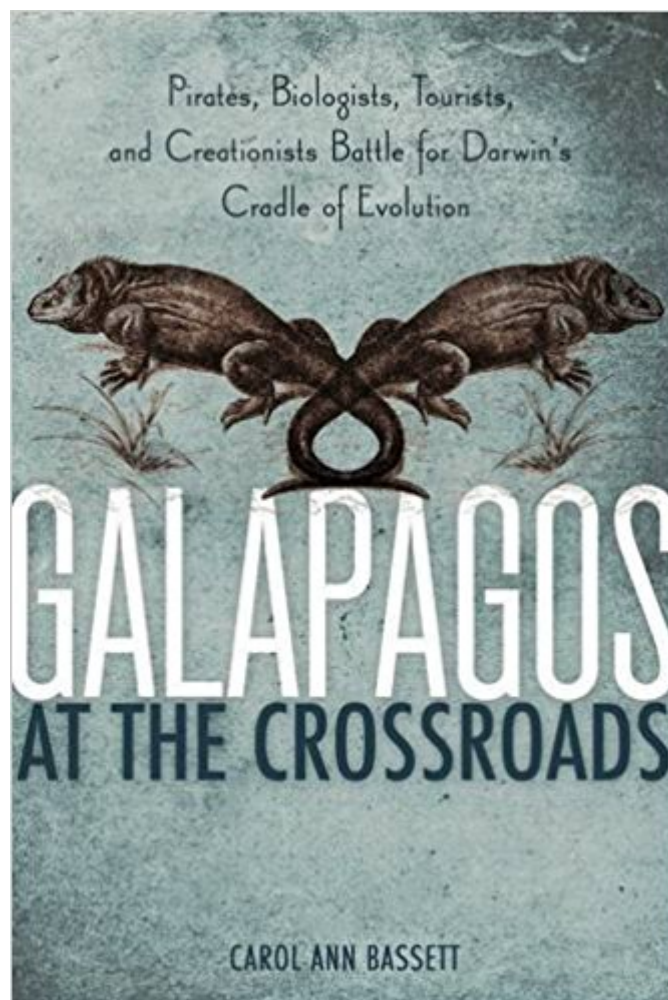




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Galapagos At The Crossroads: Pirates, Biologists, Tourists, And Creationists Battle For Darwin's Cradle Of Evolution



Synopsis

As eloquent as it is alarming, Carol Ann Bassett's portrait of today's Galápagos depicts a deadly collision of economics, politics, and the environment that may destroy one of the world's last Edens. For millions, the Galápagos Islands represent nature at its most unspoiled, an inviolate place famed for its rare flora and fauna. But soon today's 30,000 human residents could surpass 50,000. Add invasive species, floods of tourists, and unresolved conflicts between Ecuadorian laws and local concerns, and it's easy to see why the Galápagos were recently added to UNESCO's World Heritage in Danger list. Each chapter in this provocative, perceptive book focuses on a specific person or group with a stake in the Galápagos's natural resources—from tour companies whose activities are often illegal and not always green, to creationist guides who lead tours with no mention of evolution, from fishermen up in arms over lobster quotas, to modern-day pirates who poach endangered marine species. Bassett presents a perspective as readable as it is sensible. Told with wit, passion, and grace, the Galápagos story serves as a miniature model of Earth itself, a perfect example of how an environment can be destroyed—and what is being done to preserve these islands before it's too late.

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Customer Reviews

"A modern portrait of the islands... as tourists, fishermen, and immigrants exact their toll on the fragile ecosystem." —Conservation Magazine (Society for Conservation Biology) "A fantastic

tutorial for anyone curious about the natural and human health of the island state today." ["An outstanding saga of a threatened ecosystem...specific and revealing ... a 'must' for any library serious about science and ecological issues."](#) [Midwest Book Review](#) "Portrays today's Galapagos caught in a deadly vortex of interests that may destroy one of the world's last Edens." [Broadway Books](#) "Explores the changing landscape of one of the most interesting and biologically diverse ecosystems on Earth." [Willamette Week](#) "If you are looking for an example of the battle between the natural environment and human encroachment, this book provides the perfect case." [The Andersen Library Blog](#) "A vivid, lyrical account of natural wonders and growing threats...invasive species, illegal fishing, political corruption, lack of education, eco-tourism." [The Denver Post](#) "Bassett ... uses science, journalism and personal story to illuminate a species ... as a barometer for how the planet is faring." [The Register-Guard](#) "Absorbing and convincing..." [The News-Reporter](#) "...could have easily been called Galapagos in the Crosshairs. She makes a passionate case for the preservation of these islands." [American Scientist](#) "Takes a hard look at the real story: Due to a number of modern-day issues, the islands are in jeopardy." [Cosis.net](#)

Carol Ann Bassett is the author of *A Gathering of Stones* and *Organ Pipe*. She has contributed pieces to *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, *Science*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *Condé Nast Traveler*.

and he is us." Pogo, 1952. Carol Ann has written a beautiful but sad book. Maybe it is human nature, maybe corruption of underdevelopment, maybe the inevitable clash between parks, poor people, religious fanatics, big business, bureaucracy, tourism, science, and preservation. This is a book about people. Other books on the Galapagos focus on the local abundance of its unique environment, its extreme weather, odd species, friendly animals, or the Galapagos as a stage for the ideas of evolution. In contrast the author takes us on a tour of the people who live in the Galapagos and their differing relationships to that environment. This has been a missing ingredient in Galapagos literature. And Carol Ann fills the gap in the language of a poet. She paints a convincing picture that the Galapagos stand at a crossroads of degradation, overdevelopment, and disneyfication versus some kind of use that will both sustain some people who live there, preserve its unique living environment, and make it available for both scientists studying it and outsiders who come to learn its special lessons. In whichever of these scenarios unfolds, the people now there to

whom she introduces us will play a leading role. One of the themes that the author repeats is that education is an important solution. If the recent Ecuadorian migrants---presumably poor people (many of whom are illegal)---, who come from the underdeveloped mainland for economic opportunity, only better understood the evolutionary nature of the islands, they would not so abuse the resources. Some are Evangelicos, converted Protestants, and employed by the Park as guides. These are ideologically opposed to the ideas of evolution. Others along with old-timers, who lived off the immense profits of now fished out sea cucumbers, feel entitled to harvest what may have once enriched them. They now have to keep fishing or harvesting endangered species in order to sustain their families, and anyone denies them access is the enemy. And corruption enters. A law meant to support locals is subverted. Fishermen riot to do as they wish and get away with it. Large tour operators have access to government higher ups and flout regulations. The park responding to pressure recruits improperly trained fishermen as guides. The park has insufficient resources to patrol for longline poachers and uses the Sea Shepard Society---eco pirates--to help until politics intervenes. The Ecuadorian navy itself poaches. If the older generation is resistant then their children may be educated to understand the uniqueness of where they live. They are a hope of the future. What a mess. But there are heroes on the other side. Carol Ann gives us attractive sketches of biologists, knowledgeable guides, photographers dive masters, and old timers who really care about preserving the Galapagos. The pictures she draws are much more likeable than those of Edward Hoagland renown caricaturist of the New Yorker whose verbal images often had demeaning twists. She acknowledges her subjects' human foibles but brings their humanity and caring alive. While some of these heroes are pessimistic about the future of the Galapagos, others are not only hopeful but dedicated in the face of what might seem overwhelming odds of overpopulation, corruption, and economic pressure. Carol Ann has done a service in writing this book. We can romanticize about the pristine nature of the Galapagos and visit them for our own pleasure and edification, but like her we now understand how tentative those privileges are. Lonesome George, the last of his kind, is a metaphor. May those who keep fighting for the Galapagos have offspring. Carol Ann's volume is one such. Thank you.

Charlie Fisher Emeritus Professor and author of
Ã A Dismantling Discontent: Buddha's Way Through Darwin's World

Read this before a trip to the Galapagos in January. Great context for the entire experience. Sadly, there is an inherent tension in being an "eco-tourist" and the damage tourism of any kind causes. And the Galapagos are a particularly vulnerable ecosystem. I have to agree with the author that the most likely outcome in the Galapagos is that we end up with a Disneyfied "GalapagosLand" instead

of a truly pristine preserve. My main complaint is that it read more like a series of separately-published articles which means that there's some repetition.

I read this on the way and during a trip in the Galapagos. I liked the "immersed journalism" writing style which was captivating. The book provided me with a good view of the complex situation at the Galapagos both from a natural history as well as socio-economic perspective. On the negative side, I felt some repetitions. It felt as though each chapter was written without regard to the fact that people/facts were already mentioned previously.

This book helped me understand the politics of the Galapagos and all the competing influences on the status of the islands. It goes way beyond the normal tourist information and made our 3 week trip to the islands much more of a cultural experience.

Informative, well written, entertaining and important. Hope she updates it with any changes and developments since it was first published.

Insightful, interesting, foreboding . Lots of repetition but author gets point across about how easily we could lose the balance of diversity in Galapagos.

Such a marvelous book looking at geopolitical, social, economic and environmental factors influencing the present and future of these islands. I learned so much and would strongly recommend this book to others, particularly if you are planning to visit.

This book looks at The Galapagos from modern day scientific studies and socio-political struggles of the people who live there today. Very interesting, informative and real. I highly recommend this read if you want to go beyond Darwin.

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