



PROJECT REPORT COSTA RICA VOLUNTEER TRIP October 23 - November 1, 2018



Executive Summary

Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) organized and led a volunteer trip to Punta Banco in the southwest corner of Costa Rica in October 2018. The 8 ConservationVIP® volunteers included two ConservationVIP® Board members, Trip Leaders Carol Clark and Paul Adams. The group was assisted by local partners Marco Fallas (Guide) and Fernando Sanchez (Driver and Assistant Guide) from Costa Rica Sun Tours, Stephanie Joseph (Volunteer Coordinator from ProParques), Wilberth Vargas Guerrero and Guillermo Baltodano Jiménez from Proyecto Conservación Tortugas (Punta Banco Community Association), and Eric Granados with the Quetzal Project.

The volunteers continued working on three main areas for volunteer work in the Central and South Pacific areas of Costa Rica: supporting ProParques, a non-profit and public utility organization, with maintenance and sustainability projects at two Costa Rican National Parks: Parque Nacional Carara and Parque Nacional Marino Ballena along

the central Pacific Coast; and the trip's primary work goal, the group's second project, was to aid in protecting the sea turtles that nest on the south Pacific Coast beaches of Punta Banco. These community projects were carried out under the auspices of the Proyecto Conservación Tortugas (Punta Banco Community Association), a local nonprofit community organization founded in 2004 to "improve the conservation conditions of sea turtles that inhabit and nest along the coastline of the Osa canton, particularly at Punta Banco beach."

At the two parks, ConservationVIP® volunteers donated 59.5 hours of work that consisted of a short orientation, briefing on tool safety, painting a 30-meter-long steel bridge, clearing .8 miles (1.3 km) of trail, and clean-up of 2.7 miles (4.4 km) of beach, resulting in 54 gallons of trash being collected by the group.

ConservationVIP® volunteers worked in the Punta Banco area from the early evening of October 25th until the morning of October 30th and contributed 207.5 hours of volunteer work in Punta Banco. Work in Punta Banco included building a natural sea barrier in front of a sea turtle nesting to stave off the eroding coastline, tearing down and reconstructing the bamboo shelter near the nursery in town, early morning and late evening sea turtle patrols to find and protect nesting turtles and the hatchery, releasing hatchlings, exhuming hatched eggs to determine survival rates, data collection to share with the community and the national sea turtle data bases, beach clean-up and completion of sand removal and restoration work on an additional turtle hatchery. The group also participated in beach and trail clean-up along the sea turtle nesting beaches, wildlife counting and recording at Tiskita Nature Reserve, contributing to the community and national data bases. Beach and trail trash collected contributed to 378 gallons being removed.

The third volunteer work project occurred as the group traveled back north towards San José. The main purpose of this project was to contribute to the protection and sustainability of the rare Quetzal bird in Parque Nacional Los Quetzales on Cerro de la Muerte. ConservationVIP® volunteers contributed 22.5 hours of work though working on downed and already cut Alderwood trees, building nests, sighting Quetzals, and transport and installation of two artificial nests to Quetzal nesting sites within the Quetzal Protection District.

Detailed Trip Report

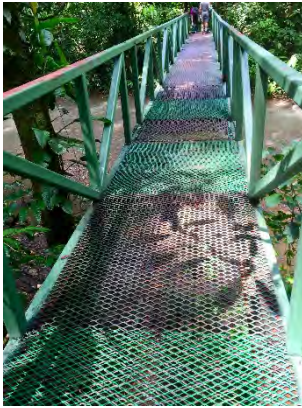
Tuesday, Day 1

Trip Leaders Carol Clark and Paul Adams met six volunteers at the Hotel La Rosa de America in San José, Costa Rica for a two-hour, detailed orientation and safety information briefing. Local guide, Marco "Tex" Fallas from Costa Rica Sun Tours provided a warm and engaging review of activities to come.

Wednesday, Day 2

Arriving at Parque Nacional Carara, Stephanie Joseph, from ProParques, guided the group through the project work painting the 30-meter steel bridge over the Quebrada

Bonita river and, when the typical rain showers began, clearing debris from approximately .8 miles (1.3 km) of the nature trail. ConservationVIP® volunteers donated 27.5 hours of work here.



Thursday, Day 3

Spending the night in Dominical allowed us to arrive early at Parque Nacional Marino Ballena for the next project with ProParques. Volunteer Coordinator, Stephanie, once again introduced the project. Unfortunately, minimal Ranger staffing at the park did not allow for a detailed work project. However, volunteers were fortunate to be able to walk out onto the famed “Whales Tail” as the tides were favorable. Along the stretch, volunteers diligently scanned for plastics and other trash and collected it along the way. Finding the beach relatively clean, 55 gallons of trash was collected along the four-hour roundtrip 2.7 miles (4.4 km) hike, totaling 32 hours of work.





Standing by the life-sized whale made entirely of found plastic bottles.

Arriving at Casa Marea Alta that evening, lodge owner Clyde Aspinall eagerly met the group at the gate. The group enjoyed dinner with discussions of the highlights of the next day's work and then retired to their shared rooms.

Friday, Day 4

The day began early, moving directly from the lodge to the Proyecto Conservación Tortugas (Punta Banco Community Association) Sea Turtle Hatchery where the group met with conservationists and community leaders Wilberth Vargas Guerrero and Guillermo Baltodano Jiménez. Here, two volunteers were able to carefully release 147 hatchlings to the sea as others helped keep an eye on them and formed a safe boundary around the hatchlings to protect them from people, dogs and perched vultures.



After breakfast and again after lunch, the group went to the end of the village to Rancho Burica where we worked on finishing the sand removal from the turtle nursery started by the ConservationVIP® September volunteer group. Another 18 cubic yards of old, previously nested sand was shoveled into wheel barrels and moved to the area by the beach and natural barriers. This time the work went quicker as several community

members joined in, adding to the volunteer efforts. Between the September and the October ConservationVIP® trips, volunteers hauled away 28 cubic yards of sand from the 21 quadrants/nests of this nursery.



October group members also cleared debris and collected plastics and trash. This trip revealed many fewer larger pieces of trash and plastic and more deposits of micro plastics than the September trip. This required intensive concentration in small areas along the beach, using garden rakes to enclose the tiny bits into larger piles for removal.



As some volunteers collected trash, others helped the Community Association by painting signs to be placed at the nursery for those who adopted a nest. 110 gallons of trash were collected, and 25 signs painted.

In the late afternoon, Clyde Aspinall arranged for a meeting between the turtle protection members of the community and our group. This was a wonderful meet and greet as everyone enjoyed a bite to eat and explained their roles and passions about their community. Later that evening, when the tides were lower, the group met with the community members and, after a short patrol, the first adult Olive Ridley sea turtle was found beginning nesting behavior and then laying her eggs. Throughout the patrol period the group walked and stood in heavy soaking tropical rain helping the community keep the sea turtle and the nest safe from local poachers as well as

supporting the community member that recovered the eggs for safe transport of 86 eggs to the hatchery for nesting. A total of 56 volunteer hours was worked on this day.

Saturday, Day 5.

A total of 447 turtle hatchlings from six nests collected earlier were released by the volunteers the first thing on this morning.

After Guillermo and Wilberth separated the hatchlings into separate nest pails and under their watchful eye, volunteers were allowed to carefully release them, making sure not to touch them.



Work then began removing the 70' x 30' failing bamboo structure used by the community as a shelter for turtle workers during inclement weather and located near one of the viable nurseries. Bamboo was freshly cut from the nearby mountain and brought to the shelter by several community members who lead the project. The area was cleaned of trash, the beams removed and repurposed as a natural sea wall barrier, and the tin roof addition was removed and cleaned up. 55 gallons of trash was collected.



At sunset the group went to the local cantina for appetizers, and some took lessons in the local “Balata” dance before dinner. Another evening of turtle patrol resulted in one Olive Ridley protected as she laid 127 eggs.

ConservationVIP® volunteers donated 68 group hours for the entire day and evening of work.

Sunday Day 6:

After a later breakfast the group continued working on the shelter, removing the rusted section of the roof. After a couple of hours of work on the shelter, the group assisted Guillermo and Wilberth with exhuming hatched egg shells in the nursery, cleaning the nest pit by scooping out the old sand and replacing with fresh. Others assisted with the actual count of the shells, collecting the data on numbers of “cáscaras” (total number of shells counted), “sin desarrollo” (no development), noting four different “estadios” (stages) of partial hatching, “pipped”, “muertos” (dead) or “vivo” (alive but not recovered in the initial hatching phase). Each volunteer helped exhume and count the egg shell remains, noting data in field notebooks. In the two-hour work period 11 nests were exhumed with a total of 869 cáscaras, thirty sin desarrollo, three estadio 1, five estadio 2, one estadio 3, eight estadio 4, nineteen pipped, four muertos and two vivos: a very high success rate indicating that of these 11 exhumations 797 hatchlings emerged from their shells in full development and were released before the exhumation and an additional two discovered alive during exhumation.



Throughout the day we collected 214 gallons of trash. The night patrol showed different turtle behavior as we observed one Olive Ridley make her way from the sea up the beach and nearly to the road as motorcycles and car light may have drawn her closer to that spot. Eventually, she turned around and went back to the sea. ConservationVIP® volunteers donated a total of 61 volunteer hours of work.

Monday, Day 7

Morning was free time for the volunteers with four of them joining Fernando and Wilberth on horseback along the beach and up to a waterfall. Others rested or went for a short drive into Pavones to see this world-renowned surf area. The afternoon was filled with a three-hour Bird and Mammal Count at Tiskita, a short walk from the lodge. Twenty-five species of birds were documented along with five species of mammals and one amphibian. The data captured on this walk will be used for the community and national data bases. Field notebooks on bird, mammal, and the sea turtle nesting will be kept for the next groups to add data. ConservationVIP® volunteers donated a total of 22.5 volunteer hours of work.



Returning to the lodge, everyone began packing luggage until dinner. A couple local artisans from the nearby indigenous community brought their crafts to the lodge and the group was able to see their handiwork and purchase what they wanted. Everyone, along with Wilberth, Guillermo and Clyde, celebrated the success of the work completed in Punta Banco and the new friendships made in the community.

In addition, one volunteer celebrated her birthday with a cake made by one of the local women and the group wished Wilberth an early birthday, as his was the following week.

Tuesday, Day 8

Several of the group awoke early and at 5:45 am walked to the nursery where the community was releasing a few more hatchlings. Then after breakfast, goodbyes and hugs with the community were plentiful as the group departed Casa Marea Alta to begin the six-hour drive north to the cloud forests of Cerro de la Muerte, an elevation gain of over 11,000 feet! Along the way, the group stopped suddenly as one Tamandua, a Collared Anteater, feeding along the road on a fence post, was skillfully spotted by our local guides.

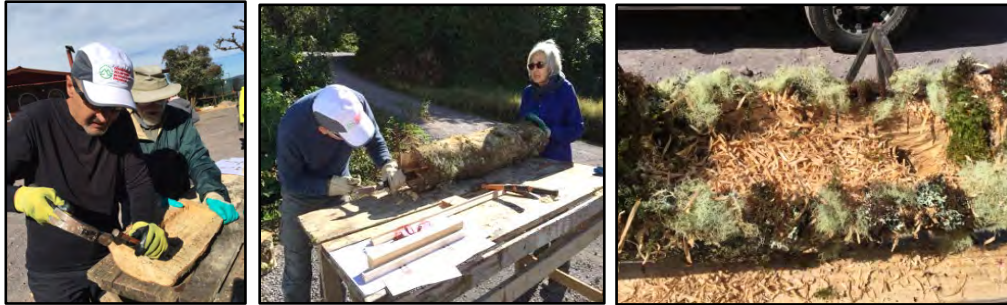
Lunch was with a local family and the group was treated to a short talk about their Shitake mushroom production before continuing the drive north to the Paraíso Quetzal Lodge on Cerro de la Muerte at Dota. ConservationVIP® contributed their time during the bus ride by discussing the trip projects and culture of the area during the seven hours on the bus. A wood fireplace and wonderful views of hummingbird feeders and the mountains greeted the group as everyone settled into their rooms and had dinner. While not a heavy physical work day, the long drive, and being in the bus all day took its toll on the group. Jackets were pulled out in the chilly mountain air and bedtime was early.

Wednesday, Day 9



After an optional bird walk and breakfast, the group was joined by Eric Granados, a community member of Sal Si Puedes and our Quetzal nest project manager, who led the group in the process of how to build Quetzal Nests. The nests were built to replace some nests that had been lost from storms and loss of habitat near the Parque Nacional Quetzal and within the Quetzal District. Learning from the September trip the process was refined, and the group was able to see the entire morning project from start to finish.

Eric had already cut the Alder into nest size pieces and the volunteers hollowed and carved out the nests and gathered lichens and wood shavings to attach to the inside and outside of the nest promoting a natural look.



Driving a short distance, the group took time to view Quetzals in their natural habitat before finalizing the nests to be placed by digging post holes and placing the nests into the ground.



In total the group contributed 22.5 hours of volunteer work on the Quetzal project.

After lunch and loading up the bus, Fernando headed towards the Don Carlos hotel in San José, arriving in the late afternoon. Adjusting back into the big city arena, the group settled into rooms, some went for short walks, and all gathered for the final dinner with Marco and Fernando. The volunteers were particularly generous and left extra gear, spare clothing, and even boots for the community.

Thursday, Day 11 The trip officially ended after breakfast. Some chose to stay an additional night or two to continue discovering more of the charm of Costa Rica.

Summary and General Comments

The primary goal for the Costa Rica Volunteer Trip was to protect the sea turtles that nest on the beaches in the Punta Banco area, assisting two Costa Rican parks, and contribute to the protection of the endangered Quetzal nesting habitat. The group donated 289.8 hours of hard work, and 430 gallons of trash was collected during the

entire trip. Special recognition goes to both Marco and Fernando who worked alongside us throughout the projects.

Acknowledgements

ConservationVIP® wishes to offer special thanks to the Costa Rica Sun Tours' guides, Marco Fallas and Fernando Sanchez, ProParques volunteer Stephanie Joseph, Punta Banco Community Association leaders, Wilberth Vargas Guerrero and Guillermo Baltodano Jiménez, and Eric Granados. We especially want to thank the many Punta Banco community members who cooked and cleaned for us, showed us how to protect this very special place, and shared their time with us.

Pura Vida!

