



**PROJECT REPORT  
MACHU PICCHU SANCTUARY VOLUNTEER TRIP  
June 6 to June 15, 2018**



*ConservationVIP® Volunteers at Machu Picchu*

### **Executive Summary**

Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) organized and led a volunteer trip to the Historical Sanctuary of Machu Picchu in June 2018 in collaboration with Peru's Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Environment (National Service for Protected Area Management, SERNANP). The project was authorized by Sr. Luis Nieto Degregori, Director de la Dirección Desconcentrada de Cultura Cusco - Ministry of Culture, and by Mgt. Ernesto Escalante Valencia, Jefe del Santuario Histórico de

Machupicchu, SERNANP. The projects were discussed with anthropologist José Fernando Astete Victoria, Jefe del Parque Arqueológico Nacional de Machupicchu.

Twenty-two volunteers, including the two trip leaders, Janice Ballak and Karla Burnley, ConservationVIP® Board Member and Trip Leader respectively, and el Licenciado Santiago Carrasco Bellota, performed 506 total hours of volunteer work related to the following projects: The ConservationVIP® volunteers worked on the grounds at the Museo Manuel Chavez Ballon the first and last day and within Machu Picchu Sanctuary for two days in between. The first day of work at the Museo included clearing the invasive Falso Kion (false ginger) and other invasive plants. 18 bags of Falso Kion and other vegetation was cleared from along the road in an area measuring approximately 300 meters in length x 2 meters wide. Volunteers also cleared overhead growth along this same road distance, while others removed lichen from a stone wall near the museum. The group spent 132 hours on these activities.

The next two days the group worked at Machu Picchu Sanctuary along the Inti Punku (Sun Gate) trail, along the trail to the Inca bridge, and on Montaña Huchuypicchu removing *Melinis minutiflora*, colloquially known as *pasto gordura*. This grass is a native of Africa and has begun to out-compete native species of plants. *Melinis minutiflora* is particularly adapted to grow quickly in disturbed soils and in areas recently burned by wildfires. The officials at the Machu Picchu Sanctuary, especially biologist Julio Ochoa, want to eradicate this invasive species before it completely replaces native species. Volunteers contributed 264 hours over a two-day period to remove *Melinis minutiflora* from the trail to the Sun Gate, along the trail to the Inca Bridge, on Huchuypicchu, and on the terraces around Huchuypicchu. The volunteers, Santiago, and Julio Ochoa and his assistants Wilbur, Cristian, Julian and Octavio, pulled and collected 57 large sacks of *Melinis minutiflora*. By removing *Melinis minutiflora* from multiple locations within the Sanctuary and along the Inca Trail, ConservationVIP® volunteers provided a valuable service to the Ministry of Culture and SERNANP and contributed greatly to the preservation of the natural and cultural environment.

The final day of work the group returned to the Museo and removed trash along the river and the grounds of the museum's botanical garden and surrounding area. The group spent 110 hours filling 42 large trash bags as well as accumulating a large pile of metal and another large pile of plastic and wood debris. Biologist Julio Ochoa and his team were quite pleased with the progress we made in removing this unsightly and environmentally detrimental waste.

During the trip, ConservationVIP donated equipment to help with the management and protection of Machupicchu Sanctuary:

1. To Miguel Zamora Salas, Coordinador de Gestión of Parque Arqueológico Nacional Machupicchu, Ministry of Culture, ConservationVIP® donated a Tomahawk Collapsible Trap and Moultrie MCG-13297 A-251 Camera for use in monitoring animals in Machupicchu, and two Deluxe Belt Weather Kits which will be used to monitor fire risk at Machupicchu.

2. To Ernesto Escalante Valencia, Jefe del Santuario Histórico de Machupicchu, SERNANP, ConservationVIP® donated a DJI 3 Professional Quadcopter 4K UHD Drone. This drone will be used as part of SERNANP's growing effort to prepare for and fight fires in Machupicchu. In appreciation, Sr. Escalante generously donated Field Guides to the Birds of Machu Picchu for the volunteers.



3. In addition, volunteers donated used equipment including safety goggles, knee pads, and gloves for use in the field work.

Discussions were conducted with SERNANP and Ministry of Culture staff regarding the volunteers' activities, and future projects. Trip leaders will provide a copy of this report to Sr. Luis Nieto Degregori, Director Ministry of Culture-Cusco, Mgt. Ernesto Escalante Valencia, Jefe del Santuario Histórico de Machupicchu, SERNANP, to Administrator of Machupicchu, Miguel Zamora Salas, and to Anthropologist Fernando Astete, Jefe del P.A.N. Machupicchu.

## Detailed Trip Report

Volunteers met the Trip Leaders and Licenciado Santiago Carrasco Bellota in Cusco on the afternoon of June 6, and spent the next one and one-half days acclimatizing and learning about the complex and storied culture of Peru. They visited several important sites including the Machu Picchu Museum, Qorikancha, and Sacsayhuaman.

On June 8, volunteers traveled from Cusco by bus to Ollantaytambo, then by train to Machu Picchu Pueblo (Aguas Calientes). On the way, they stopped at Chinchero, an indigenous village and former palace of Emperor Topa Inca Yupanqui. There volunteers toured the church of Our Lady of Monserrat, Inca terraces and remains, a Huaca (Inca shrine), and experienced a short section of the Inca Trail. They visited a weaving cooperative where they learned about traditional Andean weaving techniques and ate a traditional Peruvian lunch before heading to Ollantaytambo to catch the train to Aguas Calientes.

The Volunteer group purchased entrance tickets to visit the Machu Picchu Sacred City on June 9. Many of the volunteers began their day by hiking up Huayna Picchu, while others visited different parts of the Sacred City. Later that day, the volunteers received extensive lectures by Lic. Santiago Carrasco Bellota about the Inca culture, and preservation issues related to increased visitation as they toured the Sacred City. They returned that evening to Aguas Calientes.



## Archaeological Site Volunteer Project Description

On June 10, the volunteers arrived at Museo Manuel Chavez Ballon where they were initially allowed a self-guided tour through the museum. After the tour the Park biologist Julio Ochoa provided an overview of the museum grounds and split the volunteers into four smaller groups. The volunteers, along with Julio Ochoa and his four assistants, began removing Falso Kion (false ginger), Tritonia, Alocasia Odora Oja and Impatiens from the grounds as well as some intrusive overhead growth, up the road on the side of the museum and near the Puente (bridge). False ginger is an invasive species that the group pulled out by the root and placed in the middle of the road so that it would be crushed by the worker transport vehicles. The other vegetation was bagged for later destruction by SERNANP.



*False Ginger laid in the Road*



*Volunteer crew taking pride in their work*

Volunteers also worked on cleaning and clearing the Inca wall near the museum.



*Inca Wall near the museum (photo credit: Ellen Watts)*



*Volunteers cleaning the Inca Wall near the museum*





The primary job for the ConservationVIP® volunteers during the trip was to remove an invasive species of grass, *Melinis minutiflora* (pasto gordura). This grass is a native of Africa and has begun to out-compete native species of plants. *Melinis minutiflora* is particularly adapted to grow quickly in disturbed soils and in areas recently burned by wildfires. The grass itself becomes a significant fire hazard once it cures. The officials at the Machu Picchu Sanctuary, especially biologist Julio Ochoa, want to eradicate this invasive species before it can completely replace native species.

June 11, the volunteers arrived at Machu Picchu and were led to the upper terraces where they received an orientation from Park biologist Julio Ochoa. The volunteers, along with Julio Ochoa and his four assistants, began removing pasto gordura along the trail from the Guard House to the Sun Gate and along the trail to the Inca Bridge. To eradicate pasto gordura, it is important to dig out the roots as well as remove the upper part of the plant, so this activity requires both digging and pulling.

On June 12, the volunteers worked behind the Huayna Picchu control station. The volunteers removed pasto gordura from the terraces on Huchuy Picchu.



*Volunteers removing pasto gordura at Huchuy Picchu*





*Volunteers removing pasto gordura at Huchuy Picchu*



*Tools used to dig roots of pasto gordura*

June 13, the volunteers returned to the Museo Manuel Chavez Ballon where they picked up trash along the Urubamba river bed near the museum and in and around the botanical garden.



*Volunteers with bags of trash picked up near museum*

Park Administrator Miguel Zamora Salas arranged for a government truck to transport volunteers from Aguas Calientes to and from the work sites in the Sanctuary and arranged for the volunteers' access at the entrance to the Sanctuary in order to perform their appointed tasks. Biologist Ochoa also arranged for the gates at the Huayna Picchu control station to remain open while the volunteers worked on the trails above.

## Return to Cusco

On Thursday, June 14, the ConservationVIP® group returned by train to Ollantaytambo, the estate of Inca Emperor Pachacuti in the Sacred Valley. There they toured the Sun Temple and other ruins. Afterwards, the group returned to Cusco by bus and enjoyed a farewell dinner.

The trip adjourned after breakfast on June 15 and most volunteers returned home. A few continued their explorations of Peru and South America.

## Acknowledgments

Conservation Volunteers International Program acknowledges and thanks the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Environment (National Service for Protected Area Management, SERNANP), and the community of Machu Picchu Pueblo for the privilege of volunteering in Peru. We particularly thank Mr. Miguel Zamora Salas, Coordinador de Gestión of Parque Arqueológico Nacional de Machupicchu, Ministry of Culture, for hosting and spending time with our Volunteers.

Great thanks are also reserved for biologist Julio Ochoa, and his staff, who spent much of the time working shoulder-to-shoulder with the volunteers.

Special thanks are extended to Licenciado Santiago Carrasco Bellota, who provided excellent historical and environmental information. His work with the Peruvian ministries prior to our arrival was critical in obtaining the necessary permits to carry out our work at the Sanctuary.



Last, but not least, ConservationVIP® thanks our hardworking June 2018 Machu Picchu volunteers, for their efforts to help conserve Machu Picchu for future generations.

Janice Ballak and Karla Burnley,  
Trip Leaders and Director of Conservation Volunteers International Program





*Volunteers at Ollantaytambo*