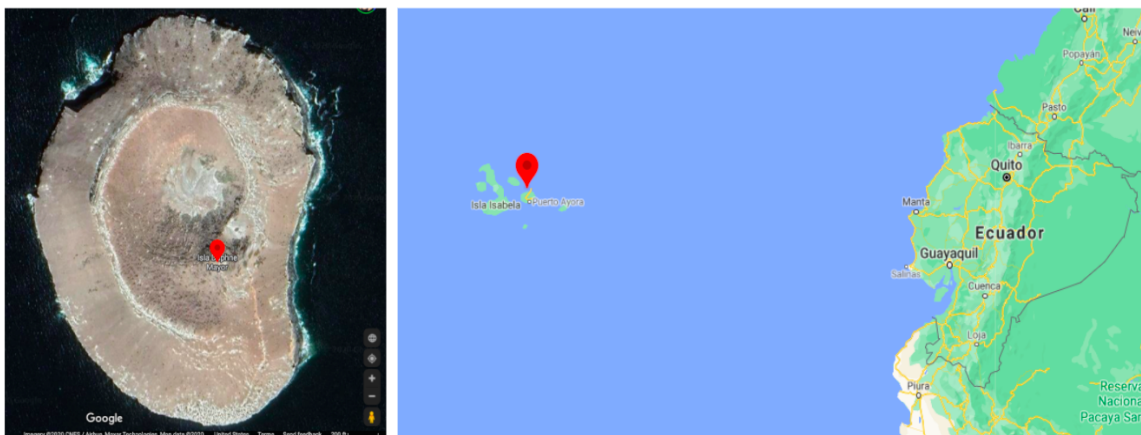


Finches Overview in Color

Overview: Finches Beaks

The medium ground finches are one of 14 different types of finches that live on the Galápagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador. They typically live their entire lives on a single island. Where this population of ground finches lives is a desert-like island with sparse vegetation that is called Daphne Major. It is only about a half mile across at its widest point. No people have ever lived there.



On Daphne Major the ground finches, as their name suggests, forage for food that they find on the ground. They occasionally catch and eat insects, but they mostly survive by eating the seeds of the few plants that grow on the island.

Here are the three types of plants that are the sources of these seeds:



chamaesyce



portulaca



tribulus

Each year, these finches mate, lay eggs, and produce offspring called fledglings during the wet, rainy season that typically lasts from January through May. The fledglings grow to adulthood during the dry season that typically lasts from June through December. These young birds can mate and reproduce during the following wet season. The adult female ground finches and the fledglings are speckled brown in color. The adult males are black.



The finches on the Galápagos Islands have been studied for over 100 years, starting with research done by Charles Darwin. Modern researchers, Peter Grant and Rosemary Grant, were interested in finding out whether they could observe any differences among the populations of finches on some of these small islands. So starting in 1973, they set out to collect as much information as they could about the finches and the islands they live on.

In their studies, the Grants traveled to the isolated Daphne Major island each year during the wet season and during the dry season. While there, they caught and banded every finch that lived on the island, including every finch born that year. Then, when they returned each year, they collected, counted, observed, and measured all the finches as well as many of the other organisms living on Daphne Major. They kept records of the number and kind of plants on the island and how many seeds they produced each year. They recorded information about over 90 individual finches over the course of their study from 1973 to 1978. During the years 1976-1978 they saw the average length of the beaks of the population of finches on Daphne Major change.