



## PROJECT REPORT GALAPAGOS ISLANDS VOLUNTEER EXPEDITION December 1 -11, 2014

### Executive Summary



Conservation Volunteers International Program (Conservation VIP) organized and led our first volunteer expedition to the Galapagos Islands, with all 12 of the participants being former volunteers with Conservation Volunteers International Program. The trip visited the Islands of San Cristóbal and Isabella on Dec 1 through Dec 11, 2014.

Conservation VIP provided 14 volunteers, including Trip Leader John Hollinrake, and Assistant Trip Leader Barbara Kennedy. We were also assisted by Andres de la Torres, a local guide from Ecuador Adventure.

### Detailed Trip Report

**Day 1:** Hostel Pimampiro, 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 1:00 PM. The remainder of the afternoon was spent with volunteers visiting the marina area of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno observing new born sea lion pups and seabirds.

**Day 2:** We left Hostel Pimampiro by bus for an island ride and to photograph sea lions and blue footed boobies at Playa Puerto Chico. Our local guide, Andres de la Torre conducted a nature walk with a discussion regarding how the various and marine mammals, terrestrial, pelagic, and shoreline bird populations have evolved in the Galapagos archipelago, while hiking the nature trail to the Puerto Chico beach. Numerous new-born sea lion pups were seen on the beach with their mothers, and one was seen with its umbilical cord still attached. Several blue footed boobies were seen and photographed on a point above the Puerto Chico bay. 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. The group cleaned boardwalk/trail and beach area.



In the afternoon we met with Dr. Judith Denkinger, Marine Biologist from the Galapagos Science Center, University of San Francisco de Quito, who provided an orientation for our volunteer project with sea turtles. We are participating in a survey 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, and graduate students at the University.

Following the orientation and briefing, one of Dr. Denkinger's graduate students gave a presentation on the problem of plastics in the sea, and now in sea birds and sea mammals. This presentation had a major impact on the volunteers, who vowed to reduce their use of plastics in the future. Following the presentation, Dr. Denkinger gave us a tour of the facilities and presented a program on how our data collection would be used and how our efforts will benefit sea turtle research in the Galapagos.



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

Our project for 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. Our volunteers were accompanied by Dr. Denkinger, who provided advice and additional education about the sea turtle population in the area. Several sea turtles were observed and several were photographed for later identification.

Our second day performing the sea turtle research project consisted of snorkelling in the morning 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. Numerous sea turtles were observed and photographed by the volunteers for later identification.





In the afternoon, the volunteers snorkelled at Carola Beach, approximately .5 mile west of the town of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno. Unfortunately, few turtles were seen, and conditions were too rough to satisfactorily photograph those turtles that were seen. Immediately thereafter, the volunteers hiked approximately 2 miles round trip to St. Stephen's Bay, the site of the landing of H.M.S. Beagle, and its naturalist, Charles Darwin, on September 15, 1835.



**Day 5:** Air shuttle in two groups to Isla Isabela hotel/airport transfer via truck/taxi. The first group of 8 passengers flew on AIR ZAB at 7:00 and the second group flew on the AIR ZAB at 7:30 flight with 7 passengers. All luggage went with passengers and arrived on time.

We spent our first two nights on Isla Isabela at Hotel Albemarle, in the village of Puerto Villamil. Following check-in, the volunteers used the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the town. 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, Galapagos penguins, and white tip sharks in a shallow inlet. Following our visit to Tintoreras, we snorkelled in a bay adjacent to the marina, where we observed and photographed several 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, birdlife, and climbed an observation tower for a bird's eye view of Isabella Island.

**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.



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 our orientation to the camp and to our projects at Campo Duro. Our volunteers worked two full days removing a large grove of non-native Papaya trees which were dropping fruit that the tortoises were eating. The tortoises were gaining too much weight from these fruits, and their health was in jeopardy. The volunteers also removed .5 acre of non-native grasses and weeds from one of the tortoise enclosures. On the second day, we worked clearing a garden area which was to be planted with crops for use as food in the Eco-Camp. The Eco-Camp is supported by its restaurant, and the camping fees. This income enables the owners to provide the habitat for the giant tortoises before they can be released into the wild. We also had a campfire, made fresh local marmalade (on the campfire) and we learned more about the "Enchanted Islands" called The Galapagos.

**Day 10:** Our Volunteers travelled by bus to the Sierra Negra Ranger station where we hiked up the Sierra Negra trail and were treated to a spectacular view. This trail is heavily used, with evidence of erosion and standing water on the trail tread, causing hikers to hike around the water and increase erosion. This trail was evaluated by the trip leaders for repair and erosion control to be performed by future volunteers from this organization. We hiked approximately 6 miles along the caldera rim, returning to the Ranger Station for our transport back to Hotel Casa Marita in Puerto Villamil for our last evening together. Volunteers cleaned up trash along the 6 mile trail hike.



**Day 11:** Taxi Transfer from Casa Marita to Airport. First group of 7 passengers flew AIR ZAB from Isabella to Baltra at 7:30 and the second group followed flying 8 passengers on AIR ZAB on the 8:30 flight from Isabella to Baltra where we all said our goodbyes and boarded our 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 trip thanks to the good work of our Leadership Team and Volunteers.

The team readily and cheerfully adopted all safety guidelines for tool usage and tool transport. Required safety gear was worn while working on the trails by all personnel. Volunteers cordially and occasionally reminded everyone to adhere to all safety guidelines throughout the work day.

## Summary

The Galapagos Islands trip led by Conservation Volunteers International Program was a success based upon our safety record, the data we collected, the important work we completed and the positive verbal feedback we received from our volunteers, the Owner and Manager of Campo Duro, and Dr. Judith Denkinger. We also completed the important data collection and work that we were asked to complete to help preserve the islands resources, beaches and trails.

Over 504 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. Conservation VIP nearly doubled their staff size with one volunteer team.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John Halliwell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Conservation Volunteers International Program