*In the Name of Wild*

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# *Prologue*

THEY TOLD US WE'D FIND the carnival train ride at the corner of Avenida Baltra and Avenida Charles Darwin. We strolled down Avenida Baltra in the early evening sun, past ice cream parlours with names like 9 Eleven Bazar, Rolls and Pops, and the Corner Sweet Shop. On the corner, two small diving shops, one next to the other, stood beside a bar that advertised happy hour specials on a sandwich board placed on the sidewalk.

We'd been warned that the train had no set schedule. Every evening, it shuttled up and down Avenida Baltra, Avenida Charles Darwin, and Avenida Indefatigable to the tune of its own circus-like jingle. Travelling in a slow loop, it picked up tourists from various hotels along the route and dropped them off on demand at restaurants and shops in downtown Puerto Ayora.


Hotels, gift stands, and pizza parlours along Avenida Charles Darwin, Puerto Ayora

Riding trackless on rubber tires, the train was made of a half dozen wagons, each large enough to accommodate a family in three rows of seats. Each wagon, brightly coloured and covered by a thick plastic canopy, was shaped like a cartoonish animal – a green mouse, a red dog, a

yellow duck. At the front, the locomotive looked like a converted VW bug made to look like a pink elephant adorned with flashing lights. When it finally arrived, our nine-year-old daughter, Autumn, was unimpressed. "Maybe after dinner," she said.

If Puerto Ayora were on mainland Ecuador, the carnival train ride would hardly be book material. But Puerto Ayora is not on the mainland. A town of twelve thousand residents located on the small island of Santa Cruz, a staggering 975 kilometres away from the Pacific coast of South America, Puerto Ayora is on an archipelago that most people around the world would never expect to have hotels, resorts, shops, or restaurants, let alone a tacky shuttle train. The name of the archipelago is Galápagos.

It was there, in the Galápagos Islands, in the late summer of 2014, that our journey began. We had long fantasized about travelling to the Galápagos. Inspired by wildlife documentaries and evolutionary biology textbooks, we imagined the place to be the home of world-renowned endemic species and curiously sociable wildlife. We didn't expect a carnival train. Or ice cream parlours. We had no clue the islands would be teeming with cruise ships filled with affluent tourists, a modern and fully developed ecotourism infrastructure, and no fewer than thirty thousand full-time residents of whose existence the outside world seemed to be largely unaware.

There were also scores of other people around the archipelago: scientists, ecologists, and conservationists. Stationed mostly at the research facility at the far end of Avenida Charles Darwin, these people work to make and keep the islands wild. "Wild" might mean pristine or unadulterated, but in today's world – we soon realized – it means something else. Wildness is both an ideal and a specific goal of environmental policy, a criterion that is regularly measured through precise indicators and pursued through the application of regulations and established practices. Not simply an untouched place, a wild environment is often one that is closely guarded and managed.

Though spectacular and enchanting, the wild nature of the Galápagos soon revealed itself to us to be a carefully managed social product: a landscape governed through a complex alliance of environmental NGOs,

UNESCO, the World Heritage program, business interests, and local and national governments. The word "wild" may denote something primitive, undomesticated, uninhabited, or undeveloped, but it is much more. Wildness can be a feeling or an atmosphere. It can be pursued as an ideal. It can be managed as an environmental condition. It can even work as an ideology for the marketing of places and experiences.

When we understand wildness as something that emerges from the way humans interact with a place, we can recognize that different societies informed by different cultures and languages will interact with places in different ways. Different people practise and experience wildness differently. Fascinated by this realization, we dedicated the next six years to learning more about wildness around the world. Over time – through our travels to ten countries in five continents, our own experiences of wildness and wilderness, and about three hundred interviews with residents – we came to understand wildness in a new light that goes against common knowledge.

Wildness is often something that is experienced and defined by visitors, explorers, adventurers, and other people who do not live permanently in the places they label "wild." Wildness, however, is different for residents of so-called wild places. Whereas visitors see absences – of history, of culture, of development, of social relations – inhabitants see presence. Speaking with inhabitants led us to re-envisage wildness as an idea rooted in connection and relation between human and nonhuman lives. It is a vision based on kinship, relationality, and care. It is a dramatically different perspective from the visitors' vision of wild nature as something untouched, remote, and unpeopled.

This book is based on local people's perspectives of wildness. The people we met came from all walks of life. We spoke with business owners, tour guides, environmental activists, local historians, heritage managers, park rangers, farmers, fishers, students, teachers, photographers, adventurers, writers, guards, artists, surfers, climbers, geologists, biologists, pensioners, politicians, and anyone who had something to teach us about the places they call home, the same places visitors call wild.

Though we interviewed over three hundred people in twenty UNESCO World Heritage Sites, we can only feature some of their

perspectives. But all of them – regardless of their presence on the printed page – taught us and allowed us to learn about wildness. They taught us what wildness might be, how it feels and, most of all, what it can become: how it can be reimagined as something other than the separation of nature from culture.

Nearly everyone we met lived or worked inside a protected area or in communities next to the site we were visiting. We met people in convenient spaces such as their homes or a nearby park or establishment. Other times, as often as we could, we met people in the sites we were learning about. As people invited us to experience places with them first hand, we learned from their knowledge of that place, saw their perspectives, and endeavoured to understand their viewpoints. We walked much and listened even more.

Early on, we realized that wildness has no borders. It can be experienced atop the highest of peaks or in the valley or town below, deep in the bush, on the edge of town, or in a farmer's field. It can be experienced while staring dangerous wildlife in the eye or heard in the melody of a cowbell. Our experiences of wildness were unlike many found in wilderness books. They pushed us to imagine what else wildness could be if we understood it as something more inclusive and relational and less conventional, confined, colonial, ethnocentric, and anthropocentric.

Wild, unfortunately, is often the exclusive business of explorers and adventurers. Many writers who leave home on a quest to experience the wild are solitary male explorers and adventurers keen on conquering and taming it. In displaying their prowess, strength, and resilience, they reveal, first and foremost, what is wild about them. We, in contrast, were a family who planned our work, travelled, met people, and reflected on our experiences together. Travelling and doing work as a family, especially a family with a young girl, changed not only how we did our work but also how people saw and received us as researchers.

We tried to listen to people and put ourselves in their shoes by asking them what they thought wild was, what it meant to them, where they had experienced wildness, and whether wildness and wilderness were different ideas. By listening to them, we learned and came up with a different, more diverse understanding of wildness than the one bestowed

upon us by colonists, explorers, survivalists, or adrenalin junkies. We are merely vessels for their ideas, stories, perspectives, and experiences. As vessels, we hold more doubt and questions than discoveries or answers.

Throughout this book, we refer to ourselves using the first-person plural, "we." "We" most often refers to the principal writers, Phillip and April. But "we" sometimes refers to the three of us, Autumn included. Autumn's experiences, different from those of her parents, are captured in diary-like recollections. In addition to reading the stories we gathered here, you can virtually meet the tellers and visit their homes through our feature documentary film *In the Name of Wild,* available through a variety of video-on-demand platforms. In addition, you can visit most of the sites, and choose your own adventure along the way, through an interactive web documentary (see https://www.inthenameofwild.com/).

We are fully cognizant that our work has a notable carbon footprint. We flew in airplanes, drove rental cars, and contributed our share of waste to the communities we visited. We did this, however, not for the sake of leisure but to learn lessons not available otherwise. Challenging what we take for granted and generating new understandings requires fieldwork – experiencing social and natural worlds, travelling to meet people where they live, and learning from them first-hand. Ultimately, we did it to share original knowledge that we hope will make a difference, knowledge that may encourage you to re-envisage your place in this wild world. This is how we, as ethnographers, learned, and we want to share our learnings with you.

As we travelled, we also abided by the principles of "Leave No Trace." We travelled as a family of three, without a film crew. This book is not about physically going to wild places but rather redefining how we come to understand and experience wildness and wilderness. We learned that people don't need to travel to understand what wildness is – they can look in their own communities and backyards.

Early in our project, as we were driving on the roads of Canada's Yukon territory, we decided to call our project *In the Name of Wild.* When we say "in the name of ..." we invoke a moral authority to speak and act on behalf of a force greater than ourselves. When we say "in the name of the law," "in the name of God," "in the name of justice, or truth, or

whatever else," we bear the name of someone or something greater than ourselves, something of great value whose sake we should protect. By saying "in the name of wild," we want to show how wildness isn't just a raw natural force but an institution: a subject of governance, environmental policy, scientific knowledge, local and national politics, global geopolitical dynamics, and complex social histories.

The expression "in the name of wild" reminds us that wildness is, indeed, a name, an idea, a value, and not a natural state that transcends the social world. When we realize this, we become attuned to the fact that, in the name of wild, different cultures indicate different ideas, values, and understandings of nature. So this book's title is *In the Name of Wild* and not "In the name of the wild." There is no such thing as "the wild" as a discrete, tangible entity. "Wild," without a definite article, is an indefinite idea, a possibility, a potential, and a multitude. And that is a good thing. By opening up what "wild" can be, we can reimagine what we can do in the name of it.

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## *"Wild" Can Be a Challenging Word*

# GALÁPAGOS

"DO YOU HAVE YOUR Galápagos National Park permits?" the stern-faced, blue-jacketed airport agent asked.

We hadn't had a chance to pay the fee yet because we weren't part of an organized tour. "No."

"No problem. You can pay here. It's $250 – $100 for adults and $50 for the girl."

We moved to the side. The passengers behind us, clearly more prepared, cleared customs and flagged the few taxis outside of the small San Cristóbal arrivals lounge.

We dug a small pile of cash out of our suitcases and handed it to the agent.

"Thank you. Enjoy the Galápagos."

There was no airport shuttle to pick us up, and all the taxis were gone. We resorted to our only option – walking. Our travel guidebook suggested it wouldn't be prohibitively long. Quietly, we rolled our suitcases 1.2 kilometres on the dishevelled asphalt of Avenida Alsacio Northia to the heart of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, San Cristóbal Island's main town.

The time-worn 1992 edition of Lonely Planet's *Ecuador and the Galápagos Islands* had sat at the bottom of a bookshelf since 2004, the year we moved in together. As the price sketched in pencil on the inside cover showed, April had picked it up in 1999 for three dollars at a second-hand bookstore in downtown Nanaimo, British Columbia. A red-billed Tropicbird captured in mid-flight graced its crumpled-up cover. The back

cover featured a curious-looking Sally Lightfoot crab. Only a few other images from the Galápagos made it into the book. A cactus. An empty, sandy beach. A distant panoramic view of an unpeopled bay on Isla Bartolomé. A waterscape view of three lonely boats near Islas Plazas. A wooden boat undergoing repair, by no one in particular, in Puerto Ayora. And, finally, in the Appendix, a visual legend for the quick identification of fish and birds.

It had made no sense to pack that guidebook into a moving box in 2004 and hang on to it until 2014, and yet we had. It had ceased being a guidebook long ago. It had become something else – a promised land of sorts. We still thumbed through it every now and then, closing our eyes to add pictures to it, images photographed by nothing but our imagination. We visualized our sailboat – the one we didn't own – docking at a solitary pier under a summer sky. We saw that red-billed Tropicbird gliding over our heads as our feet touched the unpaved ground. When we closed our eyes, we saw a penguin waddling toward us as if to welcome us to the archipelago. We could hear blue-footed boobies squawking, free and unafraid.

Reality was another matter. Earth's "last Eden" – one of the many hyperbolic monikers for the Galápagos – had as much litter as an old port town. Empty water bottles and chip bags had collected against rusty fences that encircled weed-ridden empty lots, among other signs of humankind's fall from grace: the whir and roar of rambunctious scooters and motor-bike engines and a gloomy-looking military base that loomed over the waterfront. Yet the sun stood high and warm in a pollution-free sky, and low-tide scents carried on the breeze. With its souvenir shops and eateries that promised inexpensive ceviche and fruit batidos, Puerto Baquerizo Moreno may not have been pristine, but it was at least approachable and unpretentious.

The Galápagos are a hazy dream in the minds of many wildlife lovers around the world. Once we'd started telling people about our family trip, they'd ask us how we planned to get there without an expedition team and provisions for two weeks, whether we needed a sailboat, whether we had to join groups of scientists working in the wild, and where we'd sleep. Not one friend had a clue that Puerto Baquerizo Moreno had a creperie

and a sushi place. Nor did we, really. Our 1992 Lonely Planet guide contained no evidence of such services.

The Galápagos Islands aren't known for getaway travel. They are synonymous with biodiversity, fascinating endemic species, and unusually friendly wildlife. Thanks to Charles Darwin and the generations of evolutionary biologists who followed in his footsteps, people consider the "enchanted islands" a "lost paradise" in the global quest for modernization and industrial development. They are a "natural laboratory" in which to observe nature supposedly living on its own will, untrammelled by the trappings of humankind. This vision makes documentary films, scientific treatises, and travel accounts about the Galápagos so popular and compelling. If you visit the archipelago, the story goes, you'll step back in time, to a time when life was harsher but simpler, purer and wilder.

Wildlife documentaries gloss over the strong social organization at work in this lost paradise. The Galápagos are cleanly parcelled out into two subdivisions. The one that covers 97 percent of the land is how most people envisage the archipelago. It's the stuff of the BBC and Discovery Channel, the stuff that makes wildlife lovers and wanderlust souls tremble with desire. The 3 percent, the area not set aside as a National Park, is where airplanes and plastic water bottles land. It's also where roughly thirty thousand human beings live, work, and marinate ceviche.

Just like rare wildlife species, these thirty thousand legal and illegal human residents are nearly invisible to the rest of the world. Unlike rare wildlife, these beings are not nocturnal, evasive, or endangered. They are simply camouflaged, so to speak, by media accounts that paint the "enchanted islands" as an unpeopled environment.

These people are not Indigenous. A few are descendants of early twentieth-century settlers, others are long-term residents, and most are recent immigrants attracted by a booming economy fuelled by the growing ecotourism industry. They call the islands of San Cristóbal, Isabela, Floreana, Baltra, and Santa Cruz home and welcome the comings and goings of nearly 185,000 visitors per year, most of whom arrive, as we did, by way of a convenient flight from mainland Ecuador and, unlike us, a taxi ride downtown.

After unpacking our bags at the Lonely Planet–endorsed Casa Blanca B & B, we sought out guides to accompany us into the National Park. The park ranges over eighteen major islands and dozens of islets and rocks that straddle the Equator line. Guides are not a luxury, they are mandatory. The Galápagos National Park and the Galápagos Marine Reserve strictly restrict travel. It is illegal to venture inside the park without a licensed guide.

To go anywhere within the park, visitors must be part of either a land-based tour or an expedition ship tour. The land-based tours typically take one day and depart regularly from the main towns. They may stick to land or sail on waters close to the shoreline, but they must return to home base by nightfall. Expedition ship tours can last between five and ten days. During that time, they can sail to the farther reaches of the archipelago and reach nearly all islands, with the sole exceptions of those islands and bays restricted to natural scientists.

We booked our first land-based tour for the next day, then we reminded Autumn, our nine-year-old daughter, that this trip could get rough. Few parents bring young children to the Galápagos. Cost plays a role (then again, places such as the Galápagos are as affordable as an all-inclusive four-star vacation to Disney World), but the challenges of the environment are a primary concern.

We had been backpackers in our younger years. On our first trip together in 2001, we explored India and Nepal on just a few rupees. Each day, we slashed our food and accommodation budget to see and experience more. Now, in our early forties, we believed our responsibility as parents required us to stimulate that same thirst for experience in Autumn, regardless of the challenges. To leave our daughter at home, or to postpone our travels until she was in college, "because it's hard to travel with kids" or "because they might not remember" felt like a terrible excuse. Besides, unlike the leisure trips of our earlier years, this was work travel. Autumn had no choice but to come with us.

We also understood how fortunate our family was to have this opportunity. As ethnographers, we knew we'd meet local people, learn from their perspectives, and eventually see the world from their point of view. As ethnographers, we knew we'd learn about the places we intended to

visit in a much deeper way than even the more informed travellers. Unlike packaged tourism or even independent travel, fieldwork opens doors into people's lives and cultures.

Of course, that also meant challenges. Autumn would have to find ways to entertain herself during long interviews, for example. And it meant dealing with occasional difficulties and finding ways to save money that other travelling families, or other researchers, seldom encountered, like catching ferries on choppy high seas instead of flying to save money. Adaptable by nature, Autumn seemed to understand and readily accepted the challenge.

The following morning, we rose early and boarded a small speed boat for our day-trip up the southwestern coast of San Cristóbal and into the National Park. An errant layer of white clouds shrouded the early September sun and provided occasional respite from an otherwise skin-charring sun. As Puerto Baquerizo Moreno receded in the distance, we could finally see the broader contours of San Cristóbal. The island laid low, but a verdant hump rose from its centre into the clouds, a grey, barren shroud. We had heard that the archipelago was no tropical swamp, but no one had managed to convey the sharp contrast between its sparse trees and volcanic shadows, between the browns and blacks of its lava rocks and dirt and its oversaturated aquamarine waters. It was as though a painter had forgotten to colour in the upper half of the landscape.

The two-dozen people on the boat vibrated with excitement. Fresh arrivals and backpackers, their attention focused on their cameras and the wildlife. We had already spotted sea lions sleeping, groaning, wrestling, playing, and shitting throughout the streets of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno. The first appearance of wildlife here, away from town, was a distant family of blue-footed boobies. Half a dozen frigates, happy to display their famous red collar appeared next, yet too far away to be fully appreciated. As the boat swung and cradled us from port to starboard, we struggled to find the best vantage to take photos free of elbows or the back of people's heads in the frame.

When we landed on Isla Lobos, just a few acres in size, paradise broke loose. We stepped off the boat onto dark ashen rocks that guarded access to the red dirt trails. A lizard camouflaged as an ochre-coloured

rock cheekily stuck its tongue out at April and recoiled it. A blue-footed boobie sprung its eyes and beak wide in a seeming expression of surprise and concern that we might snatch the brownish egg that found lee under her warm belly. A marine iguana lay prostrate on the warm ground, its scaly skin absorbing the sun's midday heat. Three Sally Lightfoot crabs, their plum and orange shells dotted with beady popeyes glancing forward and backward jostled for position on the edge of their diving platform to the sea.

Our first sighting of wildlife outside the parameters of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, the blue-footed booby

Galápagos animals truly seemed – as the hype had us believe – unafraid of our predatory human instincts. Never before had we felt such a deep affinity, communion, and harmony with the animal kingdom of which we are part. A quest for authentic, unadulterated, unrestrained wildness had brought us here, and here it appeared in all its glory.

Awed by what lay on the surface, we felt a child-like giddiness at the prospect of diving below. But Autumn, the only child on the boat, had mixed feelings. A decent swimmer in normal conditions, she had never donned a snorkelling mask or fins. Visibly worried, she shared with us her reservations about dipping free of restraints in wavy waters dotted with darting fish, sea lions, and iguanas. These are the moments when,

as a parent, you know that making light of a sketchy situation is probably not the most prudent course of action, but it might be the most rewarding option in the long run.

"Don't worry about them," we said. "The sea lions will get out of your way." What parent doesn't say that to his child at least once every summer?

Half-convinced, off Autumn went, aided by a member of our guiding crew. Once she trusted the mechanics of the breathing tube, she ducked her head underwater and made eye contact with a sea lion who had patiently been swimming around her. We had fibbed, she realized. The sea lions didn't get out of the way – they came by to check out what she was all about. Autumn exploded out of the water. She found our faces and beamed a smile more radiant than the sky. She wasn't angry or scared anymore. She was hooked. Over the next half hour, she tried to catch up to sea lions, marine turtles, iguanas, and more fish than our Ecuadorian guide had English words for.

We found the water warm yet refreshing. The floor of the ocean, ten or fifteen feet below us, reflected the light captured by the waves above, forming a strobe-like meshwork of odd shapes on the white sand below. Incapable of speaking through the snorkel in her mouth, Autumn gave the friendly guide a thumbs up. Speechless for deeper reasons, we thought no comment about our circumstances could have been more fitting.

Nevertheless, a different sentiment began to take form. We had no words for it at the time, and as much as we academics like to cultivate our cynicism, we both tried to repress it to enjoy the moment. Yet it was impossible not to feel the tip of that feeling poking up higher and higher in our consciousness with the passing of the hours. There was something domesticated about our experience. We weren't sure if "domesticated" was the right word, but that was the only way we could articulate it at the time.

It wasn't so much that the animals were docile and seemingly pet-like – we found that novel and amusing – but that the experience of being escorted along a well-marked trail, educated by a well-prepared guide, and shown animals as familiar with photograph-posing as celebrities with an Instagram account rubbed us the wrong

way. The place seemed as wild as any place is or has ever been on this planet. But was it? Or was it kept that way – gorgeous but planned, safe, and predictable, more like a garden than a wilderness. Had it been gingerly protected from evolving in ways deemed untoward by its wilderness-loving keepers?

Or were our thoughts less about the place and more about the circumstances in which we experienced it? Were we simply peeved because we had to share it with people other than our family; people with cameras, like ours; people with a love of nature, like ours; people who respected the environment, as we did; people who were friendly and kind toward us, as we were toward them; people who were simply too darn nice to dislike and yet, well, just people, like us; people who were there, as we were, and at the same time; people whose presence reminded us that perhaps it was wrong for us to be there as well? Did people, ahem, other people belong in the wild?

We mumbled our sentiments to one another. We noticed that our travel companions, like us, took photos of boobies, iguanas, crabs – all that bounty of wildlife – and tried to keep people out of their frames, just like producers and directors did in the documentaries we watched on TV. Our travel mates, too, had realized that to experience and convey wildness you somehow have to bracket extraneous material out. Wildness resulted from artifice. It was something you had to manufacture, to re-create. "Wild" was everything humanity wasn't, and yet, by glossing over humanity, wildness itself was nothing but a human product.

"Wild" is a challenging word.

"Wild" is used to describe a misbehaving child, a kick-ass party, a city with traffic congestion problems, a piece of salmon that hasn't been designed in a chemical lab, a backyard overgrown with too many weeds. In the same breath, wild is a parcel of land or sea that seems to resist human control. "Wild" – its etymology tells us – signifies something that is self-willed. Relatedly, "wilderness" – arising from a combination of "wild," "deor" (deer or beast), and "ness" (promontory or cape) – is a place that abides by nothing but its own will, a nonhuman will. But if things were that simple, we would be remiss in calling "wild"

challenging. What makes the word "wild" semantically treacherous is its lack of formal policing.

If you google "wild Galápagos," *National Geographic,* the Travel Channel, a 3-D IMAX movie come up. They all call the Galápagos "wild." No surprise there. But so does a company called "Wild Planet Adventures," which has a vested interest in selling its cruise package. Others do the same. If they want to sell us a well-kept resort town, they call it "wild." It doesn't end there. The world is full of places that seem wild on the surface.

*Wild Dolomiti* is the name of a book promising to reveal the Italian Alps' most "pristine" trails. "Wild" is a playground in New York City's Central Park. "Wild Adventures" is a theme park in Georgia, in the United States. "Wild and Natural" is the name of a Cosmetics company that operates on the island of Ibiza, Spain. How can a word be so loose that it can be coupled with anything or anyone? How can it be so generous and so undiscriminating, so cheap and yet still so enticing? Sure, lexical law enforcement is not exactly a thriving business, yet the word "wild" seems more promiscuous than most.

In response to this semantic anarchy, we could establish some clearly demarcated boundaries to protect a true and objective meaning of wild. American legislators attempted to do this when they passed the US Wilderness Act in 1964. For them, "wild" was a land that had a distinctly wild "character" – that is, "untrammelled" land that appeared "to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man substantially unnoticeable;" land that had "outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation"; land that was "at least 5,000 acres" or was "of sufficient size" to make its "preservation" practical; land that contained "ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value."

Alternatively, we could choose to do what many governments around the world have done: heed the specifications of the world's most influential environmental NGO, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (better known as IUCN). In doing so, we could define "wilderness" as "protected areas" that are "usually large unmodified or slightly modified areas which retain their natural character and influence without

permanent or significant human habitation and which are protected and managed so as to preserve their natural condition."

Problem solved, right? Well, only if we are willing to ignore that these two definitions offer no clarity whatsoever on their most important qualifiers. Who determines whether a place is truly unmodified, only slightly modified, or sufficiently modified? What is a "natural character"? When is human habitation "significant"? Above what threshold is the impact of humankind "substantially noticeable"? What constitutes "primitive" recreation? And who has the power to consider something recreational? Hunters? Landscape photographers? Ski resort developers? Hikers? Does a place have to be protected to be considered a true wilderness? If so, isn't the very management that ensures protection a violation of a place's natural (i.e., nonhuman) character? How can something be wild when it has fences around it and surveillance cameras installed at its gates? Above all, whose opinion and perspectives on all this counts?

Things get even worse if we go deeper. More than challenging, the idea behind "wild" can be downright dangerous if you consider that to preserve their natural character – so valuable from a human-defined ecological, geological, historical, educational, or scenic point of view – wild places must be protected from human interference. This ideology has historically been the perfect justification for eviction and resettlement programs that have displaced thousands of residents, turning Indigenous people into conservation refugees.

When used superficially, "wild" is purely rhetorical. It's the Hollywood "wild" of Chris McCandless, played by Emile Hirsch, venturing into the Alaskan bush in *Into the Wild*. It's the "wild" of Reese Witherspoon retracing the steps of Cheryl Strayed along the Pacific Crest Trail. It's the "wild," youthful imagination of *Call of the Wild* and *Where the Wild Things Are.* It's the lawless "wild, wild, West" and the people-less landscapes of "Wild Africa" or India or Antarctica or whatever continent the BBC flies to tonight. It's the pseudo-reality of *Man vs. Wild* and *Out of the Wild: The Alaska Experience* or whatever reality show the Discovery Channel produced last week.

Used politically, "wild" can be divisive, militant. It's the "wild" of fortress-style conservation schemes around the world, schemes that end

up separating people from their land in the name of tearing culture from nature. It's the "wild" of first-class ecotourism, which puts an economic premium on luxury ecolodges and turns third-world residents into guides, cooks, dishwashers, and maids. It's the short-sighted "wild" of neat borderlines and environmental zoning, which permits only trail maintenance on one side of a fence and slash-and-burn logging on the other.

The more we reflect on it, the more "wild" begins to feel not only promiscuous and polysemic but also shallow and arbitrary. It's a vacuous brand. Exchanged like cash, "wild" is a dirty, anonymous, and spiritless currency that has more value here, less there. In this capitalist environment, remote fishing and hunting lodges, green eco-resorts, guided paddling adventures, and entire countries are marketed and sold in the name of wild.

We are not the first to notice this. Throughout modern and contemporary history, wild, wildness, and wilderness have fed the book-publishing industry as much as they have the business of TV and film production. From Thoreau and Goethe to Snyder and Turner, from Strayed and Bryson to MacFarlane and Griffiths, scores of writers before us have answered the call of the wild from places wild in their minds and their hearts. But "wild" continues to evade cognitive capture; its affective notional slipperiness mimics its remarkable semantic agility.

The idea of wild is elusive, but so, too, are its geographical referents. When you seek wildness, where, precisely, do you go? Logically, to a place where you expect to find it, to a place that you deem wild. That is what most writers and adventurers do. But when you do, a problem emerges. If you look for wildness where you expect to find it, what you see mirrors your mental images. Wild places become a mere test of your ideologies, a manifestation of your fantasies, aspirations, and fears. Wilderness areas become fantasies of well-cultivated minds and well-trained bodies keen on putting their Instagram flag on the next highest peak.

We faced the same challenge at the beginning of this project. Keen on researching wildness and wishing to better understand it, we kept asking ourselves where we should go for our fieldwork. Our family loves small islands. We live on one, and we have travelled for leisure and for work to a handful of small islands around the world. Left to our own

devices, we would have uncritically dragged Autumn to countless small islands across the world in search of wildness. But to what advantage? Wouldn't those travels, in the end, simply confirm our initial hypothesis about the insular nature of wildness and wilderness? Wouldn't the wildness we'd stumble upon simply confirm our notion of what constitutes wildness in the first place?

Having realized that day tours would lead us to a limited number of destinations, we booked a last-minute discount deal on a multiday cruise expedition. Having never been on a cruise before, the word evoked goofy imagery from *The Love Boat,* a TV show that ran in the late 1970s and early '80s: well-manicured captains, overly accommodating crew with plastic smiles, white-linen-covered tables, five-course dinners, and Bermuda shirt-wearing passengers indulging in lounge music dances at night.

Reality wasn't much different, even though our ship's chief guide vehemently insisted three times a day over five days that ours was "not a cruise" but rather an "expedition ship." We still had a Jacuzzi on the sundeck, a breakfast buffet, and plenty of 1980's-style cocktails and Bermuda shirts.

Unlike *The Love Boat,* our cruise was small, educational, and focused on a prepackaged notion of adventure that had been negotiated with the National Park authorities. Their guidelines allow nearly two hundred ships to sail around the Galápagos in two categories: small yachts and larger vessels. Small yachts accommodate sixteen passengers, larger vessels nearly one hundred. Both options focus on ecotravel and wildlife encounters.

Small yachts are more intimate (which sounds nice until you come to terms with the fact that you have nowhere to hide from those fifteen other people). Small yachts can also be slightly more luxurious and may be structured to cater to niche interests. Larger vessels provide more generic services and are typically better suited for families who wish to share a larger cabin and for people who are prone to experiencing motion sickness.

Galápagos National Park regulations also stipulate that large vessels must take people ashore in shifts, in numbers no higher than sixteen. So, as much as we bemoaned having to sail around the archipelago with nearly seventy people, we knew that we could learn from their experiences as well. Moreover, we'd be taken to places chosen by distant authorities with a clear, official vision of what constituted wildness and wildlife. By going to places we had not quite chosen, we could learn something new and discover something unexpected. We went to bed the first evening and wrote notes to this effect in our journal. The first half day had gone by without much to whine about, and we looked forward to sailing to the farther reaches of the archipelago overnight.

The next morning after breakfast, before the excursion, the chief guide, a young man, warned us that the water would be quite cold. Fortunately, our package included wetsuit rental, and all sizes were available, "even children's," he announced while looking at Autumn. "However," he added, "I'm sure that our one child on board will find that in comparison to her Canadian waters our sea will feel as warm as a swimming pool, and I doubt she'll need a wetsuit."

Autumn offered a groggy smile in return. She wasn't feeling like herself. The constant rocking motion of the top-heavy ship throughout the night had resulted in poor sleep, little appetite, and an unnatural craving for motion-sickness pills.

"Come on, Autumn, you'll feel better once you're in the water snorkelling," we said.

She smiled, softly and unconvincingly, without making eye contact with either of us.

We couldn't wait to get off the ship either. The day before, we had spent only a half hour in the water after two hours of jostling for unencumbered views of pink flamingos and terrestrial iguanas. The chief's briefing, however, went on and on. He advised us about strict park regulations, restrictions on our movements and activities, and the need for our earnest collaboration in keeping the park "pristine." The islands had zero facilities, so our short excursions had to be planned in detail. He underlined that the only sign of human presence on these islands would

be a few "dry landings." We had to listen to the warning three times a day for five days in a row. It went something like this:

> Remember! There are two kinds of landings. They are different from one another. Very different. Who can tell me what they are? Anyone? Yes, Tim? That's right! Good remembering: dry landings and wet landings. And what's the difference? Does anyone remember? Yes, Fenfang? Good job! Wet landings mean that we pull our Zodiac on the beach. Dry landings mean there is a rocky shore, and so we walk off the boat onto steps carved on the rock. So, this morning's landing is wet. Which is okay, because ours is an e-x-p-e-d-i-t-i-o-n ship, right? Not a cruise. We're here for adventure. Anyway, a wet landing means what? Yes, Gabriela? Good job! No sneakers, only sandals. Did everyone pack their sneakers? Muy bien! You guys are terrific. Everybody gets artisanal gelato and a glass of 1992 Malbec tonight for doing such a good job!

Though the "adventure" wasn't real, the restrictions were. Upon landing – either wet or dry – we had to march in step with our small group's naturalist guide, listen to his interpretive lectures, take nothing but photos, and leave nothing but footprints. And since we had to keep pace behind the group of sixteen in front of us, and ahead of the clan behind us, minor schedule deviations were unthinkable. And so were off-trail detours. Outing after outing, bay after promontory, island after islet, our ship anchored punctually, Zodiacs departed and returned on schedule, and the captain reliably got us back on course before another vessel arrived on site, all as planned by the itinerary gods of Galápagos National Park.

Our guide – an approachable university-educated local man in his early thirties – explained to us that the ships' schedules were even more complex than they seemed. Restrictions dictated how many yachts and ships could operate in the archipelago, which kinds of boats could travel to certain destinations and, of course, how many visitors could set foot on each island, on any specific day or month, and at what hour of the day. This meant that larger ships, smaller yachts, and day-tour boats

needed to adhere to rigid timetables put together during painstaking planning sessions held months in advance in the name of sustainable ecotourism.

With a tight schedule in place, we settled into a quotidian routine. Eat breakfast. Receive a daily briefing. Take part in the first excursion. Return to the boat for lunch while the captain sails to the next destination. Alight for another excursion. Mind the gap between the ship and the platform. Return for supper. Sleep while the crew sails on. Repeat the process the following day.

On the third day of our journey, we anchored off Rábida, a small island known for its bright maroon sand. As usual, our guides helped us step onto and off the Zodiacs. As usual, we were guided around the short trail. As usual, we were told about the wildlife that called Rábida home and about the park's sustained historical efforts to exterminate invasive species such as rats. As usual, we were given options to choose from: after our short walk, we could either board a glass-bottom Zodiac and motor along the shore or snorkel around the beach on our own. As usual, we returned to the boat on time for our meal. It felt as though wildness, just like dinner, came à la carte.

Gentrification is not simply an urban phenomenon; it happens in wild places too. Whereas development drives urban gentrification, ecotourism drives the gentrification of wild places. The comfort of visitors, convenience of access, control of behaviour, the education of travellers, and the beautification and rewilding of nature in light of existing environmental standards are the cornerstones of the gentrification of wilderness.

Unlike urban gentrification, the gentrification of the wild works in subtle and nearly invisible ways. Our cabins were cleaned punctually every morning. Our three meals a day were healthy, tasty, and abundant. An onboard doctor looked after us any time we desired her attention. A waiter poured us a stiff drink every time we provided a credit card. The crew laid out fruits, treats, tea, coffee, and juice every time we returned from an off-ship excursion. All this comfort and convenience did not affect the wildness of the places we visited, but it engendered a systematic loss of self-responsibility on our part as travellers.

Like children, we were constantly taught and educated. Our guides' constant interpretation of the natural history around us rendered our world certain, secure, sensible, firm, and real. In this pre-interpreted world, iguanas spat, male sea lions acted out, and frigates showed off in predictable ways. Like parents, our guides knew best. Science knew best. Official interpretation triumphed over our naive curiosity. There was no room for surprise in this gentrified wilderness, no patience for our imagination. There was no enchantment, no wild wonder.

The education we received gave us a sense of control over the situation. The guides' constant interpretation informed our perception of the world and reinforced the need for careful planning. Just as architecture works together with urban planning, here, conservation was working together with science education to make our experience positive and free of doubts and unpredictable encounters with danger. In this neighbourhood, we were all subjects of science and international environmental governance. We were schoolchildren on a field trip. We were ecotourists.

As you would expect from a gentrified neighbourhood, our little ecotourist bubble was clean, beautiful, and camera-ready. No litter on the ground. No one carried prohibited goods. No unwanted residents. No loiterers. No one carried firearms; the only thing you could shoot were photographs. In a beautified urban neighbourhood, you need to worry about nothing but enjoying yourself and consuming sights. In this wild neighbourhood, there was nothing but sights, nothing to be done but sightsee.

Days before our excursion to Isla Lobos, we had struggled to label our experience. It felt domesticated, but we knew that wasn't the right word. We had now found a better qualifier – "gentrified." Like a gentrified urban neighbourhood, the national park had a much higher economic value when its wildness was thoroughly planned, tamed, and controlled for the sake of ecotourist sustainable development.

Whether tourism is sustainable in the Galápagos is a matter of perspective. In 2014, the Galápagos received an annual average of 185,000 visitors, a mind-blowing growth from the few thousands who had travelled to the remote archipelago as recently as thirty years before. This

spike in arrivals came with problems serious enough that Ecuador resigned itself, in 2007, to labelling the islands "at risk," and UNESCO added it to its blacklist of World Heritage Sites "in danger."

The trouble laid not so much in tourists' well-regulated bodily presence in the park but in the logistical challenges that tourism brought to the archipelago. Most notably, the expansion of the tourist industry fuelled massive increases in labour-driven migration to the Galápagos from the Ecuadorean mainland, which has resulted in both a serious infrastructural crisis and restructuring of the island economy, politics, and way of life.

Presented as a naturally unpeopled landscape, the Galápagos are allegedly a place for nature only. People are threats to the fragile environment, they are strangers who do not fit in, and they are simply an invasive species. Humans are not part of nature, this argument goes, and without people meddling with self-willed nature, the Galápagos are and will always be a pristine, untouched wilderness.

Try stepping out of this cognitive box, however, and you realize that the Galápagos are not a pristine natural laboratory for the study of evolution. It is only because the islands have been imagined and idealized that way, and only because that deeply ingrained idealization has resulted in the careful manufacturing of a seemingly pristine landscape, that they look so untouched and feel so wild.

The separation of people and nature in the Galápagos depends on clearly demarcated borders between the land and marine reserve and the area where local people work and live. And while the latter has remained constant in terms of space at 3 percent, over the last fifteen years, the resident population has more than doubled as mainland Ecuadoreans have come to the archipelago in search of better-paying jobs.

As people continue to move, tensions mount. Despite the government's strict regulations on domestic immigration, resources and infrastructures have stretched thinner and thinner. The availability of clean water and sewage disposal are grave concerns for residents, and the arrival of new invasive species along with immigrants and tourists has become the biggest threat to endemic biodiversity.

Wilderness areas around the world are "fragile" and "threatened" environments. But the words "fragility" and "danger" often obfuscate

other issues: social and cultural dynamics that are easy to forget because we often think of wild places as empty of people. Scores of anthropologists, environmental historians, and geographers have been trying for the last three decades to correct our ignorance; unfortunately, they've had limited success.

In 1996, for example, a provocative volume edited by American historian William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground,* pronounced that pristine wilderness is not quite what it seems. Wilderness, Cronon and colleagues argued, lives first and foremost in our collective imagination and is rooted in the idea that humankind is somehow not part of nature. When we separate people and nature to keep nature safe, untouched, and pristine, we ignore that people are nature, that they have lived and altered every single environment in the world, and that by excluding our species from fragile areas deserving of wilderness protection, we humans essentially give our species the licence to destroy the unprotected rest of the world. The myth of an independent nature ignores the interconnections between our species and all others on this planet we call home, and it hides the notion that nature – as we understand it, imagine it, conceptualize it, defend it, legislate it, experience it, exploit it, study it, enjoy it, and protect it – is very much an idea that our species has created.

The Galápagos may be thought to be wild, but history shows us that they are not people-free. A human presence in the islands was documented as early as 1535. Throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, whalers and pirates regularly stopped in the archipelago, mainly to stock up on giant tortoises. The word is that they taste very good. The pirates found that they also kept well and could survive up to one hundred days without food or water. Reports dating nearly a century ago state that whalers took and ate as many as one hundred thousand Galápagos tortoises in the 1800s alone.

Keen on legitimating its sovereignty claims over the islands, the government of Ecuador facilitated a progressive colonization of the Galápagos throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when many people came in search of guano and coal. Salt mines, sugar cane plantations, small agriculture, a mill, a tortoise oil industry, livestock raising, and fishing were also undertaken – all with a mixed bag of fortune and misfortune. Curiously,

the Ecuadorean government even went so far as to advertise settlement opportunities in European newspapers, and more than a few families made the journey across the Atlantic in search of Eden (a subject well-portrayed in *The Galapagos Affair: Satan Came to Eden,* one of very few documentaries to focus on local social and cultural issues instead of wildlife).

By the 1960s, as many as two thousand people lived in the archipelago. Life wasn't easy. An arid climate, difficult terrain to cultivate, and dramatic isolation from the rest of the world meant that people had to be content with subsisting on hunting feral animals and growing fruits and vegetables in the humid highlands of Santa Cruz, San Cristóbal, and Isabela. Oral histories detailing memories of those days depict tightly knit communities and a simple life punctuated by intermittent arrivals of ships from the mainland carrying mail, goods, returning relatives, occasional scientists, and handfuls of new migrants.

Nature in the islands has not been pristine or untouched for at least half a millennium. People have been just as much part of the fabric of life in the Galápagos as wildlife. Yet it was the wildlife, thanks to the diffusion of Darwin's theories, that attracted evolutionary biologists to the islands. Starting in the early 1950s in particular, a few groups of scientists began to actively lobby the Ecuadorean government for active protection of the Galápagos. Subsequently, in 1957 UNESCO asked a German ethnologist, Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, and an American ornithologist, Robert Bowman, to travel to the archipelago to explore the possibility of establishing a permanent base for visiting scientists. Two years later, the recently formed Charles Darwin Foundation (CDF) managed to persuade the Ecuadorean government to create an officially protected area, paving the way for a biological research station. Today, the CDF's sprawling compound lies just outside of Puerto Ayora's town centre, and it draws most of the cruise-ship passengers given a few hours to spend in town at the end of their journey. The CDF is also a powerful lobby, just as it was in its early days.

A few decades ago, representatives from the Charles Darwin Foundation and the Galápagos National Park sat down together to discuss what types of tourism would best serve the dual goal of conservation and economic development. Rather than exploiting the local

environment and its scarce resources with land-based tourism and the related infrastructure it would require, it was determined that floating hotels (expedition ships) would simultaneously assist in land conservation and in attracting well-to-do visitors.

Floating hotels would cruise around the archipelago without requiring any infrastructural development other than the occasional dry landing. Nature-loving tourists could simply fly in and out of Baltra Island – where the American military had previously built an airport during the Second World War. From there, they could easily board a ship, take a tour, sleep and eat on board, and finally return to their home base in the mainland.

This all seemed like a brilliant idea.

Given the alleged environmental soundness of the floating hotel model, we had several ethical qualms about seeking bedroom space in town. By eating imported food, we feared we'd contribute to the environmental costs associated with shipping goods from the mainland and we'd end up giving local fishing folk and farmers more reasons to seek expansion of their business into park and marine reserve land. By showering at a bed and breakfast in town, we knew we'd consume precious water. And by flushing down the toilet everything we ate, we'd clearly pile on the sewage disposal problem affecting the communities. Little did we know when we made our reservations back in Canada that advocates of land-based tourism in the Galápagos had recently been making increasingly compelling arguments for the ethics of their business.

One morning, we told our bed-and-breakfast host, Sofia, that we had given a great deal of thought to our choice of accommodation. We were satisfied with our choice, we told her. She couldn't have been happier to hear that conclusion. By visiting the towns, we could get a glimpse of local culture and understand the uniqueness of social life in the archipelago. "These islands are not only 'a paradise,'" she said. "When you're a tourist, you can see that side. But when you live here as a resident, you can feel the social problems we have."

Highly educated, progressive, supportive of conservation principles, and adamant about the need to protect the unique environment and culture of the islands, Sofia was particularly upset with the local institutions. "I never liked the little attention that social problems get. Nature

gets attention, but humans don't. I have been here for twenty-five years, and I am still not able to drink potable water from the tap here. If you are talking about an equilibrium between animals and people, here, we should have good education, good hospitals."

Politically involved and of strong voice, Sofia was critical of local politics, and she sensed we related to her feelings. "The Galápagos are a *marca,* we say in Spanish, a brand." Her voice rose over a cacophony of chanting birds and roaring motorbikes outside the breezy breakfast room.

And a successful brand they are. In 2007, for example, tourists spent US$419 million in the Galápagos. However, only US$62.9 million entered the island economy. As it happens, most cruise ship tourists reserve their cabin space from abroad or through large travel agencies based in the mainland, and cruise ships are owned largely by foreign interests and a small number of mainland Ecuadorean families. Because cruise ship tourists spend hardly any time in the main towns, very little of their money lands in the hands of small and medium-sized local businesses. To compound the problem, cruise ship operators are not obligated to hire their crew locally and often end up employing workers from the mainland who are willing to take in lower wages than islanders.

Small independent businesses such as Sofia's B & B and the many locally owned restaurants and shops operating in Puerto Ayora and Puerto Baquerizo Moreno are starting to change these trends by promoting the advantages of land-based tourism for the sake of social and economic justice. However, the inequalities coursing through the Galápagos economy still run deep, and many locals perceive the politics to be unfair.

"I was recently in Germany," Sofia said, "and I told a woman I was from the Galápagos. She tilted her head in disbelief and stared at me for a while. 'You are human,' she said to me, as if she had discovered a new species. 'I didn't know there were actual humans living there!'"

We laughed and told her some of our fellow cruise passengers did not believe us when we told them there were thirty thousand people living on the islands. Most of the cruises skirted towns and inhabited areas.

"As residents, we are fourth-class citizens here," she said. "The animals are first, the scientists and conservationists are second, the tourists are third and, finally, there are the residents." In fact, a handful of

researchers interested in the social conditions of the islands have recorded similar sentiments over the last few years. In survey after survey, residents lament that much more attention is given to the health of various wildlife species – tortoises in particular – than to people.

For example, during a 2012 tsunami warning, the Ecuadorean military and park officials organized a large-scale aircraft and naval evacuation of tortoises, whereas humans largely had to fend for themselves. One stinging outcome of this process was that Lonesome George – the last known surviving member of the Pinta Island tortoise subspecies – was taken to a luxury hotel in the highlands whereas a group of less-mobile senior citizens remained behind.

Sofia told us that many galapagueños have for some time been frustrated with the disparities between the amounts of money channelled into conservation at the expense of social well-being. Their discontent isn't unfounded; the CDF itself has argued that improving social conditions too much could result in larger numbers of immigrants coming to the islands in search of higher standards of living. Compounded by inefficient governmental administration, slow bureaucracy, and corruption, this attitude has played a crucial role in making residents of the archipelago unhappy. So, while cable TV, high-speed internet access, and the frequency of air connections with the mainland have improved considerably over the last few years and now rank among the best in the continent, acute diarrheal diseases, fungal infections, and intestinal parasites resulting from contact with contaminated water continue to plague residents.

Over the last twenty-five years, conflicts have also erupted over restrictions placed on fishing in the archipelago. Sea cucumber fishermen have been particularly aggravated by policies imposed by Galápagos National Park without prior consultation. Following a total ban on sea cucumber collection – largely seen as a punitive response to illegal overfishing – angry fishermen retaliated in 1994 by exterminating tortoises, sharks, and sea lions.

Tensions continued for years. In 2000, Isabela Island fishermen burned park offices and threatened to kill the park director, who escaped only by hiding in the mangroves. More violent strikes erupted in 2003

and 2004 when machete-wielding fishermen took over some visitor sites and went after park officials and scientists, who again just escaped. The indiscriminate killing of animals continued. In 2007, eight tortoises were destroyed on Isabela Island. In 2008, 53 sea lions were decapitated. In 2009, another 18 tortoises were found dead. And in 2011, fishermen turned their murderous anger toward 357 sharks.

Invasive species-control and removal programs have also been a controversial issue. In 1971, scientists estimated that 77 introduced species existed in the archipelago. In 2008, the number had reached 888, of which 31 were considered invasive. In response, between 2001 and 2007, US$43 million were spent in various projects aimed at eradicating introduced species such as goats, whose eating habits make survival difficult for tortoises.

Notably, one of the most controversial eradication programs involved an elaborate plan to employ specially trained sharpshooters to fire at goats from advanced-warfare helicopters. To find as many goats as possible, a few captured female goats were equipped with signal-transmitting GPS and given hormones to attract unsuspecting male goats. The two-year long program was funded to the tune of US$18 million by the national park and CDF together with the USAID, the World Bank, and the Global Environment Facility, as well as a few other smaller donors. The snipers took down 140,000 goats, and nearly all the meat was left to rot, when it could have instead fed many families.

As these histories of discontent and conflict make obvious, views of the Galápagos as wild and pristine are not just abstract attitudes existing in people's minds. Rather, these ideologies have manifested themselves in policies that have resulted in isolating wildlife from people's communities, in separating park management from the political administration of the islands, and in striving to restore park landscapes to supposedly pristine conditions without paying sufficient attention to the social and economic consequences of environmental protection. Recent improvements in both environmental and political relations have resulted in UNESCO taking the Galápagos off the list of World Heritage Sites in danger, but a lot of work remains to improve conditions of life for both humans and wildlife.

We are ethnographers. Ethnography is the study of culture as practised by researchers in anthropology, sociology, geography, education, and countless other social sciences. First and foremost, ethnographers learn from people, people with whom they interact as part of their research over days, weeks, months, and at times even years of extended relationship building, observation, dialogue, and shared participation in daily activities and practices of all sorts.

Contemporary ethnographers learn the same way early anthropological ethnographers did. They learn first and foremost by virtue of people's generosity, their kindness and openness, and their willingness to teach them. As ethnographers, our work often entails travelling, meeting strangers, gathering the lessons they teach us, making sense of that knowledge by putting it in a broader context, and drawing insights from those lessons, often by referring to whatever teachings other researchers have shared before. Guiding our work is a simple principle that asks us to put ourselves in the shoes of others, to see the world from their eyes.

Like journalists, ethnographers tend to write stories, but our purpose is neither investigating culprits nor exposing "the truth." Our work focuses on understanding, on learning from what people can teach us, on accumulating experiences and perspectives to arrive at insights into life-worlds often distant from our own. Unlike journalists who are driven by agendas, or perhaps by the need to get to the bottom of something, ethnographers are often driven by curiosity and wonder.

We had travelled for research to many other fascinating places before, but the Galápagos had long captured our wonder and that of the people around us. Before departing for Ecuador, we noticed that our friends and families looked toward our little adventure with vicarious excitement, anticipation, and admiration. More than any other travel we had undertaken before, the Galápagos seemed truly remote, wild, the last frontier of modernity and civilization.

So it was hard for us to be cynical, as academic types often are. We hated the idea of going back home with stories of environmental threats, short-sighted conservation policies, social problems, and economic injustice. We loathed our newly found conviction that visitors to the Galápagos

could only find some kind of paradise there so long as they did not realize they were in an ecotourist bubble. And most of all, we dreaded the notion that an expensive and systematic conservation plan had managed to maintain 90 to 99 percent of the historical biodiversity of the islands at the obvious expense of the islands' true wilderness. For if "wilderness" signifies a self-willed land, then most certainly the Galápagos – with their fenced park borders, their advanced-warfare helicopters, their reintroduced species, and their "Keep on Trails!" signs – were nothing but the most gentrified natural environment on the planet.

The trouble with wilderness, observes environmental historian William Cronon in *Uncommon Ground,* is that it hides the fact that the entire surface of the planet has been modified in one way or another by humans. There are no pristine places left, anywhere. And to think there are some, somewhere, only leads to ignoring, hiding, and sometimes purging people's presence from the places we somehow disillusion ourselves into deeming wild. So instead of looking for wilderness in the earth's most iconic landscapes, Cronon concludes that we might as well seek a wild closer to us: in our backyards, in city parks, or even in abandoned industrial sites where nature is making an unexpected comeback on its own.

As academics, we could relate to this argument intellectually. But as lovers of wild nature and at a sentimental level it simply turned us off. And as parents, we did not want to tell Autumn that we would spend two weeks the next summer looking for wildlife in a place such as Vancouver's Stanley Park or a former industrial site by the airport. As lovers of the wild, we did not want to surrender our faith in wildness because of our disenchanted belief that no self-willed places are left in the world. As citizens of this planet, we did not want to throw away the baby (conservation) with the bathwater (our society's limited understanding of nature). Like our friends and families, we had been attracted to the Galápagos in the first place because of a sense of hope – hope that wildness would still exist. But had we found it? It was doubtful.

Our short trip to the Galápagos had clearly sparked a crisis in our minds and our hearts. We knew that protected areas were necessary for the sake of biodiversity conservation, but we had also discovered that the

dualisms and the speciesism that conservation policies rely on could at times be noxiously arrogant, blind, and unjust. We knew that wilderness was a myth and that the very notion of pristine nature was just an empty ideology and a business brand, but we were unwilling to accept that places such as the Galápagos are no wilder than that patch of grass in our garden overgrown with dandelions.

What now?

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