

Welcome to the Galápagos Islands

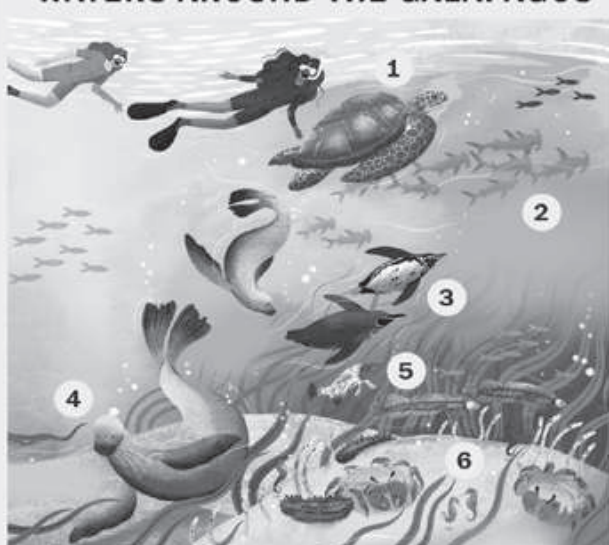
From sea turtles to giant tortoises, the Galápagos are full of natural wonders. This article, adapted from a book by Karen Romano Young, explores what makes them special.

According to Juan Pablo Muñoz, a marine biologist at the Galápagos Science Center, “The Galápagos is the last frontier, the best preserved place on Earth. I think every kid in the world should visit here once in their life and experience this place that is like something out of a storybook.” So why is this group of about 20 islands, located in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of South America (see the map at far right), so special?

The main reason is that the Galápagos islands are home to extraordinary wildlife. People live on just 3 percent of the land. The other 97 percent — and the ocean surrounding it — has been set aside as the giant Galápagos National Park. The rare species that live here are safe and continue to thrive — and can be studied safely, too.

The Galápagos Islands are a hot spot for biodiversity (variety of living things), with an exceptional abundance of species found on the islands

THE CREATURES THAT LIVE IN THE WATERS AROUND THE GALÁPAGOS



- 1. Green sea turtle**, the only sea turtle species that nests in the Galápagos.
- 2. Hammerhead shark**, visits Darwin and Wolf Islands by the hundreds every year.
- 3. Galápagos penguin**, builds nests within cracks in lava.
- 4. Galápagos sea lion**, can be seen sleeping on boardwalks and park benches!
- 5. Red-lipped batfish**, can startle you in a dark corner of a reef.
- 6. Pacific sea horse**, or giant sea horse, can be 12 inches long.

themselves and in the water around them. Biodiversity is higher on the Galápagos than in many other places because there are many different habitats — places where life can find particular foods, as well as sleep and mate.

Why are the waters around the islands so full of life? Something beneath the sea makes a difference: volcanoes. New volcanoes on their way to the surface and old ones — former islands — are hidden below the water. These seamounts, as they are called, are an important Galápagos environment that is rich in life. “We’d go along the sandy, muddy seabed and see a fish here or there,” scientist Adam Soule says. “Then we’d get onto the seamounts and they were just covered with life — corals, fish, anemones, sea stars.”

Mapping seamounts is key to life in the islands. Knowing where seamounts are on the seabed will allow people in the Galápagos to ensure the source of so much life will be carefully managed and protected.

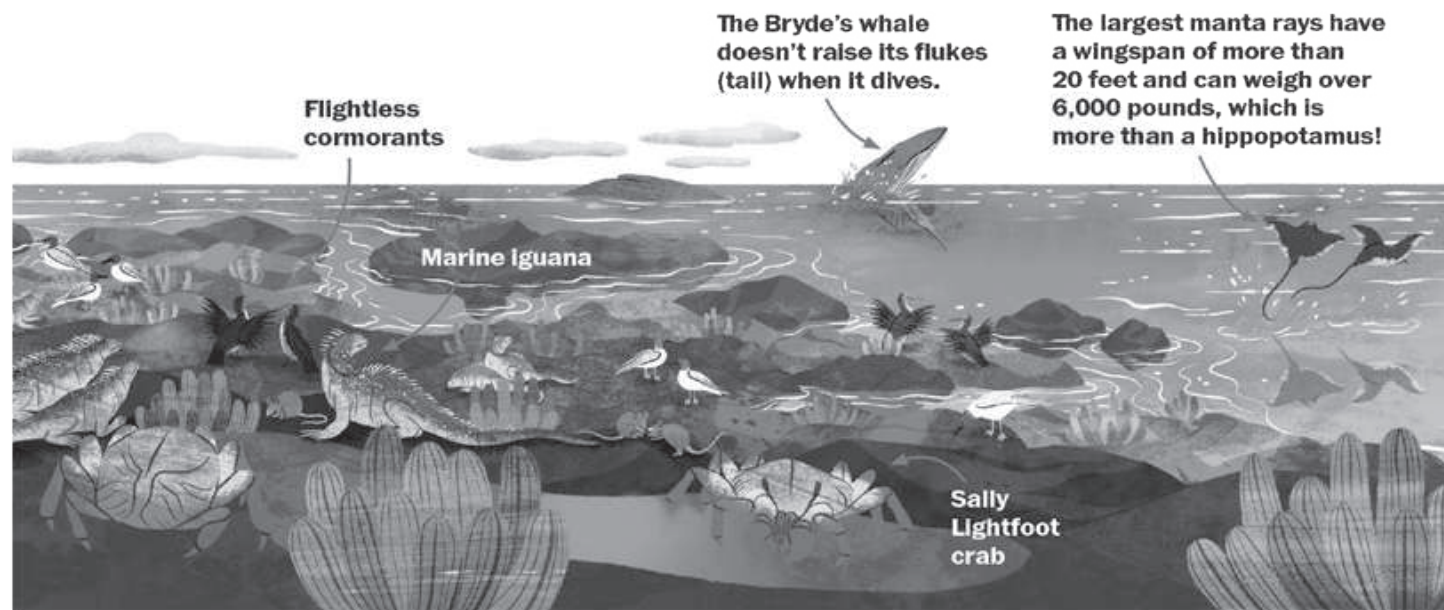


Where are the Galápagos islands?
The Galápagos consist of 13 major islands, six smaller islands, and many very small islands called islets. They lie along the equator in the eastern Pacific Ocean, 620 miles west of Ecuador. The islands are spread out over a large area of 23,000 square miles.

Spanish word galápagos means “tortoise.” The Galápagos tortoises live up to 150 years, which is believed to be longer than any other land animal. The islands also have rare marine iguanas, which feed on seaweed.

What plants and animals live in the Galápagos?
Because the Galápagos are so isolated, the plants and animals found there are very unusual. Cactus forests grow in the dry lowlands, while the uplands are covered with thick, moist vegetation, such as ferns and mosses. The islands are famous for their giant tortoises. These giant tortoises were once so abundant that Spanish explorers named the islands after them. The

Why are the Galápagos islands famous?
The Galápagos are famous because of the scientist Charles Darwin. After studying the plants and animals on the islands in the 1800s, Darwin developed his theory of evolution. The theory, which explains how living things adapt over time, changed the science of biology forever. Darwin was not the first person to see the Galápagos, but they were not a common destination before his visit. They are so far from other land that they are sometimes referred to as the “world’s end.”



The Bryde's whale doesn't raise its flukes (tail) when it dives.

The largest manta rays have a wingspan of more than 20 feet and can weigh over 6,000 pounds, which is more than a hippopotamus!

PUZZLES & JOKES

Stumped? Don't worry, you can find the solutions to all the puzzles at: whatonearthmag.com/answers

ANIMAL WORD SEARCH

Can you spot the names of 12 baby animals hidden in our word search puzzle? Good luck!

O W L E T
W F K O A W V Z K
V I I K P D O F I C Q
R V T D T H C W T P I T L
Y T S P G U S F E E H R F
D E P D U C K L I N G C F C T
N I Q D Y K J L G G S Z A P Q
Z X K Z W F X N O Y J M I L T
S Q B T H A I X Y C F G L R S
Y Y Z X C L A T B V L O F S T
F E H S D H O L E I B U C
F A O W E Q F T A E U E K
G Y J C H E Y F O C H
T A D P O L E M F
Z X L S M

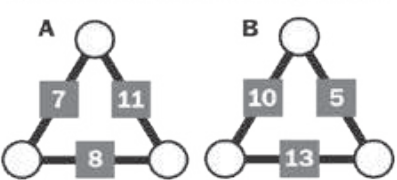
- | | | |
|----------|---------|---------|
| CHICK | FOAL | KITTEN |
| CUB | GOSLING | OWLET |
| CYGNET | JOEY | PIGLET |
| DUCKLING | KID | TADPOLE |

NUMBER TRIANGLES

In the triangles below, the numbers inside the squares are the sums of the two numbers in the connected circles. For example:



Can you figure out which number should appear in each of the circles? All the numbers in the circles are between 1 and 10, and a number can only be used once in each triangle.



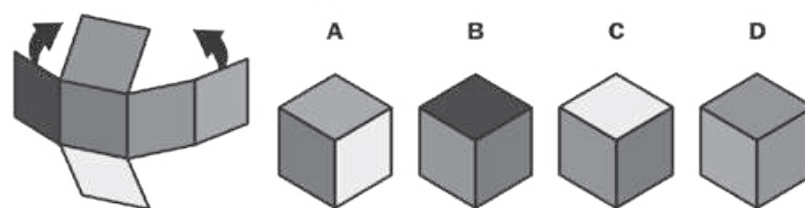
SUDOKU

Fill all the empty squares so that every row, column and 3x2 box contains each of the numbers 1 to 6.

			4		5
5		6			2
	2	3		4	
4					3
3		5	2	1	
	1				

CUBE IT!

The six-sided shape on the left can be folded to form a cube. Only two of the cubes on the right can be made by it. Which are they?



What do you call a spider with twelve eyes?
A spiiiiiiiiiiider!

What type of dinosaur is never late?
A Pronto-saurus!

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