



## The Galapagos

### *Studying the marine iguanas*

David Robinson

Some of the most remarkable creatures encountered by Darwin on the Galapagos were its iguana's. He was particularly fascinated by the marine variety though it was far from flattering. Darwin wrote that they were hideous looking creatures of a dirty black colour, stupid, and sluggish in their movements. He did concede however, that they were strong and graceful swimmers.

Bearing in mind how much time they spent in the water, Darwin was surprised to find that marine Iguana's didn't eat fish. He dissected several creatures, and found that their stomachs were full of seaweed.

Darwin noticed that the water was too cold for marine iguana's to stay in for a long time. When they weren't feeding he observed them clinging to the rocks above the shoreline, basking in the sun. After the cold sea, these reptiles craved warmth.

Darwin was also interested in their terrestrial cousins, although again he wasn't very complimentary about their appearance. He called them 'small ugly animals' with a singularly stupid appearance, and lazy half torpid movements.

Today they're still plentiful on some islands. But marine iguanas are particularly vulnerable to changes in sea temperate. Which can have a dramatic effect on the availability of seaweed.