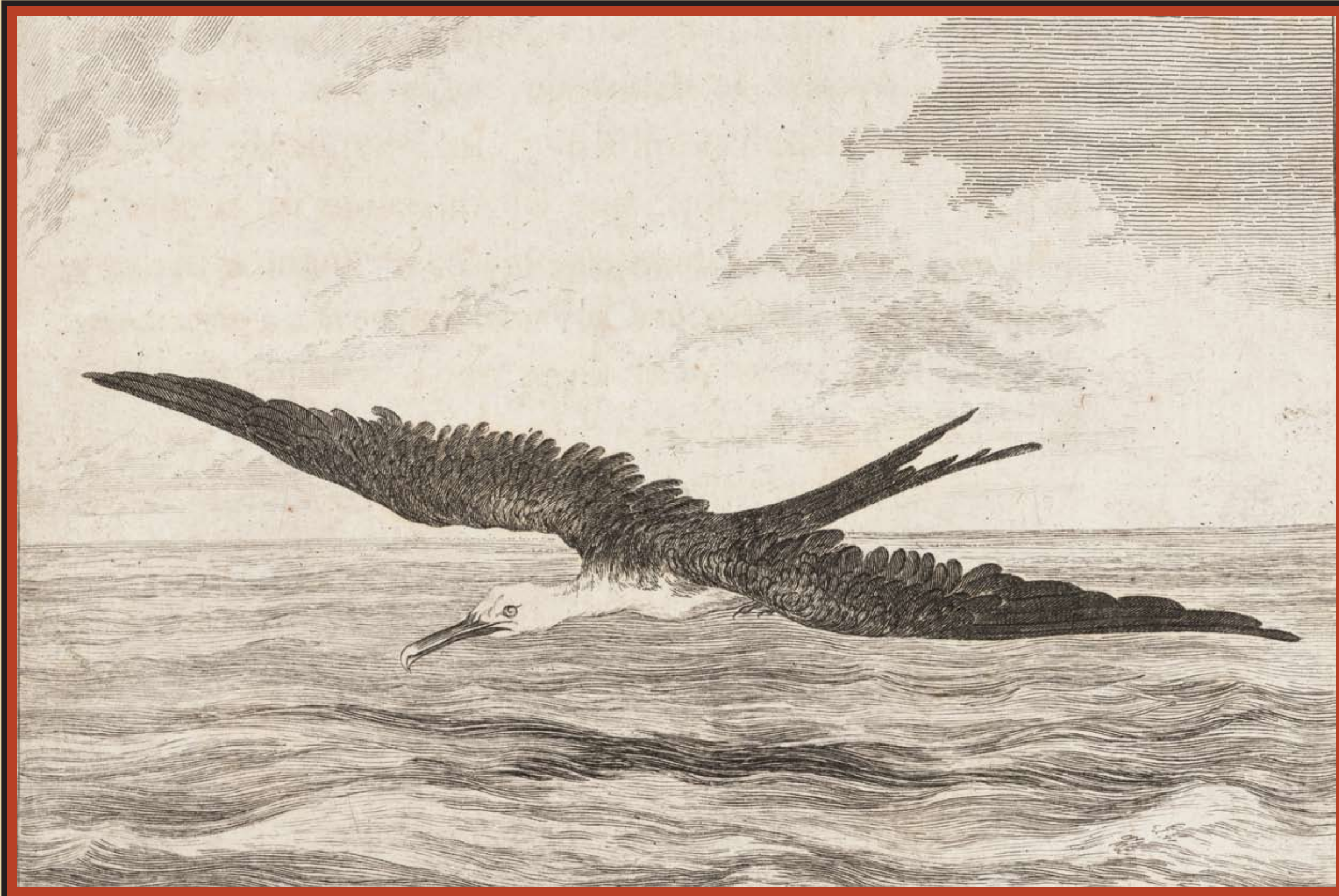
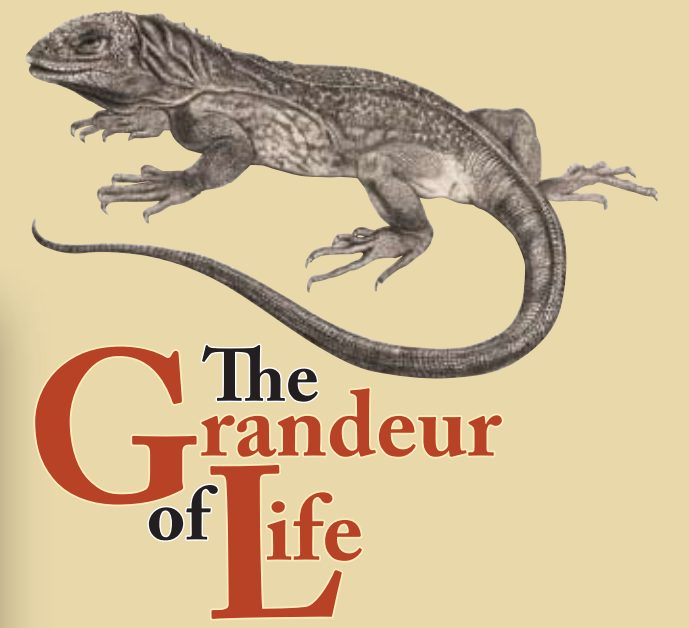


Designing Birds



Many naturalists in the nineteenth century believed that animals were perfectly adapted to their environment by design. Darwin had trouble with this, because animals often appeared to be less than perfectly suited to their habitat. Birds' feet were a case in point. For example, the Campo flicker, a woodpecker observed in Chile, has the climbing feet of other woodpeckers, but Darwin never saw it climb a tree. The frigate bird has webbed feet, but it never swims. The land rail has the same feet as most other rails, which are perfect for marshes, and yet the land rail never goes near swampy land. Darwin believed that perhaps these traits were not designed, but rather the result of inheritance, the retention of certain traits even though they are no longer useful in a changed environment.



Top: Frigate Bird, from Georges Buffon, Histoire Naturelle, 1749-1804.

Above: Land rail, from John Gould, The Birds of Europe, 1837.

Left: Campo flicker, from Louis Duperrey, Voyage autour du monde... sur la corvette La Coquille, 1825-30.

