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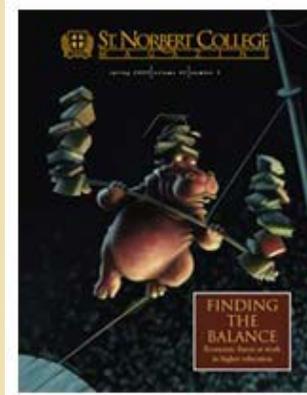
Student research goes Galapagos

"I think that everybody should go to the Galapagos at least once in their life," says **Jaime Beine '10**. "There is a whole other world out there," adds **Samantha Christian '11**, her yellow field book resting in her lap.

The two students were part of a J-term course on the archipelago off Ecuador's coast, the islands where Charles Darwin first formulated the theory that would later appear in his "On the Origin of the Species."

"We basically followed in his footsteps," says Christian. Under the lead of **Tim Flood** (Geology) and his wife, Sally, a veterinarian, the students spent each day snorkeling and observing the flora and fauna. Two professors and two students from Macalester College joined their group.

Natural conditions in the Galapagos have hardly changed since Darwin explored the islands in the 1830s. In fact, the 10 St. Norbert students who traveled from island to island for eight days this January might even have seen a few of the



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An artist reflects on his recent work.

same animals as Darwin himself – the giant tortoises of the Galapagos live up to 200 years.

“As an educator I can’t think of a better laboratory,” says Flood, who has taken 10 trips with students since he started at the college.

It was a case of learning through observation, since visitors to the protected environments are not allowed to collect so much as a grain of sand. However, there was plenty to look at. Most animals are fearless due to the absence of natural predators, and so can be encountered at close range.

Beine, who lists the blue-footed boobies as one of her favorite among the birds she encountered, says the group saw a lot of extravagant displays. A bio-informatics major, Beine hopes to go into professional research after graduation.

Flood, who was a first-time visitor to the Galapagos himself, appreciated the mix in expertise among the group. “It’s what the liberal arts education is all about,” he says. “We had science majors and non-science folks contribute to the experience.”

The Galapagos group met once a week before the trip, read about 1,500 pages of natural history, and is following up on the experience with a research proposal and a reflection paper. A presentation to campus on their experiences coincided with Darwin’s 200th birthday and led to coverage on a local TV news station.

Embarking on this trip in 2009, the Year of Darwin, challenged the students to view their experience in the context of the history of science, and to recognize that despite the vast scope of research today, there are still places that remain nearly untouched. “The Galapagos don’t have much human impact,” reflects Beine. “They can stand still.”

Office of Communications

Phone: (920) 403-3557

Fax: (920) 403-4010

E-mail:

communications@snc.edu



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