

# Drawn *to the edge of the world*





## Suffolk marine artist Claudia Myatt sailed to the Southern Ocean with only her sketchbook and pencils. Her two-month odyssey changed everything

WORDS: Mike Trippitt

It's time for an adventure," she thought. But when Suffolk-based marine artist and art teacher Claudia Myatt announced her plans to take two months off work and sail a 100-year-old former Dutch fishing lugger over 3,000 miles, from The Galapagos Islands to Easter Island, around Cape Horn and on to The Falklands, her friends' reactions were mixed. Some regarded her with envious admiration. Others thought her mad.

From her home, a converted tugboat on the River Deben, she recalls mixed feelings as she travelled alone halfway around the world to spend two months aboard Tecla with complete strangers. "I'm an anxious traveller," she says. "But I'm fine when I'm there. I love new experiences."

"I'm interested in the fact that we live on this great big planet and there is a lot of it that I haven't seen. I am getting more and more interested in wilderness, the empty spaces, the wild places in the natural world."

A trip aboard Tecla offers paying crew members the chance to sail in parts of the world that are rarely within the reach of hobby sailors. The first leg of the voyage, a 13-day haul across the South Pacific, was like nothing she had done before.

"One of the reasons I wanted to do it was because I have never done any ocean sailing," says Claudia. She admits that sailing in the vast ocean, though "absolutely delightful" was very different to short cruises along the Suffolk coast.

"When I first took the helm of Tecla I asked the skipper what course we were steering. 'Two hundred and ten degrees', he said. How long for? I asked. He said, 'Oh, about two weeks.'"

Claudia Myatt is a keen observer of detail. Sitting in the compact wheelhouse of the 45ft Else, which she has lived aboard

**LEFT:** Suffolk marine artist Claudia Myatt hopes to publish her sketches from her voyage on Tecla to the Southern Ocean in a book. Image: Claudia Myatt

since 2013, she watches the river. Godwits peck busily on the shore and the Deben's gentle waves lap against neighbouring vessels.

Sketching marine life, the moods of the sea, the subtleties of light and expressing the character of the little boats that make East Anglia their home keeps her never far from the shore. Her work for several yachting magazines, the RYA, her original paintings and other commissions reflect her contentment with the quieter, simpler elements of our world.

When she set off to join Tecla on November 6, 2019, she planned to sketch everyday and to keep a journal. Pencils and four sketchbooks made up the tools to record her trip, but surprisingly, she left something behind.

"I didn't take a camera because I wanted to question the assumption that you have to take a photograph of something you haven't seen before. I'd become interested in this camera versus sketching thing and thought,

what if I decided not to take a camera, not to respond to that impulse to go 'click'?" She calls it "reflex photography" and believes that by indulging in it "you rob yourself of being in the moment".

"I thought what is the point of that? If I see an iguana that I haven't seen before, the first thing I want to do is stand there, look at it and appreciate it. I will also want to draw it." But she says there are plenty of photographs on the internet for those who want to see one.

In today's social media world, she wonders, has our focus changed from enjoying a moment, or an experience, to a desire merely to photograph it and post a picture on Facebook or Instagram?

But as (practically) everyone now has a camera in their phone, isn't it easier to take pictures than sketch pictures? After all, not everyone can draw. Claudia Myatt laughs. "Anyone can draw. Everybody can draw because everyone can drive a pencil. The humble pencil is low tech and



**RIGHT:** Woodbridge artist Claudia Myatt took a 3,000 mile voyage on the vessel Tecla to the Southern Ocean.

Photo: Mike Trippitt



very cheap, but it has the power to change perception.”

Claudia has taught students ashore in East Anglia, on cruise ships around the world and on ‘sail and sketch’ holidays. She believes that all who can write can learn to draw. Drawing, she says, is just a different alphabet from writing, with different rules that most people have not learned.

Spending weeks on end with nothing but sea and sky, wind and water, does test powers of observation. Before the trip Claudia wondered whether there would be enough for her to draw everyday. It took a while for her to get into the swing. “My challenge was to draw little tiny things that made each day different. I did lots of small sketches of seascapes, the different sea states and patterns of the waves, waves’ crest and colours, different skies and clouds, and sunsets.”

As the days went on her crew mates suggested things for her to sketch – a fresh loaf of bread, the crew in their sailing boots, representations of conversations that had taken place, the small

Drive out to Gipsy Cove & see ‘Tecla’ sailing past on her next adventure. Sunshine & calm sea. Wish I was still on board & going with her!



**LEFT:** Claudia Myatt aboard Else, where she has lived since 2013 on the River Deben. Photo: Mike Trippitt

detail around each of them and the routines of life aboard.

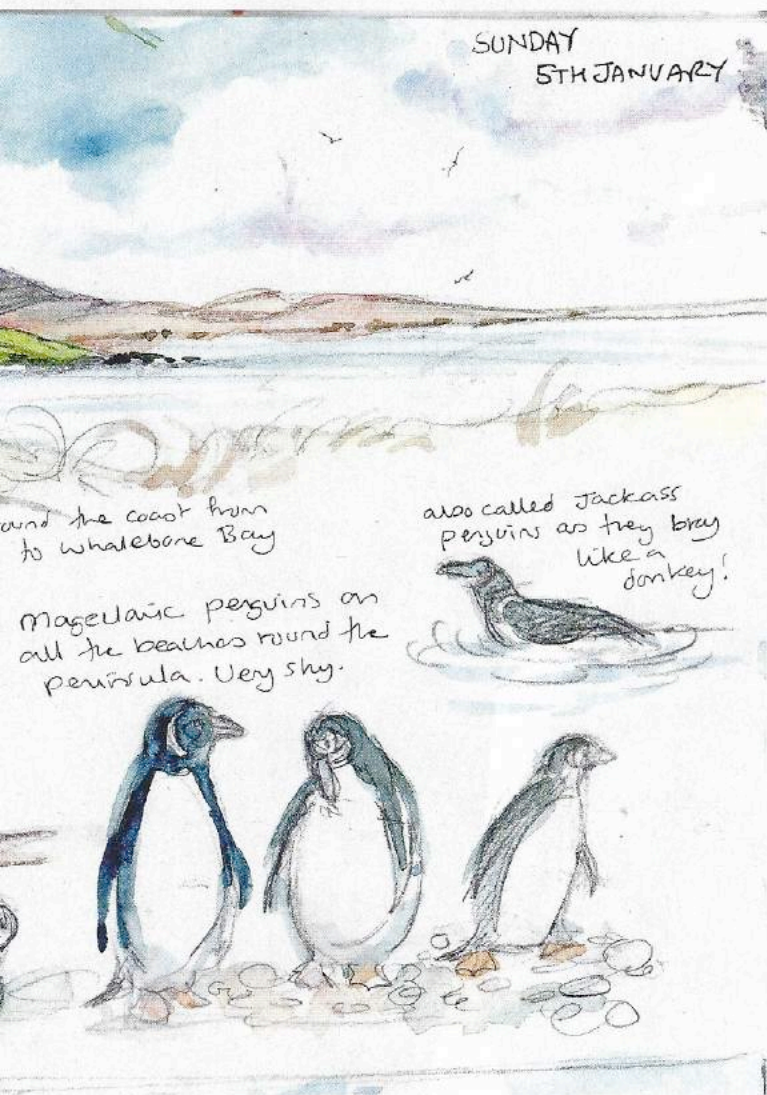
“It became part of the fabric of the day, so even though from the outside everything was the same everyday, there were subtle differences in conversations and detail. You do get obsessed with detail on a long trip, because your whole world gets magnified and everything becomes important – sleep, the books you read, what you have for dinner.”

Ashore on the Galapagos Islands Claudia Myatt sketched freely and had no regrets about not bringing a camera. The barren landscape of some of the relatively new islands was not the most photogenic, but around the islands she was struck by a feeling of being an intruder.

“There is this whole sense that humans are the alien species. We are the visitor, we don’t belong there.” She recalls sitting on a sandy beach with mangrove trees behind, birds singing and wildlife unconcerned by the occasional human trespasser.

“Anywhere else in the world





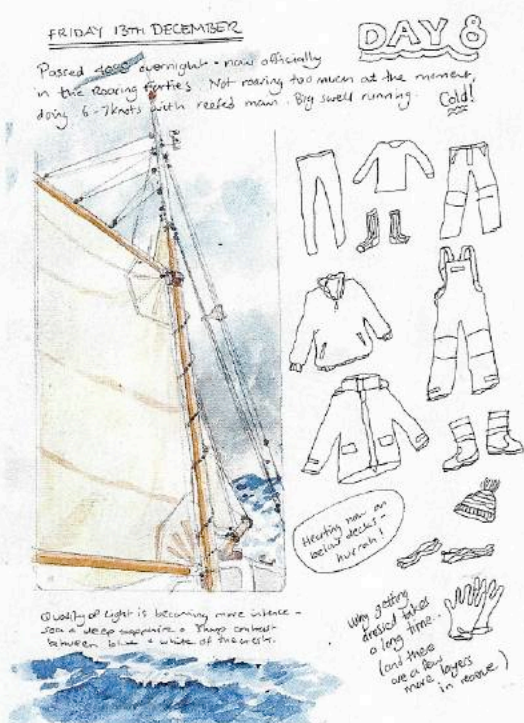
SUNDAY  
5TH JANUARY

and the coast from  
to Whalebone Bay

also called Jackass  
penguins as they bray  
like a donkey!



Magellanic penguins on  
all the beaches round the  
peninsula. Very shy.



FRIDAY 13TH DECEMBER

DAY 8

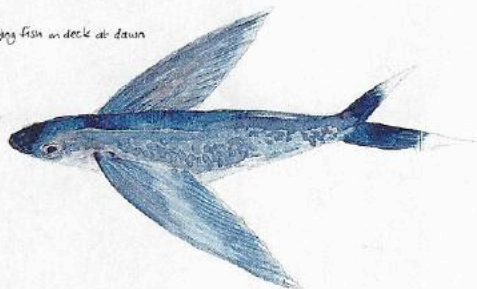
Passed ~~last~~ overnight - now officially  
in the Rearing fifties. Not raining too much at the moment,  
doing 6-7 knots with reefed main. Big swell running. Cold!

Quality of light is becoming more intense -  
see a deep purple or blue on land -  
between blue & white of the crest.

Hardly now an  
actual deck -  
hurrah!

Very jiffy  
drivels took  
a long time  
(and these  
are a few  
more  
in none)

Flying fish on deck at dawn



there would be a path and a resort hotel, a car park and even a McDonalds behind the mangroves, but you know that in this place there is absolutely nothing, and that no humans ever go there. You feel grateful for the fact that these places are still here. I knew that when we took a dinghy back to our ship the place would be silent again. There's no human noise."

Though damage was wrought on The Galapagos by seafarers and explorers who, in a less enlightened age, wildlife was plundered for food, decades of strict bio-security measures have begun the repair. Goats and rats have been eradicated, and indigenous turtles and sea lions have lost their fear of humans.

But for Claudia there is always a reminder of how our world, its vast oceans and continents are linked. A plastic bag discarded thousands of miles away in Ecuador can become snared around a turtle's neck in The Galapagos. Just how the waste created in our backyard can

damage the environment across the entire planet is illustrated on Easter Island, located in what she calls "the ocean of shame".

"It just looked like a pretty sandy beach with lots of coloured shells, but when I scooped it up, every single one of those pretty colours was a piece of rubbish. It was weathered and had obviously travelled a long way. It wasn't their rubbish. Everywhere is connected, it is universal problem."

Inevitably, Claudia Myatt's adventure had to come to an end. After four weeks rounding Cape Horn and making landfall at Port Stanley on the Falklands it was time to say goodbye to Tecla. She describes a "wave of sorrow" in disembarking and knowing that a new crew would be sailing on to South Georgia, The Beagle Channel and Antarctica, places she longed to go.

"A few days later I was sitting sketching on a hillside [overlooking Stanley] when I saw Tecla sail out. It was hugely emotional watching her sailing

off without me. My heart went with her. I felt I had left a bit of me behind."

And while her two-month journey had its high and lows, she longs to do it again.

"It's always in the back of my mind. It has reinforced my view of the planet as a big blue watery thing with just a few noisy, shouty bits where things are going wrong. It has put politics and world events into context.

The planet is still bigger than us and always was. In a way it is settling to have been down to the Southern Ocean. It is still rolling, just as it always has, and hopefully, as it always will." ♦  
**Claudia Myatt's website [claudiamyatt.co.uk](http://claudiamyatt.co.uk) has more information about her work and career, plus her blog. She is currently editing a book about her trip featuring her sketches and words which she hopes to have published in the autumn. More information about the sailing vessel Tecla, her history, adventures and itinerary at [tecla-sailing.com](http://tecla-sailing.com)**

**TOP:**  
Before she set off from her Woodbridge home, Claudia wondered if there would be enough for her to sketch while at sea. She found plenty to inspire her. Image: Claudia Myatt

**TOP RIGHT:**  
Claudia's sketch of a flying fish from her trip aboard Tecla. Image: Claudia Myatt