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PHOTOGRAPHY

Underwater Adventure In Cold Spring Harbor

Photo exhibit goes below sea level to document Darwin's legendary hangout



Photo by © Eco-Photo Explorers

In "Galapagos: Darwin's Enchanted Isles" at the Cold Spring Harbor library, the Eco-Photo Explorers will bring their guests on a guided photo tour of the Galapagos Islands. Above is Bartolome Island, Galapagos.

Divers travel to Darwin Island to see some of the marine life in the Galapagos Islands.

By Danny Schrafel

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Patrons of the Cold Spring Harbor Public Library will soon have the opportunity to take a closer look at one of the planet's most ecologically unique and influential regions.

In "Galapagos: Darwin's Enchanted Isles," the Eco-Photo Explorers will bring their guests on a guided tour of the Galapagos Islands, where scientist Charles Darwin obtained the first seeds of his groundbreaking and controversial theory of evolution.

Last summer, Christopher Weaver of Eco-Photo Explorers made his inaugural trip to the islands. He said he'd been trying to get to Galapagos for several years and has already done a fair bit of cold water diving and photography.

The volcanic Galapagos archipelago, located 600 miles off the west coast of equatorial South America, hosted Darwin for five weeks.

"When you go back to Charles Darwin going there, it was a very secluded island," Weaver said. "You'll have marine and animal life that you're not going to see anywhere else because of isolation and a lack of cross breeding...they're all different, and the animals that are there adapt to those different conditions."

The whole story, however, takes place both above and below sea level. While many people come to see the Galapagos tortoises, equatorial penguins and marine iguanas, there's another ecosystem equally as fascinating below sea level, including hammerhead, Galapagos and whale sharks, manta and eagle rays, sea lions and dolphins.

"[Divers] want to go to Darwin and Wolf Islands," Weaver said. "They're probably two of best places in the world to go to see some of the marine life."

Today, the Islands are considerably less secluded, consisting of Ecuadorian national parks, towns and scientific research stations. The island has become a tourist haven for a wide variety of people, Weaver noted, a fact he discovered upon his first visit. While he said he was expecting wild, untouched seclusion, he found something a bit different.

"I never really realized how built-up some of the places are," Weaver said. "I was pretty surprised that they've got some pretty bustling populated areas. I had a different vision of what it would look like."

Regardless of the recent development push, Weaver said the islands offer a



Photo by © Eco-Photo Explorers

truly unique experience.

"Every island could be slightly different," he said. "They're all volcanic, but in some areas, you'll find a desert, all the way up to a tropical area. You could go to a specific island group, come ashore, and it looks like something from Mars. The islands themselves are spectacular."

"Galapagos: Darwin's Enchanted Isles" will be presented Saturday, Sept. 6 at 2 p.m. To register, call the Cold Spring Harbor Library at 631-692-6820 or visit their website at www.cshlibrary.org.