

RIT groups flock to the

Galapagos

Following Darwin's trail

Robert Rothman has built a bridge from RIT to the Galapagos Islands.

Rothman, professor of biology, first visited the islands in 1989. He has returned 19 times to the Pacific archipelago 600 miles off the coast of Ecuador, leading a total of about 200 RIT students, parents, faculty, alumni and friends to the islands where Charles Darwin began to develop his theory of natural selection.

Usually, the group sets out in June, as they did this year. He has special plans for 2009. That year marks the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth, and the 150th anniversary of the publication of his seminal work, *Origin of Species*.

"I'm planning a trip for February 2009, in addition to the June trip," says Rothman. "It will give us the opportunity to see the islands in a different season, and, of course, it's a chance for more people to go."

Rothman's groups are small – no more than 15, a size that he feels allows a richer experience for participants. They have a comfortable vessel to themselves and choose their own itinerary.

Each trip is different, but Rothman's groups have snorkeled with penguins and marine iguanas, observed flightless cormorants tending to their chicks, and ridden horses to the top of an active volcano. Few visitors go home without close-ups of giant tortoises and blue-footed boobies, but some of the islands' unique residents reveal themselves only to the patient observers. For example, there are 13 distinct Darwin finches, and they are difficult to identify. After 19 visits, Rothman has seen 11.

"We like to go slowly," says Rothman. "It's about watching."

To find out more about the trips, contact Rothman at 585-475-5215 or by e-mail at rhrsbi@rit.edu, or visit his Web site at Galapagos.rit.edu. He'll also be giving a slide presentation and talk at 10 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 10, during Brick City Homecoming.

Photos by Robert Rothman



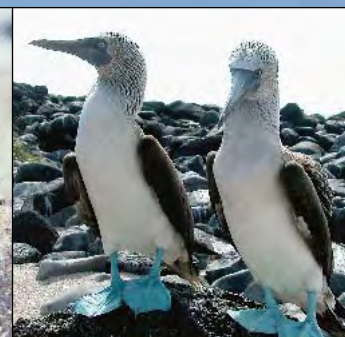
Biology Professor Robert Rothman gets a close look at a marine iguana during his 2002 trip to the islands. At right, a red-billed tropic bird in flight.



The RIT groups travel aboard small, well-equipped vessels.



A sea lion poses for Kate Carlough '06 (biotechnology) and Mike Klein '06 (biotechnology).





Anna Ludi '04 stops to look at a frigate bird.



Student Mark McCreary, left, and Brad Tebbets '06 get close-up shots of a group of marine iguanas.



The 1995 group poses with a gathering of the famed Galapagos tortoises.

Page 21: Fifth-year biotechnology student Michael Klein gets a great shot of a waved albatross taking flight.

From left, below, are: marine iguana, blue-footed boobies, Galapagos penguins, flightless cormorants, Sally Lightfoot crab, marine iguanas.

