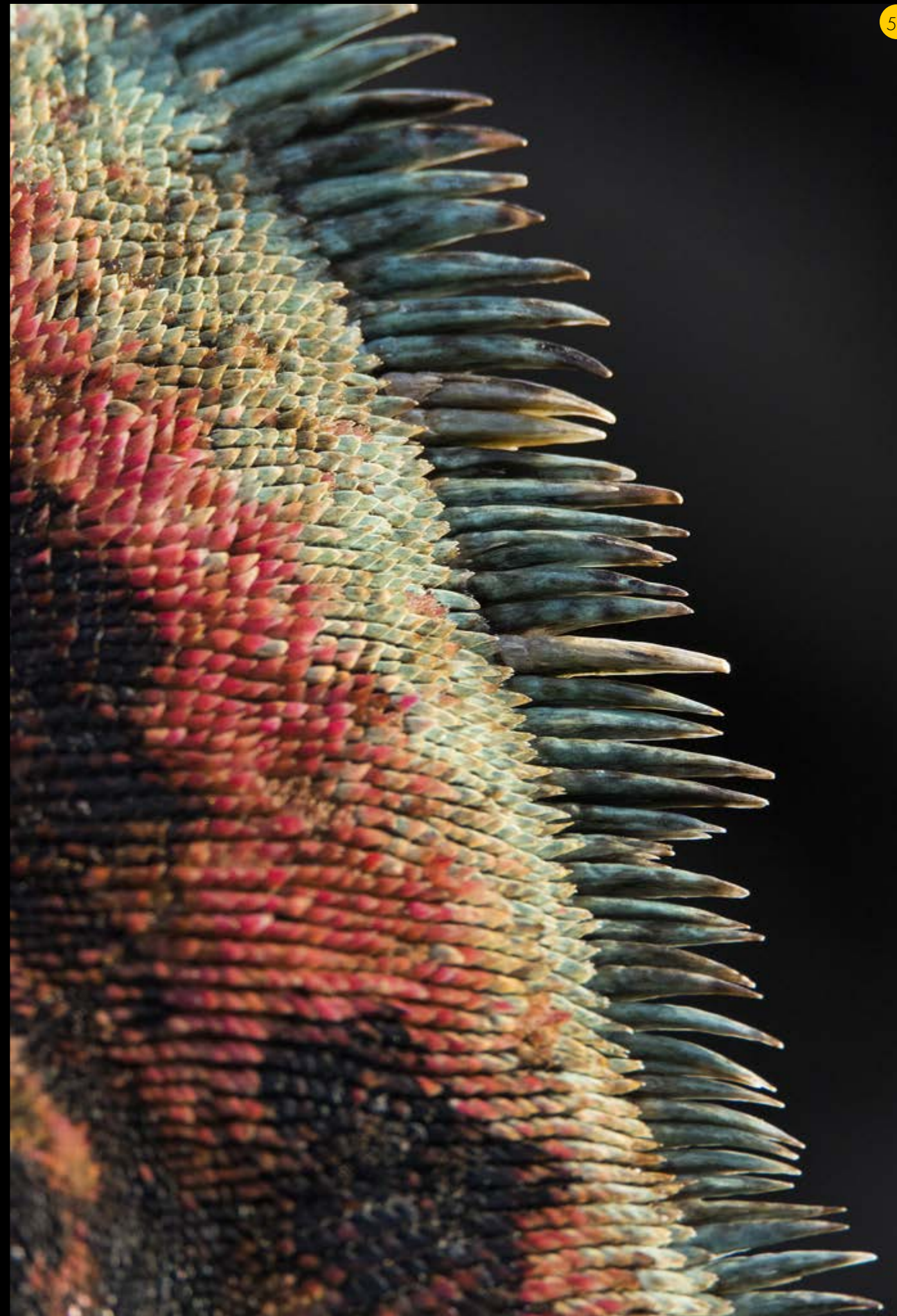


■ Galápagos sea lion *Zalophus wollebaeki* pup, Isla Floreana.





■ Left, Green turtle *Chelonia mydas*, Isla Floreana; right, dorsal detail of the typically colorful Marine iguana *Amblyrhynchus cristatus* sub. *venustissimus* found on Isla Floreana.



Typical - and stunningly beautiful - coastal landscape of Isla Floreana.

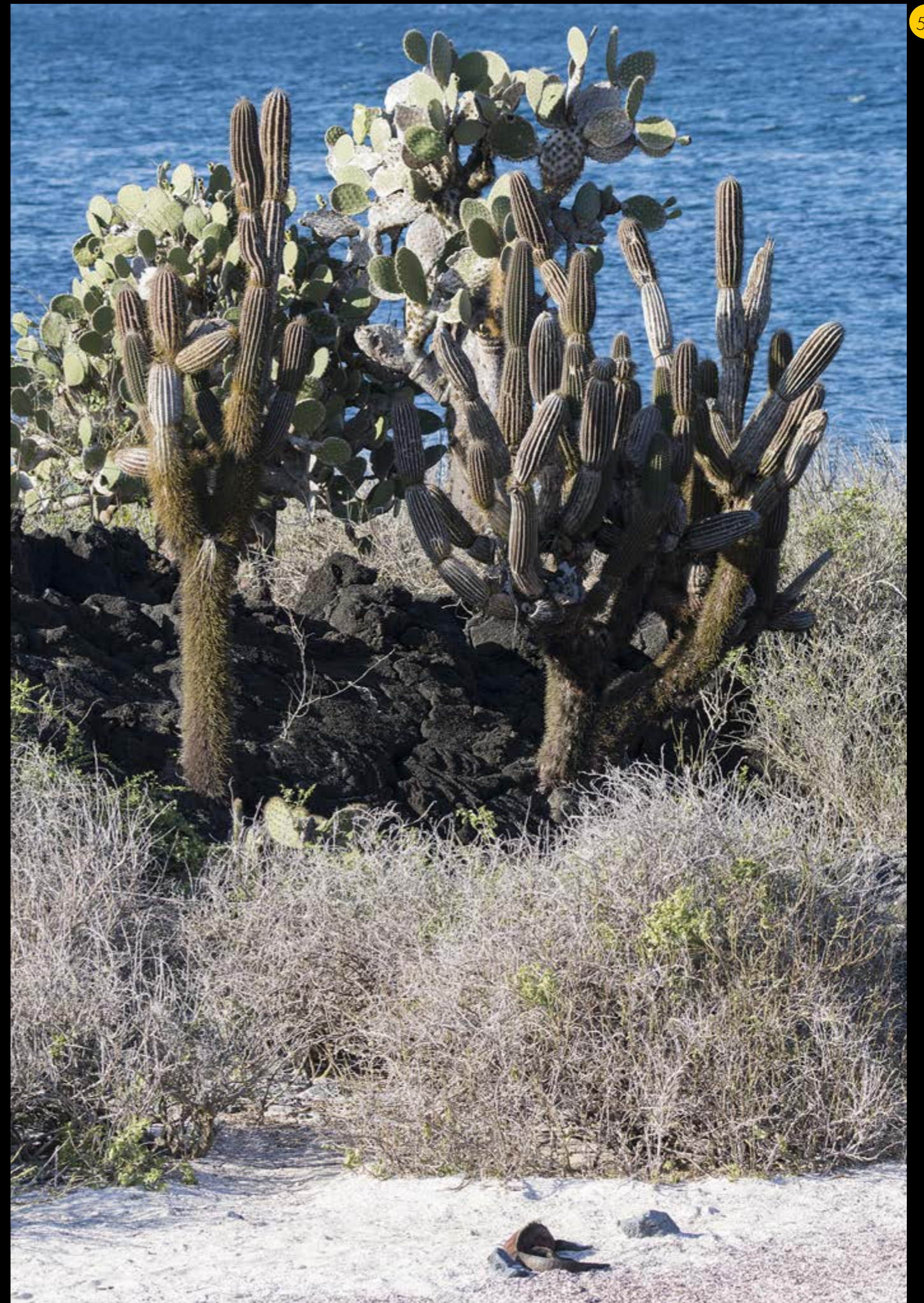


■ Galápagos giant
tortoise *Chelonoidis*
"nigra" from the
breeding center
of Isla Floreana.





Left, ■
Galápagos
giant tortoise
Chelonoidis
"nigra" from
the breeding
center of
Isla Floreana.
Right, typical
coastal
landscape with
Opuntia cactus
and marine
iguana.



■ *Marine iguana*
Amblyrhynchus
cristatus sub.
venustissimus,
Isla Floreana.

