



PROJECT REPORT GALAPAGOS ISLANDS VOLUNTEER EXPEDITION March 16 - 26, 2015

Executive Summary



Conservation Volunteers International Program (Conservation VIP) organized and led our first volunteer expedition to the Galapagos Islands in partnership with REI Adventures, visiting the Islands of San Cristóbal and Isabella on March 16-26, 2015.

Conservation VIP provided 14 volunteers, including Trip Leaders John Hollinrake and Mark Hardgrove and videographer Peter Murphy. Peter accompanied the group to take video and photographs of our work, which will allow Conservation VIP to recruit future volunteers to help in the Galapagos Islands. We were also assisted by Andres de la Torres, a local guide from Ecuador Adventure.

The following training, education, data collection and other volunteer work were completed during this expedition: More than 504 volunteer hours were dedicated to sea turtle census data collection, tortoise habitat projects at Campo Duro, trash collection along hiking trails and beach cleanups. Trash collection and beach cleanups were completed on approximately 8.5 miles of trails and 0.7 miles of beach.

Conservation VIP 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.

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 to upper 80's in the day time and upper 70's at night. Rain gear was not required as we had refreshing occasional rains and few showers other days. Conservation VIP Volunteers worked through the rain showers as the warm rains felt good to the folks who were soaked from sweating already.

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 ride and to snorkel and photograph sea turtles at Playa Puerto Chico. Upon arrival it was determined that 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 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.

Conservation Volunteers International Program donated a Go Pro Hero waterproof digital camera to the University of San Francisco de Quito to replace a broken camera, to enable the graduate students to continue to photo survey of the sea turtles. Following the orientation and briefing, 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. Several sea turtles were observed eating jellyfish, 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 Lobería 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.

Day 5: Air shuttle in two groups to Isla Isabela hotel/airport transfer via truck/taxi. The first group of 7 passengers flew on EMETEBE at 7:30 and the second group flew on the EMETEBE 9:30 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, 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 four 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.

Days 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 thirty five 40 ft. tall trees, removing .5 acre of non-native grasses, planting .5 acre of native grasses and repairing 1700 ft. of chain link tortoise fencing, and installing 36 new posts.



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, and during our 4 hour hike, five different tour groups of approximately 20 people each were seen on the trail. 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 Casa Marita in Puerto Villamil for our last evening together. Volunteers cleaned up trash along the 6 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 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.

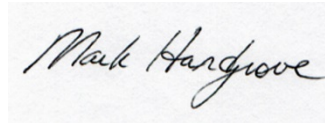
Total Volunteer Hours Contributed: 504

Over 500 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.



John Hollinrake, Director



Mark Hardgrove, Director

Conservation Volunteers International Program