

# Galápagos Islanders Aim to Control Tourism, Mosquitoes



The Galápagos Islands get their name from the Spanish word *galápagos*, which means *turtle*. But the giant tortoises for which the islands are known -- and many other species -- might be in danger from tourists and the insects they bring with them to the islands.

Thirty years ago, the Galápagos welcomed about 10,000 visitors each year. Last year, more than 161,000 visitors traveled to the islands. The growing numbers of tourists bring with them something this poor country needs: money. But the planes and boats that carry people to the islands also carry insects like the *southern house mosquito*.

Back in the late 1800s, the southern house mosquito arrived on the island of Hawaii. It was carried there in water barrels on fishing ships. The mosquitoes carried diseases that ended up wiping out many of Hawaii's birds. Some scientists are worried that the mosquitoes might do the same thing on the Galápagos. They are worried that the southern house mosquito could end up harming the island's tortoises too. "It is just a matter of luck that it has not happened yet," said one scientist.

## NEWS WORD BOX

tourists    tortoise  
unwelcome    sewage  
government    insecticide

Galápagos tourists bring other unwelcome things to the islands. They bring trash for which landfills must be built. They bring sewage too. Since the islands do not have a sewage system, sewage is left to seep into the ground and the sea. If tourism keeps growing, the island landscape could be changed forever.

The government of the Galápagos has taken action. In order to control tourism, it limits the number of boats that can take tourists around the islands. All visitors must be led by a trained guide. In addition, every plane that flies into the Galápagos must be sprayed with insecticide before it takes off for the islands.

## MORE ABOUT THE GALÁPAGOS

- Two hundred years ago, 300,000 tortoises lived on the islands of the Galápagos. But for many years the tortoises were killed for food. Today, the number of tortoises on the islands has shrunk to 3,000.
- The Galápagos giant tortoise can weigh up to 500 pounds and live for 150 years.

## THINK ABOUT THE NEWS

In what other ways might the government of the Galápagos help protect the islands from harm?