

Final Evaluation Report

We ask all grant recipients to complete a project evaluation that helps us to gauge the success of your project. This must be sent in **MS Word and not PDF format**. We understand that projects often do not follow the predicted course but knowledge of your experiences is valuable to us and others who may be undertaking similar work – remember that negative experiences are just as valuable as positive ones if they help others to learn from them.

Please DO NOT fill in and submit this form until the project has been completed.

Complete the form in English. Note that the information may be edited before posting on our website.

Please email this report to jane@rufford.org.

Your Details	
Full Name	Carlos Andres Silva Zambrano
Project Title	Hidden barriers to conservation: Addressing social acceptability to enhance effective management of the Galapagos Marine Reserve
Application ID	41832-1
Date of this Report	28 th July 2025

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
Examine individuals' perceptions of biodiversity conservation among residents and tourists in the Galapagos Marine Reserve (GMR), and their attitudes and preferences for conservation policies.			X	We produced a rich dataset by collecting 1,360 surveys from both 629 residents and 729 tourists (50% national and 50% international tourists) in the Galapagos Islands. The data includes perceptions of the state of Galapagos' marine biodiversity; awareness and attitudes toward conservation and management policies, including changes to entry fees for accessing the Galapagos National Park. The dataset also includes potential explanatory variables for these attitudes, preferences for reallocating entry fees revenues and identification of marine species that may require further conservation actions. Overall, most residents opposed the entry fee increase before, one month, and nine months after its implementation. However, they would support it if revenues were allocated to clean water systems, species conservation, and improving tourist sites. In contrast, tourists generally supported the increase and were less sensitive to how revenues were allocated, though they expressed concern about further conservation and waste management efforts.
Assess the main factors driving the			X	Through data analysis, we generated valuable insights into

social acceptability of conservation policies, particularly those aimed at reducing anthropogenic pressures from tourism in the Galapagos Marine Reserve (GMR).				the factors that drive public support for conservation policies. During the project, a change in entry fees policies was implemented (August 2024). This allowed us to conduct the study in a natural experiment setting, comparing survey responses collected before and after the policy change. This unique opportunity strengthened the contribution of our study and will form the basis of a scientific article, with findings relevant to the Galapagos and other marine protected areas (MPAs) in developing countries.
Strengthen stakeholders' understanding of how to improve the design and implementation of policies so they are more socially acceptable to the local community, thereby increasing the likelihood of their effective and timely implementation.			X	We worked closely with the Galapagos National Park Directorate and engaged the local community during the design of our survey tools. For this, we conducted six focus groups and four in-depth interviews with a total of 26 residents from different sectors, e.g. fishers, farmers, tourism and scuba diving agencies, naturalist guides, hospitality, scientists, local NGOs and government workers. The project findings have been shared and discussed with local authorities and stakeholders, contributing to a better understanding of public attitudes toward conservation in the Galapagos. The research is also helping to monitor and assess the impacts of the recently increased conservation entry fees, thereby informing future decision-making processes.

2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a). Enhanced understanding of public attitudes towards marine biodiversity and conservation policies: Our findings show that incorporating residents and visitors' preferences for how revenues from conservation entry fees should be allocated can increase public support for higher fees, a need to reduce anthropogenic pressures from tourism and securing funding for the management of the Galapagos Islands. In terms of specific marine species, the local community emphasised the need for greater protection of threatened species such as the scalloped hammerhead (*Sphyrna lewini*), whale sharks (*Rhincodon typus*), and sea turtles (e.g., *Chelonia mydas*). Additionally, there is support for a stricter management of key fisheries, including the spiny lobster (e.g., *Panulirus penicillatus*), sea cucumbers (*Isostichopus fuscus*), the Galapagos grouper (*Mycteroperca olfax*), and the Pacific spotted scorpionfish (*Scorpaena mystes*). Residents also identified the main threats to biodiversity, with solid waste accumulation, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and wildlife trafficking as their primary concerns.

b). Monitoring of the impact of higher conservation entry fees: We were able to collect data in a natural experiment setting by conducting surveys before and after the increase in conservation entry fees (enforced since August 2024). The Galapagos National Park Directorate is using our results to monitor whether residents' attitudes and tourists' profiles (e.g., spending, tourist activities, and environmental attitudes) are shifting following the policy change. These insights can support ongoing decision-making, for example, further adjustments to the entry fee scheme to regulate visitor numbers. Moreover, our results help to identify investment priorities in public services (e.g., waste management, and drinking water system) and ecosystem protection (e.g., species conservation, invasive species control, marine reserve monitoring). Engaging the local community in these participatory decisions can enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of conservation actions.

c). Strengthened relationships with authorities and the local community: Our project fostered collaboration with local authorities and community members, laying a strong foundation for ongoing and future research. Moreover, this strengthened relationship is supporting the development of a new research proposal focused on valuing marine biodiversity in the Galapagos using stated preference methods such as Contingent Valuation and Choice Experiments. The new study would incorporate priorities identified by the community, such as increasing conservation efforts for endangered species, addressing key threats to biodiversity, and improving the management of specific fisheries. Ultimately, the goal is to inform effective conservation policy and enhance local capacities for managing the Galapagos National Park and Marine Reserve.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

The final wave of data collection was delayed due to the extraordinary general elections held in Ecuador. To avoid potential bias in survey responses resulting from the ongoing political campaigns, especially among local residents, we decided to postpone data collection during the election period. The final round of surveys was conducted after the election results were confirmed, ensuring that responses were not influenced by political tensions or campaign activities.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.

The project involved the local community and the Galapagos National Park Directorate from the early stages to the dissemination of findings. We conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with a broad range of stakeholders, including tourism operators, naturalist guides, scuba divers, fishers, farmers, scientists, NGO members, park rangers, and local government staff (Figure 1, Figure 2). Their views inform the design of our survey tools and the interpretation of results.

Residents benefited from having their opinions on conservation, tourism, and fisheries policies systematically collected, analysed, and shared with decision-makers, while ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. Focus groups also created a safe space for cross-sector dialogue, helping identify common concerns and priorities.

Two young local volunteers from the Charles Darwin Foundation were trained in techniques and ethical procedures to conduct surveys. They supported the data collection, thereby strengthening local research capacity.

The project also generated valuable insights to help monitor the impact of the updated entry fee policy on tourists' profiles and residents' perceptions. This evidence also supports the Galapagos authorities in making informed decisions, such as further revisions to the entry fee scheme and potential reallocation of revenues toward conservation and local development. The findings have been shared with stakeholders, including the Galapagos National Park Directorate, the Department of Tourism of Ecuador, local NGOs, and the academic community.



Figure 1. Focus group with residents in Puerto Ayora, Galapagos Islands



Figure 2. In-depth interviews with scuba divers at Baltra Canal, Galapagos Islands

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes. This project highlighted the need to continue supporting biodiversity conservation in the Galapagos, where tourism, fisheries, and food security poses growing challenges. With increasing demands and limited resources among local institutions, further collaborative research is essential.

Building on the strong relationships and new connections established, as well as the problems identified during the project, we aim to develop a new research grant proposal. This follow-up study will apply environmental valuation methods (e.g., Contingent Valuation and Choice Experiments) to assess the value of marine conservation, supporting cost-benefit analyses for policies that can have an impact addressing threats such as ecosystem degradation, invasive species, wildlife trafficking and illegal fishing.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

- Policy brief: A policy brief ([link](#)) has been shared and discussed with authorities, including the Galapagos National Park Directorate (GNPD) and the Department of Tourism of Ecuador, as well as with local NGOs and the general public. The Galapagos National Park Directorate (GNPD) produced the Technical Report No. MAATE-DPNG-DUP-002-2025, titled "*Perceptions, Stay, and Visitor Experience Regarding the Adjustment of the Entry Fee to the Galápagos Protected Areas (August 2024 – January 2025)*". The GNPD's report cites our policy brief multiple times and acknowledges that its analysis and findings were based on our contributions.

- Scientific article: A scientific article on social acceptability of conservation policies has been drafted and will be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal. It has been presented at three conferences: the *First Congress of the Latin American Association of Environmental and Resources Economists – LAERE 2025*, the *Scottish Graduate Programme in Economics – SGPE Conference 2025*, and the *Edinburgh Business School Postgraduate Research – EBS PGR Conference 2024* (Figure 3). The article was also presented at the *Workshop on Public Acceptability of Environmental Policies*, organized by the University of Stirling on September 24, 2025; a post of the presentation is available [here](#).

- Further publications and presentations: Additional analysis of the dataset generated during the project may lead to another policy brief and/or scientific article. Further meetings with local stakeholders and submission of the article to new events are also planned.



Figure 3. Presentations at the *Scottish Graduate Programme in Economics – SGPE Conference 2024* (top photo) and at the *First Congress of the Latin American Association of Environmental and Resource Economists – LAERE 2025* (bottom photo)

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

- Publish the scientific article on social acceptability in a peer-reviewed journal.
- Conduct further analysis of the data to potentially produce an additional policy brief and/or scientific article.
- Continue collaborating with the Galapagos National Park Directorate and local stakeholders to develop a follow-up research proposal.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

Yes. The Rufford Foundation (RF) logo was used in printed materials for data collection, including those for focus groups and surveys. Some young researchers from the local community asked for information about the RF grants and were directed to the official website. The RF logo was also featured in presentation slides used at conferences (Figure 4) and in the policy brief, which acknowledged its financial support (Figure 5).



Figure 4. Presentation of project's preliminary findings at Edinburgh Business School Postgraduate Research – EBS PGR Conference 2024

Policy Brief

Adjustment of entry fees to the Galapagos National Park – Tourist attitudes and perceptions

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Abstract

This policy brief summarises key findings from the project *Hidden Barriers to Conservation—Addressing Social Acceptability to Enhance Effective Management in the Galapagos Marine Reserve*, conducted by Heriot-Watt University with the support of The Rufford Foundation, in collaboration with the Charles Darwin Foundation and the Galapagos National Park Directorate. It discusses tourist attitudes towards changes in entry fee policies in the Galapagos National Park. As one of the most biodiverse places on Earth, Galapagos faces several challenges for its conservation and sustainable development, including increased anthropogenic pressure due to the rapid growth of tourism. To address this, entry fees have been adjusted for the first time in 25 years, with the aim of regulating visitor flow while generating additional resources for the national park management. Entry fees are a key tool for managing nature-based tourism, and their adjustment is essential to restoring their effectiveness. However, little is known about how these changes impact the tourism sector. By analysing tourist attitudes and perceptions during the fee increase period, this study provides recommendations to guide future entry fee adjustments and the allocation of additional funds collected. Ultimately, these recommendations aim to facilitate the effective and timely implementation of entry fee policies, supporting both the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable management of Galapagos.

Keywords: public attitudes, individual preferences, tourism management, protected areas.

JEL Classification: H23, Q26, Q57.

Suggested citation: Silva-Zambrano et al., (2025). *Adjustment of entry fees to the Galapagos National Park – Tourist attitudes and perceptions* [Policy Brief]. Heriot-Watt University, Charles Darwin Foundation.

Adjustment of entry fees to the Galapagos National Park

Policy Brief

that, while tourists are willing to contribute financially, domestic tourists are more sensitive to how additional funds are invested. Therefore, improving visitors' perception of the fee requires effective and transparent management of resource allocation, prioritizing areas of high-impact and concern for tourists and policymakers such as environmental sanitation, species conservation, and invasive species control.

Additionally, it is crucial to enhance communication about how entry fee revenues are invested. Increasing transparency regarding the fee's revenue and its allocation would support greater flexibility for future adjustments, strengthening its role as a tool for regulating tourism while promoting the sustainability and conservation of the archipelago. Finally, understanding the attitudes and perceptions of the local community is also essential to ensuring the timely and effective implementation of tourism management policies in the Galapagos National Park—see Silva-Zambrano et al., 2025.

References

Observatorio de Turismo de Galápagos. (2025). *Arrivos mensuales*. Retrieved February 13, 2025, from <https://www.observatorioturismogalapagos.gob.ec/>

Silva-Zambrano, C., Aravena, C., McLaughlin, E., & Viteri, C. (2025). *Residents attitudes toward the increase in entry fees to the Galapagos National Park – How to build broader public support?* [Policy Brief]. Heriot-Watt University, Charles Darwin Foundation.

Acknowledgements: This study is part of the project *Hidden Barriers to Conservation – Addressing Social Acceptability to Enhance the Effective Management of the Galapagos Marine Reserve*, led by Carlos Silva-Zambrano, PhD student at Heriot-Watt University, under the supervision of Claudia Aravena and Eoin McLaughlin. The project is implemented by Heriot-Watt University thanks to the support of The Rufford Foundation and in collaboration with the Charles Darwin Foundation and the Galapagos National Park Directorate. This project has received Ethical Approval No. 2024-7118-10002 from Heriot-Watt University, and is conducted under Research Permit No. PC-22-24, issued to the Charles Darwin Foundation by the Galapagos National Park Directorate. This publication is contribution number 2705 of the Charles Darwin Foundation for the Galapagos Islands.

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Figure 5. Front page and acknowledgements of the policy brief summarising the project's findings

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

Research team:

- Claudia Aravena: PhD thesis supervisor at Heriot-Watt University
- Eoin McLaughlin: PhD thesis supervisor at Heriot-Watt University
- Cesar Viteri: collaborator from the Charles Darwin Foundation

Field assistants:

- Maria Fernanda Hidalgo: support for data collection (Galapagos resident)
- Edwin Lara: support for data collection (Galapagos resident)

10. Any other comments?

I am grateful to The Rufford Foundation for supporting this project and to the Galapagos community for their engagement. I am pleased we have generated valuable discussions and that the project's outputs are informing local authorities and stakeholders. Continuing this work through a follow-up project will be invaluable, not only for conservation efforts in the Galapagos Islands but also for generating insights applicable to other protected areas in developing countries facing similar challenges in local development and endangered species conservation. It will also be fundamental in supporting my professional development and the successful completion of my PhD research.

ANNEX – Financial Report
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