



There is a new species of tortoise in Galapagos. In 2005, geneticists revealed that Santa Cruz appeared to be home to two distinct species of giant tortoise rather than one. After ten years of further investigation, researchers have now formalised this distinction.

Based on genetic evidence, it appears that tortoises reached Santa Cruz not once but twice. The first settlers probably floated over from San Cristobal or Espanola around 1.7 million years ago, resulting in the population at "La Reserva" on the south-western slopes of Santa Cruz. More than one million years later, it looks like there was another colonisation event, giving rise to the population at Cerro Fatal some 20 km to the east.

In spite of their proximity, there has been very little mixing between these tortoises. "They are as different from each other as any other tortoises in the Archipelago," says Adalgisa Caccone, a geneticist at Yale University and lead author of the study. The Reserva tortoises retain the original name given to the Santa Cruz tortoises, *Chelonoidis porteri*, whilst the Cerro Fatal population is now called *Chelonoidis donfaustoi*, a tribute to the work of Galapagos National Park ranger "Don Fausto" Llerana who retired in 2014 after 43 years of service.

In December, the Galapagos National Park carried out an ambitious expedition to Wolf Volcano on Isabela in an effort to locate tortoises with Floreana and Pinta ancestry. **Feature on page 18.**

Above: A tortoise from the Cerro Fatal population, with retired ranger Fausto Llerana. Galapagos National Park.