

# Hope for the Critically Endangered Mangrove Finch



## Quick Facts

### Mangrove Finch:

*Cactospiza heliobates*/  
*Camarhynchus heliobates*

**Habitat and Diet:** Mangrove finches live in mangrove stands with dead wood and leaf litter and prefer areas that are separated from the sea by a beach. They eat insects and other invertebrates such as larvae, spiders and moths and add fruits to their diet if available.

**Range:** Formerly found on Fernandina and Isabela islands. However populations have been so seriously reduced they are now **restricted to less than 100 individuals on only two locations on Isabela.**

### IUCN Designation:

**Critically Endangered**

## How to stop the countdown!

With a population of less than 100 individuals, the mangrove finch *Cactospiza heliobates* has been classified as being "Critically Endangered" and is at serious risk of becoming the first of Darwin's finches to become extinct since Charles Darwin visited over 170 years ago. The main threats to these finches are changes to their environment such as the introduction of invasive species and disease. The most serious threats currently are introduced black rats and the fly *Philornis downsi* which have severely disrupted the delicate ecological balance that has historically sustained finch populations. The first case of avian pox has also been recently recorded posing a potential threat of enormous consequences for this vulnerable species.

The Charles Darwin Foundation (CDF) has partnered with the Galapagos National Park (GNP) and Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust in a joint effort to secure the future of this species. The Mangrove Finch Project has been in operation since October 2006. The conservation of the critically endangered and geographically restricted mangrove finch is planned to be achieved by thoroughly investigating the last remaining populations and developing the methods to control threats. Information gathered in habitat surveys, genetic analysis and research to understand where these birds are looking for food and what they eating will provide the team with valuable knowledge to guide how to better manage existing finch populations.

Since the inception of the project, there have been a number of noteworthy successes. Control efforts have resulted in a marked decrease in the introduced rat populations and a higher mangrove finch fledging success has been observed. For the first time, mangrove finches have moved out of their original mangrove patches into adjacent mangroves – a sign that the population is growing. First genetic results confirm that the species is still genetically viable. Three park guards have been trained and now help to monitor the birds and control rats.

While this is encouraging, there is still a great deal of work ahead. Continuous monitoring of the finches is necessary as is the need to relocate some birds to safe sites where the mangrove finches are known to have resided in the past. Efforts must continue to ensure rat control as well as an awareness campaign for the inhabitants of Isabela Island.

Support from the British Government's Darwin Initiative will ensure their research up to 2011. Through exacting science supporting excellent management, the CDF and partners aim to ensure that the mangrove finch does not become another sad addition to the extinct species of our planet. The Darwin finch logo of the Darwin Initiative might well be the lucky charm for the mangrove finch.

## Meet the Team



Dr. Birgit Fessl has been involved in finch conservation for 10 years and now works with her team of Ecuadorian students and volunteers in an effort to conserve the last remaining mangrove finch populations. The team wishes to thank its partners and donors who have made this project possible.



Swiss Association of  
Friends of the  
Galapagos Islands