

May 29, 2013 | By Mario Aguilera

Public Lecture at Scripps Explores Darwin's Deep Connection to the Ocean

Ritter Fellowship winner Alistair Sponsel to give free public lecture on June 14 at 11 a.m.



*Alistair
Sponsel*

An expert on the history of science and exploration will discuss the early days of Charles Darwin's storied career and how the ocean played an instrumental role in its launch during a public presentation at Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego.

Alistair Sponsel, an assistant professor of history at Vanderbilt University, will present a free public lecture on June 14 at 11 a.m. at the Robert Paine Scripps Forum for Science, Society and the Environment (Scripps Seaside Forum) on the Scripps Oceanography campus (8610 Kennel Way, La Jolla, CA 92037). Seating is available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Sponsel's lecture, "How Studying the Ocean Launched Charles Darwin's Scientific Career," is part of his recognition as the 2013 recipient of Scripps's William E. and Mary B. Ritter

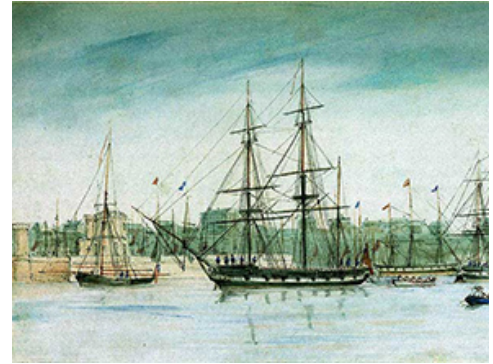
Memorial Fellowship, which honors a scholar of marine science history and includes research funds and an honorarium. The Ritter Fellowship was created through an endowment from Robert Cody, nephew of Scripps Institution of Oceanography's founding director, William Ritter, and the fellowship is named for Ritter and his wife, Mary.

The Ritter Memorial Fellowship honors "historians, scientists, or other scholars whose research enlarges and deepens the understanding of the history of earth, ocean, and atmospheric sciences." The award recognizes Ritter's early efforts in positioning Scripps as a leader in observing and studying the oceans for the benefit of science and society. Scripps has maintained a position as a leader in long-term global innovation, both in developing new tools for making

The British naval surveying ship H.M.S. Beagle by Owen S

observations as well as the theories that provide the framework for interpreting these observations. Such innovations provide widespread benefits to society, both in basic research as well as technological developments for broad usage.

Charles Darwin's prominence in science is rooted in his 1831-1836 voyage around the world on the British naval surveying ship H.M.S. *Beagle*.



“What exactly was the opportunity that the voyage presented to a young and ambitious naturalist?” Sponsel asks. “Darwin’s manuscript notes from the voyage indicate that sea life and the nature of the sea floor were objects of continuous fascination. Many of the famous insights he later made on dry land were a direct consequence of Darwin’s ability to envision present and past undersea worlds like no naturalist before him.”

Sponsel believes that Darwin’s companionship with *Beagle*’s survey officers led the young scientist to develop an innovative approach to studying marine biology and geology that set him apart from his contemporaries.



In addition to studying Charles Darwin’s early career, Sponsel researches the history of coral reef science. Prior to his current position at Vanderbilt University, he managed the U.S. branch of the Darwin Correspondence Project and was a postdoctoral fellow and lecturer in the history of science at Harvard University. He received his Ph.D. in the history of science from Princeton University and was a Smithsonian Institution postdoctoral fellow. Sponsel’s research has earned honors from the History of Science Society and the Geological Society of America.

Sponsel’s upcoming book, tentatively titled “Darwin’s First Theory,” will be published in 2014 by the University of Chicago Press.

UC San Diego’s [Studio Ten 300](http://studio.ten300.com) offers radio and television connections for media interviews with our faculty, which can be coordinated via studio@ucsd.edu. To connect with a UC San Diego faculty expert on relevant issues and trending news stories, visit <https://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/media-resources/faculty-experts>.