

Humans, not oil, pose problems for islands

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PUERTO BAQUERIZO, Galapagos Islands — Sea lions snooze and their cubs frolic amid the late afternoon shadows falling over the shore, even as oil from a grounded tanker stains the rocks nearby and fills the air with a heavy stench.

For now, the Galapagos Islands, a trove of rare plants and animals, appear to have escaped what could have been an ecological disaster.

After a tanker ran aground Jan. 16, spilling at least 185,000 gallons of diesel and bunker fuel into the pristine waters off San Cristobal Island, winds and currents carried most of the fuel out into the open sea.

Good fortune may have averted disaster but the question remains whether the Galapagos — made famous by Charles Darwin's theory on how species evolve — can ultimately

survive the presence of perhaps the world's most aggressive species: Homo sapiens.

The Galapagos Islands were already under siege from unchecked migration by Ecuadorians escaping the poverty of the mainland 600 miles to the east.

Their presence and the alien animal and plant species they have brought with them are pushing the islands' fragile ecosystem to the breaking point, scientists say.

"You couldn't have a more potent symbol of human impact on these islands, which for millions of years were without the touch of man," said Robert Bensted-Smith, director of the Charles Darwin Research Station on the island of Santa Cruz. "The oil spill is a symbol of how we can mess them up without even thinking about it."

Only one pelican and two seagulls are known to have died

from the spill off San Cristobal, the easternmost island in the remote Pacific archipelago.

But dozens of sea lions and birds, including albatrosses and blue-footed boobies unique to the Galapagos, had to be trapped and cleaned.

Scientists say the main concern now is whether fuel will settle to the bottom of the ocean and kill algae, the only source of food for marine iguanas, another species found only in the Galapagos.

"It was a close shave, but I think it's safe to say the spill did not have a major impact on the Galapagos," said Godfrey Merlen, a British researcher who has lived in the archipelago for two decades and is helping the Galapagos National Park Service monitor the damage.

Man's presence is most visible in Puerto Ayora on the island of Santa Cruz, the largest town in the archipelago.

"You couldn't have a more potent symbol of human impact on these islands, which for millions of years were without the touch of man."

Robert Bensted-Smith
director, Charles Darwin Research Station

Salsa music floats out from the Five Fingers Discotheque on the seafloor Charles Darwin Avenue in Puerto Ayora, home to 10,000 of the island chain's 16,000 residents. Stores offer T-shirts with Galapagos motifs, including one that shows a blue-footed booby and reads: "Do Boobies Walk in their Sleep?"

But before the pizza parlors and taco shops, the islands sparked the interest of a young British naturalist.

During a five-week visit in 1835 to the Galapagos archipelago,

Charles Darwin began to form his theory of evolution based on the "survival of the fittest" after observing how finches differed from island to island, their beaks changing to adapt to different food sources.

He called the volcanic islands, believed to be only 4 million years old, "a living laboratory of evolution."

"Both in space and time," he wrote later, "we seem to be brought somewhat near to that great fact — that mystery of mysteries — the first appearance of new beings on this earth."

Mentors work to help youth

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him to do it. "It's just fulfilling to watch a child succeed," Novoty said. "It makes me feel good."

Vaughn said the workshops and the support the other mentors have given her have made the program a success.

"Without the Tuesday night meetings, I don't think I would have a relationship with my mentee," she said.

Snyder said it was not necessary for a mentor to speak Spanish, but it was necessary to be able to understand cultural differences.

Students who are interested in being a mentor can call Snyder at the Hispanic Center at 474-3950.

Reinhard's suit still pending

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two weeks," Peterson said. Thom Cope made no comment about the case when contacted by the Daily Nebraskan Friday.

In his suit, Reinhard said the story, "Bones of contention: UNL alleged possession of Indian remains would violate federal law," caused him "severe emotional distress and loss of reputation."

Reinhard's suit also stated he lost forensic jobs because of the attacks, which caused him to lose money.

Reinhard was unavailable for comment Friday.

This is the third suit filed by Reinhard.

The first suit was against his former graduate assistant, Stan Parks.

Parks, who works in the anthropology department,

accused Reinhard of changing inventory records and mistreating remains in newspaper interviews.

Peterson, who also represented Parks, settled the case in 1999 out of court.

The second suit was filed last spring against Robert Hitchcock, an associate professor of anthropology.

Hitchcock's case is still pending.

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