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INTRODUCTION



Wild at heart

Freshly emerged from the aftermath of the Second World War, two young artists living in the crowded, gray city of Brussels hatched a dream: they wanted to raise a family on an island somewhere in a warm climate, where they could be close to nature and lead a self-sufficient lifestyle. At first, they explored Corsica; kayaking, camping, and surviving on what the sea could offer. Then, they read about the Galápagos Islands. Before long, they sailed away from Europe aboard a banana carrier towards a new life in the Pacific, expecting never to return. They would learn how to become pioneers.

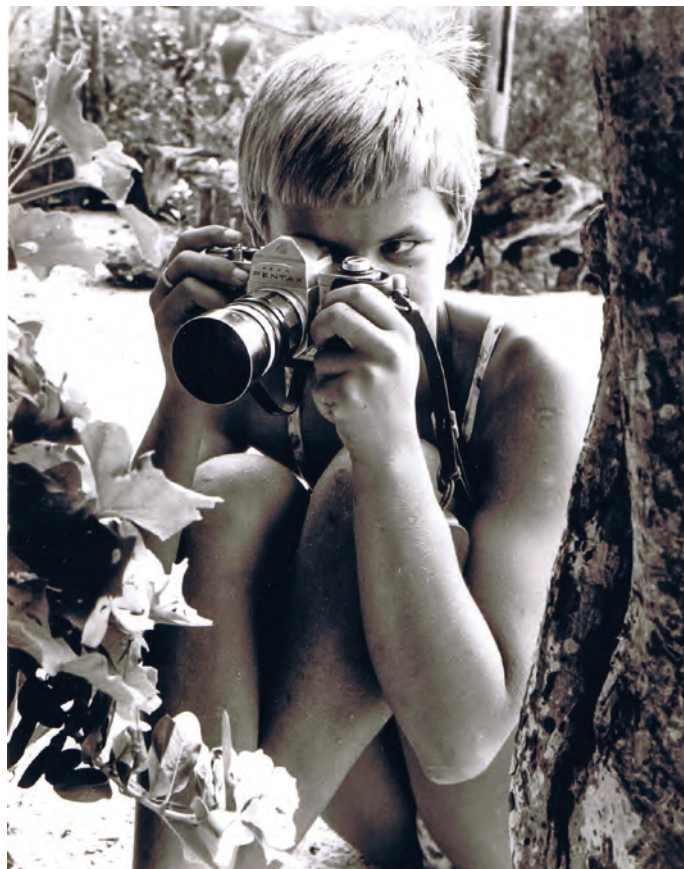
André and Jacqueline De Roy — and I — stepped ashore on the Galápagos Islands on 21 December 1955, the day I turned two. Looking back, this birthday gift was to last me a lifetime, although it would be years before the archipelago was declared Ecuador's first national park, eventually becoming world-famous.

Initially, we homesteaded in the highland wilderness of Santa Cruz Island, at the center of the archipelago, a couple of hours' walk from the coast. There, thanks to the rainy climate, it was possible to grow fruits and vegetables. We lived in a tent my mom had sewn for the purpose. Our next home was a lava-rock house, built on the arid coast by my dad, just in time for the birth of my little brother in 1958.

Among the meager belongings my parents had brought from Belgium were their beloved cameras — some of which my dad had fashioned himself — and an ample supply of black-and-white film and photographic paper. The negatives were processed in seawater, because precious rainwater was reserved for drinking. Prints were produced at night on a homemade enlarger. I recall sitting transfixed, fighting off sleep, under the dim glow of a kerosene hurricane lantern wrapped in red cellophane, as incredible images appeared slowly in shallow dishes of processing chemicals.

Above right: My first SLR camera was an excellent old Pentax, but I had to estimate the exposure settings.

Right: This nesting great blue heron was shot in 1969, on my first roll of color film.





When I was eleven, and already in love with the wildlife around me, I started borrowing my father's antique cameras. At fifteen, out of the blue, I was gifted my first bona fide SLR (single-lens reflex camera) by a visiting filmmaker. A Pentax Spotmatic, it came with an 83-mm screw-on telephoto lens, but no built-in light meter. In March of 1969, while balancing precariously on the bow of my dad's tiny rowboat, I took three frames of a great blue heron regally shading her eggs. This was my very first roll of color film (Kodachrome II, ISO 25) and, with Dad's advice, I estimated the exposure: 125th of a second, f5.6. One of those three images, seen opposite, became my earliest published photo, and still remains my all-time favorite image of this elegant wader.

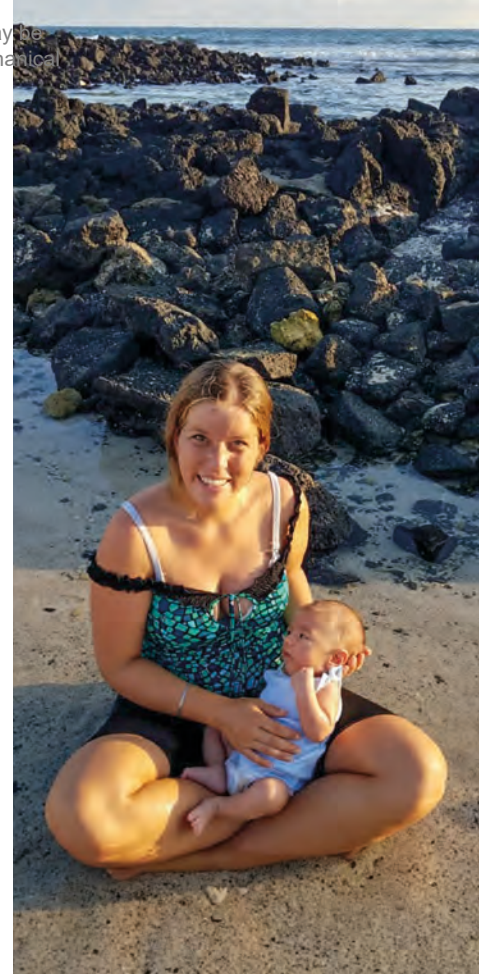
Half a century later, I still haul my cameras up active volcanoes and dive with sharks and whales, adding fresh material to my ever-growing Galápagos photo collection, which now surpasses half a million images.

This book is a compilation of those fifty incredible years capturing every facet of the wildness of the Galápagos Islands, including subjects never before recorded. Although wildlife photography has led me to all seven continents, and countless other places — large and small — my fascination for these mythical islands continues to grow. To me, they will always be untamed and untamable.



Top: Tempting a young lava heron with small mullets I'd caught. She remained my friend for years, and later led me to her nest in the mangroves.

Above: Already fascinated by wildlife behavior, I captured an altercation between a heron and a pelican when I was eleven, using my dad's manual Zeiss Ikon camera.



Four generations of Galápagos pioneers

Above left: Before the Galápagos dream was born, as newlyweds my parents explored the Mediterranean. While snorkeling in Corsica, they discovered ancient amphorae from Phoenician shipwrecks.

Top right: My great-nephew Ilán Baque was born in Galapagos on 16 December 2018. Here, he enjoys a tidepool dip with his mom, Nathalie, who married an islander, Andrés Baque, in 2014.

Above right: My parents, André (1924–1992) and Jacqueline (1925–2015). Over their lifetime, they saw many changes on Galápagos.

Right: Celebrating my mom's 85th birthday in her beautiful home. From left to right, my brother Gil (a fisherman), me, my mom Jacqueline, Gil's wife Martha, and their daughter Nathalie (also a fisherwoman).



Right: The first homestead in the highland forest was a tent on a log platform, raised off the ground to keep clear of herds of wild cattle and pigs.

Below right: The little lava rock house on the coast was completed just in time for the arrival of my brother, who was born at home.

Below left: I tamed my first family of Darwin's finches when I was ten.

Bottom: Decades later, feeding the flock remained a favorite pastime for me and my mom. It also helped the birds make it through long periods of drought.



Following page: Under gyrating star trails, giant tortoises sleep peacefully as dawn breaks over Alcedo Volcano, Isabela Island.