

**PROJECT REPORT
GALAPAGOS ISLANDS VOLUNTEER EXPEDITION
November 4-14, 2015**

Executive Summary



November 2015 Galapagos Volunteers at Campo Duro, Isabela Island

Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP) organized and led our second volunteer expedition to the Galapagos Islands in partnership with REI Adventures, visiting the Islands of San Cristóbal and Isabella on November 4-14, 2015.

ConservationVIP provided 14 volunteers, including Trip Leader John Hollinrake and Assistant Trip Leader Mark Hardgrove. Andres de la Torres, our local guide from Ecuador Adventures, also assisted us.

Total Volunteer Hours Contributed: 644

Over 644 hours of work was donated to Galapagos Islands in less than a two-week period. On the island of Isabella the National Park has 15 employees. ConservationVIP nearly doubled their staff size with one volunteer team.

The following training, education, data collection and other volunteer work were completed during this expedition: More than 644 volunteer hours were dedicated to the data collection, project completion, trash collection along hiking trails and beach cleanups. Volunteer Hours also include the two days of project work demolishing a rooster pen to use the wire mesh for concrete reinforcement and constructing a concrete lined tortoise pond at Campo Duro.

ConservationVIP volunteers got along fantastically, and integrated well with the Marine Science Center staff and students, other visitors, Galapagos residents, and folks we met on the islands while doing our work. The volunteers took the opportunity to use all protective equipment, data collection equipment, tools and gear during the course of the surveys and project work. REI donated seven Go Pro Hero 3+ underwater cameras for the Galapagos project. ConservationVIP purchased LED-viewing monitors for the seven Go Pro cameras, which allowed our team of volunteers to use photography equipment which meets the standards of the Galapagos Science Center and the requirements of the Sea Turtle documentation project.

The weather was mostly sunny with mild trade winds and some rain during our work days. The temperatures were also good and were in the mid 80's in the day time and mid 70's at night. Rain gear was not required as we had refreshing occasional rains and few showers other days. ConservationVIP Volunteers worked through the rain showers, as the warm rains felt good to the folks who were soaked from sweating already.



Volunteers at Puerto Chico Beach, Santa Cruz Island

Detailed Trip Report

Day 1: Casa Opuntia, our hotel on San Cristóbal Island.

Trip Leaders and our Local Guide Andres de la Torre conducted an in depth orientation and briefing at the hotel beginning at 2:00 PM. The remainder of the afternoon was spent with volunteers fitting snorkelling gear to be used for the sea turtle photo survey.

Day 2: We left Casa Opuntia by bus for an island orientation and to snorkel and photograph sea turtles at Playa Puerto Chico. Upon arrival it was determined that wave action and currents were too strong for conducting a sea turtle census, so we then learned about the terrestrial, pelagic, and shorebird populations, and marine mammals while hiking the nature trail and surrounding beach areas. Volunteers picked up trash along the trail and in the beach areas. Next we visited the Galapaguera reserve. La Galapaguera is the nearby breeding station and sanctuary for giant tortoises where we learned about the captive breeding programs and some of the work necessary and how we could help.

In the afternoon we hiked from Casa Opuntia to the Interpretive Center where we learned about the natural history of the Galapagos Islands. We continued our hike and conducted our turtle survey snorkelling and photographing sea turtles inside Darwin Bay. Leaving Darwin Bay we hiked to the Darwin statue and then hiked down to Corolla Beach where we conducted our second turtle survey.

When Dr. Judith Denkinger, Marine Biologist from the Galapagos Science Center, University of San Francisco de Quito arrived on San Cristobal she provided an orientation for our volunteer project with sea turtles. ConservationVIP is participating in a long term study and census of sea turtles as part of ongoing research on the impacts of increased boat traffic on sea turtles being conducted by Dr. Denkinger.

We also viewed a video developed by the Science Center on the impacts of plastics to the environment and marine life and then we watched the sunset from the top floor of the Science Center.

Days 3 – 4: Our Volunteers conducted a sea turtle census.

Our project for the next two days consisted of assisting researchers with a sea turtle census. We photographed turtles while snorkelling, to identify the individuals by their unique markings, patterns and any injuries, and provide other on-shore assistance with the survey. Our volunteers also cleaned the beach areas visited during our data collection.

Our first day of the sea turtle research project involved taking two boats to the research site surrounding Kicker Rock, and surface snorkelling in water too deep to touch or see the ocean bottom. Sea turtles were observed and were photographed for later identification. Our volunteers were accompanied by Dr. Denkinger, who provided advice and additional education about the sea turtle population in the area.

Our second day performing the sea turtle research project consisted of snorkelling at Loberia Beach, a popular beach with locals and tourists located approximately one mile from Puerto Baquerizo Moreno. This area is known for its resident population of sea turtles. Several sea turtles were observed and photographed by the volunteers for later identification.



Sea Turtles are identified by the patterns on their faces, and compared with a database maintained marine biologist Dr. Judith Denkinger.

Day 5: Air shuttle in two groups from San Cristobal to Isla Isabela hotel/airport transfer via truck/taxi. The first group of 7 passengers flew on EMETEBE at 6:30 and the second group flew on the EMETEBE 8:30 flight with 8 passengers. All luggage went with passengers and arrived on time.

We spent our first two nights on Isla Isabela at Casa Marita, in the village of Puerto Villamil. Those who arrived on the first shuttle had time to explore the nearby coastline. In the afternoon we visited the Centro de Crianza, the Giant Tortoise Center of Isabela, and learned about the National Park's captive breeding program. The Center houses several sub-species of tortoises endemic to Isla Isabela. We saw both hatchlings and the older breeding animals in action.

Day 6: In the morning we took a bus to the marina and boarded our boat to the islet of Tintoreras. We saw sea lions, sea turtles, marine iguanas and penguins. Following our visit to Tintoreras, we snorkelled in a bay adjacent to the marina, where we observed and photographed more sea turtles. The photos will be submitted to Dr. Denkinger to enable her to expand her census area to include the area near the Puerto Villamil marina. In the afternoon we returned back to the shore and rode mountain bikes approximately 12 miles round trip to the Wall of Tears. This wall, towering 65 feet in places, was constructed in the 1940's by convicts when Isabela was a penal colony. We stopped numerous times for giant tortoise sightings, beautiful sunsets at Playa Amour and climbed an observation tower for a bird's eye view of Isabella Island.



Volunteers examining Giant Tortoises at National Park Breeding Center, Isabela

Day 7-9: Travelled by open bus to Campo Duro where we had lunch and settled into our tents, which had been previously set up for us by the Camp staff. Campo Duro is an Eco-Camp located in the foothills of the Sierra Negra Volcano. Campo Duro is an enchanting location set in the cooler lush, tropical highlands. We enjoyed the fully equipped sleeping tents with mattresses with bedding, outdoor private showers, bathrooms with flush toilets, and a thatched roof restaurant and bar. Most of the fruits and vegetables served are grown organically in the on-site gardens and our food was cooked in wood fired stone ovens.



Project site with Giant Tortoise awaiting the commencement of pond project, Campo Duro

Campo Duro works in concert with Galapagos National Park, providing a reserve to help raise tortoises from 3 to 8 years old. After lunch on our first afternoon we attended an orientation to the camp and examined our projects at Campo Duro. Our volunteers wanted to start work that afternoon, a day early, so we began constructing special tools, organized the equipment and got setup for the next days' work. After two full days of hard work which consisted of excavating soils and excavating footings we went to work mixing cement by hand and placing it in the new pond area. 14 Volunteers mixed 5 cubic yards of volcanic gravel with 15 bags of cement which was used to form the bottom and sides of the pond. Large rocks were placed in a footing and cemented in around the edge of the pond to form a footing and protective edge. Water was carried in 5 gallon buckets over 100 ft. to mix the cement. After two full days of work we completed the large concrete pond. We also transplanted 12 large native shrubs and planted them around the edges of the new pond. That evening we had a campfire, made fresh local marmalade (on the campfire) and we learned more about the "Enchanted Islands" called The Galapagos.



15 x 90 lbs. of cement bags were mixed by hand with gravel and water to create the concrete pond



Completed pond ready for rain to fill and Giant Tortoises to enjoy.

Day 10: Our Volunteers travelled by bus to the Sierra Negra Ranger station where we hiked up the Sierra Negra trail and were treated for a view of Sierra Negra volcano. The direct route trail has been closed due to lack of maintenance and unsafe conditions. Park visitors are now forced to access the Sierra Negra via a wide off camber muddy trail which is heavily used, and during our 4 hour hike, five different tour groups of approximately 20 people each were seen on the trail. This new access trail was evaluated by the trip leaders for repair and erosion control hopefully to be performed by future volunteers from this organization. We hiked approximately 5 miles up the trail to see the caldera rim, returning to the Ranger Station for our transport back to Casa Marita in Puerto Villamil for our last evening together. Volunteers cleaned up trash along the 5 mile trail hike. After lunch we returned to our hotel in Puerto Villamil for one last evening in the Galapagos and a farewell dinner.

Day 11: Taxi Transfer from Casa Marita to Airport. First group of 7 passengers flew EMETEBE from Isabella to Baltra at 7:30 and the second group followed flying 8 passengers on EMETEBE on the 9:30 flight from Isabella to Baltra where our volunteers all said our goodbyes and boarded their flights home.



Social Interaction: The team of volunteers worked and “played” extremely well together and friendships were quickly formed. At the end of each day an EQ (Emotional Quotient) rating was taken to determine the overall spirit of the group. We all ate breakfast, lunch and dinner together each day and we all enjoyed each other’s company.

Safety: We started each day and each new project with safety briefings and safety reminders and we all worked together to watch each other for dehydration, safe tool use, use of protective equipment and safe work practices. No incidents or accidents were reported during the work projects or sea turtle project thanks to the good work of our Leadership Team and Volunteers. One participant did have a near miss in his hotel room at Casa Marita on the last day. Apparently too much pressure was applied to the pedestal sink in his bathroom and it was pulled away from the wall and broke on the tile floor.

The team readily and cheerfully adopted all safety guidelines for tool usage and tool transport. All personnel were required to wear safety gear while working on the pond. Volunteers cordially and occasionally reminded everyone to adhere to all safety guidelines throughout the workday.

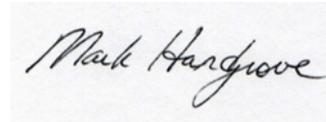
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Our final evening was spent together at our farewell and thank you dinner at Casa Marita; an evening that most will remember with special people, in a special place with lasting memories and friendships.



John Hollinrake, Director



Mark Hardgrove, Director

Conservation Volunteers International Program