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This document, dedicated to the flightless cormorants of the Galapagos Islands, combines a series of photographs by the British researcher Godfrey Merlen, preserved as slides in the audiovisual collection of the Library, Archive & Museum of the Charles Darwin Foundation, with a selection of texts taken from William Beebe's book *Galapagos: World's End* (1924).

Using both resources, and connecting the visual works with narrative fragments, a comprehensive approach to one of the most iconic Galapagos species is sought. An approach that goes beyond mere scientific knowledge and that places this species in a broad and comprehensive framework. The minimalist design reinforces the importance of the images, which are already part of the audiovisual heritage of the Galapagos.

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The texts included in these pages belong to the chapter "Rainbow Chasing," in which Ruth Rose, one of the first women to actively participate in a scientific expedition to the Galapagos Islands, recounts the landing of the crew of the *Noma* at Tagus Cove, Isabela (Albemarle) Island. Hers is one of the first complete and popular descriptions of a flightless cormorant.

Our thanks to Godfrey Merlen for the images, and to all the chroniclers, travelers and scholars who left, in their field notebooks, testimony of the natural wonders they found on their way through "The Encantadas".

Edgardo Civallero | Charles Darwin Foundation



"As we landed, pelicans were fishing in the dusk, but the greatest thrill came when we saw our first flightless cormorant swimming fearlessly near the boat. It watched us and now and then dived deeply, once passing far down under the boat" (p. 165).



"On a shoulder of rock above the ravine sat a large, dull-coloured bird; it turned its head and a spark of clear greenish blue glinted from its eye and a long, goose-like neck stretched out. Only the sight of a great auk could have been more thrilling, for here was a flightless cormorant, a bird probably doomed in a few years to an extinction as complete as the great auk's" (p. 170).



"We had nearly recovered from the excitement of the capture of the penguins when word came from another exploring party that there were cormorants on their nests just across the cove ... we went across and found two magnificent flightless cormorants sitting on their nests. The two nests were fifteen feet apart on slight projections of lava rock on the steep slope, and about twenty feet above the water. Each bird had a single egg and nothing would induce her to desert it" (p. 175).



"The wings were very small, held ordinarily close to the body, but out sideways at a sharp angle when the bird was sunning itself" (p. 176).



"When I approached closely or waved my hat the bird rose high on her toes, opened and slapped her mandibles, uttering a regular cormorant croak, but louder and more resonant than that of our cormorant species" (p. 176).



"Their usual mode of progression is an awkward waddle, the whole body of the bird moving in rhythm with the short legs and great webbed feet. When they meet an obstruction, as a lava block, they bend down a little and leap upward with both feet at once, sometimes clearing six inches and often resorting to a series of penguin-like hops, wholly unlike the habit of any species of flying cormorant" (p. 176).



"The eggs are elliptical in shape, of a pale-bluish green, much concealed by a whitish deposit of lime and about one and three-quarters by two and three-quarters inches in size" (p. 176).



"These are giants among cormorants, lack of flight having resulted in a decided increase of dimension and body weight" (p. 177).



"As we might expect, the legs and feet are large and of great strength, and the swimming webs are aided by an additional expanse of skin in the form of a broad, stiff flap extending down the tarsus" (p. 177).



"They swim much lower in the water than other cormorants, often with only the head and neck exposed, the back being completely submerged. When diving, the body is humped suddenly forward or actually thrust up, forward and down in a real forward dive. Long distances can be covered under water, the wings held loosely, but motionless, while the great totipalmate webs curl and uncurl with great power and a machine-like regularity" (p. 177).



"Like most of the other birds who live among these black lava islands, the cormorants are dull in colour. The bill, pouch and feet are all dusky brown or black, while the plumage is dab brown, with sometimes a little greenish iridescence on the upper surface, set off by a few white, hair-like feather-filaments on the head and neck. The eye is the only exception to this colour scheme, being of clear, glittering Italian blue" (p. 178).

"The inconspicuousness of these birds, large as they are, is attested by the fact that they escaped the attention of Darwin, and all expeditions down to twenty-five years ago." (p. 178).



"They are confined to parts of the coast of Narborough and the adjoining western side of Albemarle, and are very near the danger line of extermination. One of the last expeditions to the Galápagos killed twenty-six of the birds, and they have been thoroughly measured and examined, so it is to be hoped that very few additional ones will be needed" (p. 178).



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