



CORNELL LABORATORY *of* ORNITHOLOGY

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Dear participants on the NY Yacht Club Galapagos expedition:

I am greatly looking forward to spending time with you on our trip to the “Enchanted Islands” this April and May. My own career in evolutionary biology was launched when I spent a season studying Darwin’s Finches in the Galapagos, and it remains one of the most inspiring and biologically magical places I have ever visited. It will be a great pleasure to share the natural wonders of the archipelago with you on our voyage.

In advance of the trip, I wanted to pass along a bit of advice about animal-watching equipment and potential background reading. I hope you find these recommendations and leads useful.

Best regards,

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Essential Galapagos Equipment

Binoculars. The wildlife of the Galapagos is often so tame that you can walk right up to a bird or iguana, but you will surely find yourself wanting a good pair of binoculars for viewing from shipboard or for spying on animals that are doing something interesting off of the trails.

Binoculars for animal-watching come in a bewildering variety of shapes, sizes, and magnifications. The most critical consideration in choosing a pair is whether you find them comfortable to hold and use. Binoculars are usually described using two numbers (for example, 8 x 42) where the first number is the overall magnification and the second number a measure of the light-gathering power. 7, 8, or 10 magnification binoculars are by far the most useful for watching animals; the second number is less critical. Higher-power (and heavy) marine binoculars not good for field use, as they are hard to hold and carry.

If you are thinking about purchasing a new pair of binoculars for this trip, I suggest reading the review article by my colleagues at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, available at

http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Publications/LivingBird/Winter2005/Age_Binos.html You can also find this article easily by typing “ornithology binoculars” into a Google search. Although this review is oriented towards bird-watchers, it is equally relevant to the general animal viewing that we will enjoy in the Galapagos.

Camera. No specific recommendations here, except to suggest that you bring ample memory cards or other storage devices. I’m not a fanatical photographer myself, but nonetheless I burned through more than 50 rolls of film (in the pre-digital days) on my first trip to the archipelago. It is an indescribably photogenic place!

Field Guild to the Wildlife. The best guide is *Wildlife of the Galapagos* by J. Fitter and others, published by Princeton University Press. This guide is available in most large bookstores and on Amazon. The wildlife of the Galapagos is not so diverse that it requires a lot of pre-trip studying...but a short review in advance will help you recognize most of the animals on sight and thereby increase your enjoyment of the trip. Pop quiz: how do you tell the difference between a blue-footed and a red-footed booby?

FUN BACKGROUND READING ON THE GALAPAGOS

1. *The Beak of the Finch: A Story of Evolution in Our Time*. Author: Jonathan Weiner. This popular-science account of research on Darwin’s Finches won the Pulitzer Prize for non-fiction in 1995. The research program this book describes is still active and remains the most famous and well regarded field study in all of evolutionary biology. On our trip we will sail around the tiny Isla Daphne where this research has been conducted (and where I lived myself as a researcher), and we will have ample opportunity to watch and compare the various species of finches on the Galapagos. If you read just one book in advance of the trip, this is the one to choose (in terms of both reading pleasure and content). It is widely available in chain bookstores and on Amazon.
2. *Evolution’s Workshop: God and Science on the Galapagos Islands*. Author: Edward Larson. Basic Books, 2002. This well-regarded book treats the history of exploration of the Galapagos and how it has influenced scientific and popular thinking about the archipelago, evolution, and science in general. Available on Amazon.
3. *Galapagos, A Natural History*. Author: Michael H. Jackson. A general review of the natural history of the islands and their animals and plants. Probably not a book to read cover-to-cover, but a good source for tidbits of information across a wide range of topics and subjects.

FOR MORE SERIOUS HISTORY BUFFS:

4. *Galapagos: Worlds End*. Author: William Beebe. First published in the 1920s and widely available (and still in print: both used and new copies are on Amazon). A classic account of a 1923 scientific expedition to the Galapagos aboard a steam yacht. A light read that is evocative of its time and place.
5. *The Voyage of the Beagle*. Author: Charles Darwin. Okay, so Darwin was not the ideal shipmate: aboard the Beagle he was constantly seasick and he spent as much time as possible ashore. But he did make it through a global circumnavigation, and his one chapter on the Galapagos is justifiably famous for hinting at his later insights about evolution. The full *Voyage* is available from any large bookstore, but the complete text is also online at: <http://www.literature.org/authors/darwin-charles/the-voyage-of-the-beagle/> which provides a simple way to read the one short chapter on Darwin's visit to the Galapagos (chapter 17).
6. Melville, Dampier, and many others. Many famous and not-so-famous visitors to the Galapagos have written compelling accounts of their travels. In looking for a web source for Hermann Melville's serialized account of his visit in 1854, I stumbled across a site that has collected many of these more obscure texts. Check out <http://www.galapagos.to/TEXTS/INDEX.HTM> if you are interested in historical accounts ranging from those of Melville, to the piratical explorer William Dampier in the late 1600s, to a sensationalized 1959 article entitled "The Lust-Mad Emperess of Galapagos."

FOR YOU FANS OF HARD-CORE SCIENCE:

7. *How and Why Species Multiply: The Radiation of Darwin's Finches*. Authors: Peter and Rosemary Grant, Princeton University Press, 2007. The Grants, a husband and wife team, are the scientists who have led the long-term research popularized in the book *The Beak of the Finch*. This more recent book by the Grants themselves is a readable account of their research program and its more general relevance to the big questions in the field of evolutionary biology.