



2-24-2023

## Collins '02 Leads High School Research Trip to Galápagos Islands with Carstens '02

Chris Francis  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

---

### Recommended Citation

Francis, Chris, "Collins '02 Leads High School Research Trip to Galápagos Islands with Carstens '02" (2023). *News and Events*. 4267.  
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/4267>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@iwu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@iwu.edu).

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.



# Collins '02 Leads High School Research Trip to Galápagos Islands with Carstens '02

Feb. 24, 2023

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Scott Collins '02 and Kosha (Baxi) Carstens '02 first met when they were two years old, and have stayed in touch since their shared college days. This July 2023, Carstens will be joining Collins' high school biology class as they take a nine-day trip to do original research and conservation work on the Galápagos Islands.

Collins and Carstens both came to Illinois Wesleyan University as biology majors, where Carstens jokes she was “not sure what I would have done or if I would have made it out alive without Scott next to me.” In Collins' case, he initially planned to become a doctor, but left IWU determined to become like the teachers who had inspired him.

“Dr. (Thomas) Griffiths was a professor of mine, and I loved the way he taught. He made me realize that I don't have to be in an operating room to help people,” Collins said. It also helped that Collins' mother, Louise (Stephens) Collins '69, was a music education alumna who still teaches today.

Collins became a biology teacher at Lemont (Ill.) High School, where he has been since graduating from IWU, and where he saw an opportunity to enhance what he had initially experienced as a high schooler in Ottawa, Illinois.

“We had student trips to England and France. It was a formative experience to see other cultures and get out of the small-town bubble, —which I think there's also a bubble around the suburbs. But it was a sightseeing trip,” Collins says. “It wasn't until 2017 that I had enough courage to start doing my own trips.”

As a biology teacher, Collins was most interested in taking his students deep into nature. He wanted them to get their hands dirty experiencing a taste of the extended field work that they might perform as a biologist, and he wanted to make sure that they did something to help preserve the nature they were engaging with.

His first trip was to Yellowstone National Park, where Collins and four of his students “did a vegetation depletion survey, literally counting blades of grass in the middle of a vast valley with bison walking up to us,” Collins said. “We were informing their decision about how many bison to cull that year, (and) they culled a little bit fewer than planned because of the data we found.”



Scott Collins '02, a biology teacher at Lemont High School, has led numerous educational trips for his students across the globe with plans to travel to the Galápagos Islands in July, along with fellow scientist and Titan Kosha Carstens '02.



A high school student of Scott Collins '02 swims with sharks during an educational trip.

“You would never know that there are people who do that unless you see it for yourself. I had a student who was dead set on dental school, but then she switched to going to school in Montana to become a park ranger,” he said.

Meanwhile, Carstens had earned her master's in zoology and evolutionary biology from Michigan State University. She pursued a career in the pharmaceutical industry and got her second master's in bioethics and

health policy from Loyola University, but she was jokingly jealous of Collins' class trips.

“I have been begging him to let me come to every trip he's gone on,” Carstens said. “Then he called me and said ‘wanna come to the Galápagos?’ I nearly fainted.”

Since 2017, Collins had chosen destinations based on what his students were interested in and what was feasible for a week or so of travel. Trips included surveying invasive fish species and uncovering an ancient city in Maui, measuring glacial melt and exploring land exposed by melting ice for the first time in recorded history in Alaska, and planting coral and exploring shipwrecks off the coast of Honduras. But the Galápagos Islands – which famously inspired Darwin's theory of evolution – were always a frustratingly difficult dream for Collins. Getting to the remote Pacific islands is a two-day process in itself. But, by finding a company that could arrange the trip to fit their needs, Collins is finally making it happen this July.

The service-research will include 15 of Collins' students replenishing the island's biodiversity by planting endemic flora and traveling between the four main islands of the Galápagos archipelago, which features highland forests, deserts, volcanos, coral reefs and all the other microcosmic ecosystems that make the islands a pilgrimage for evolutionary biologists — which is why it is the perfect trip for Carstens to join.

“I invited her to come as our resident biologist,” Collins said. “She did a lot of evolutionary research on bats, so she will be a great resource for the students.” She will be among the educational chaperones that also include two of Collins' former students returning for the trip and a Lemont High School art teacher providing lessons on sketching and photographing nature.

“Both Scott and I are going to cry about a thousand times, I bet. It's hallowed land for scientists like us,” Carstens said.

*By Chris Francis*