



PROJECT REPORT COSTA RICA VOLUNTEER TRIP October 22 – October 31, 2019

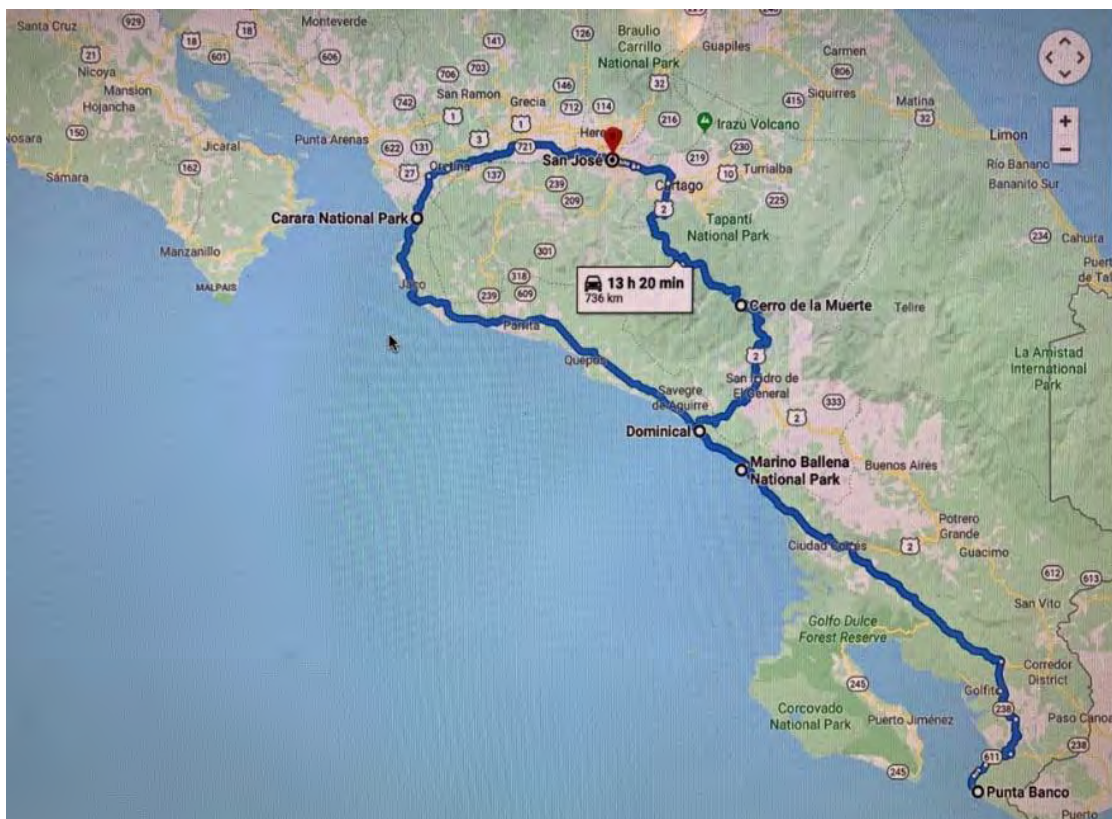


Executive Summary

Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) organized and led a volunteer trip to Punta Banco in the southwest corner of Costa Rica in October 2019. Thirteen volunteers, travelling from the United States, including Trip Leaders Carol Clark and David Summer, met in San José, Costa Rica to begin the journey. Marco Fallas, a Guide from Costa Rica Sun Tours, joined the group for the orientation meeting and stayed throughout the trip.

Work focused on the three main zones 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, aiding in protecting the sea turtles that nest on the South Pacific Coast beaches of Punta Banco. The sea turtle 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."

Detailed Trip Report



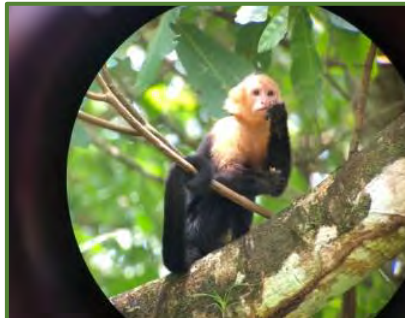
Nearly 460 miles (736 km) of travel to four volunteer work sites

SPECIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Parque Nacional Carara

At Parque Nacional Carara, volunteers were greeted by Stephanie Joseph, ProParques volunteer coordinator, who introduced the local Park Rangers we would work with and explained that the morning project would be cleaning and replacing part of the 288 linear feet of park entrance fencing. Using cleaner and buckets of water, part

of the group removed brush and vines and hand scrubbed the fencing while another group helped dig out and then installed two new eight- foot sections.



After completing the project, volunteers enjoyed some wildlife viewing in the park.

Parque Nacional Marino Ballena

Leaving Parque Nacional Carara, the group travelled to Dominical for the night. We arrived early the following morning at Parque Nacional Marino Ballena for the next

project with ProParques. Volunteer Coordinator Stephanie once again introduced the project: repainting the approximately 900 sq. ft. ranger quarters/station and fixing the front step. Working alongside the Park Rangers, volunteers quickly embraced the project and completed it in record time. These projects within the parks set the lofty group dynamics and pace.



Painting the Ranger quarters/station at Parque Nacional Marino Ballena

Throughout the trip from San José to Punta Banco, leaders and guides integrated discussion of the natural, cultural, and social aspects of Costa Rica. Breaking up the travel between project sites, stops were made for “típico” meals served by local families. The group stretched, picked up some personal grocery items, viewed wildlife, and learned about customs and history.



Scarlet Macaws spotted along the way



Stretch break along the surf beach



Trying out the fresh coconuts



Waiting for a local cattle drive to clear, the group saw a White-Headed Caracara landing in a tree

Punta Banco Sea Turtle Project:

Arriving at Casa Marea Alta in Punta Banco on the evening of Day 3, the lodge owner Clyde Aspinall eagerly met the group at the gate. The group also met conservationists and community leaders, Wilberth Vargas Guerrero and Guillermo Baltodano Jiménez from Proyecto Conservación Tortugas. Following dinner and a briefing on the highlights of the project work, volunteers settled into their new home away from home and retired for the night.

Before breakfast the following morning the group walked directly from the lodge to the Proyecto Conservación Tortugas Hatchery where they were provided with an orientation to the projects.



Volunteers released a total of 962 hatchlings at Punta Banco.

Throughout the stay in Punta Banco, volunteers worked at the three community sea turtle nurseries, Tiskita, Punta Banco, and Rancho Burica, all located within a short walk of each other. Three night patrols turned up one nesting Olive Ridley turtle that laid 126 eggs and one turtle that exhibited “false crawl” behavior by coming ashore and then returning back to sea without making a nest or laying eggs.

Punta Banco Nursery area:

The group exhumed 1,270 egg casings of hatched sea turtle eggs from the nursery; data was recorded on numbers of different stages of the carcasses.



The volunteers collected 332 gallons of trash during beach cleanup and collected driftwood to strengthen the natural sea barrier.



Other projects included rebuilding of upper bamboo poles and making new cones.



Tiskita Nursey area: Volunteers planted seventeen coconut trees as a natural barrier, removed old sand from half the nursery, and replaced it with 87 wheelbarrows of fresh sand to help minimize bacteria harming the eggs.



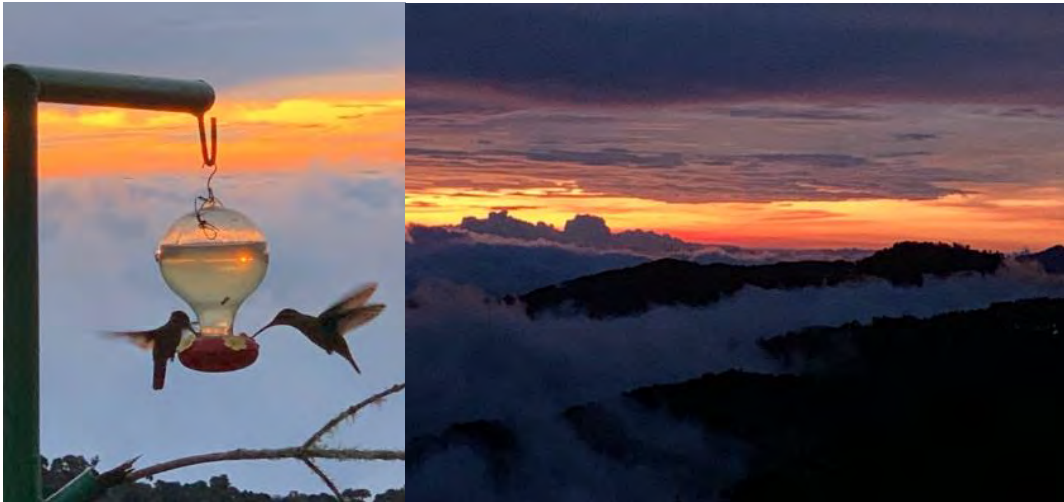
Rancho Burica Nursery area: Volunteers built a 10 x 20 sq. ft. extension of the existing nursery and added 26,000 pounds of sand to it.



Completed addition

Along the shoreline: Volunteers measured out and painted 10 sectional markers (cairns) along approximately three miles to assist the sea turtle night patrollers in documenting nesting locations.



Cerro de la Muerte in the Highlands:

Along the return drive from Punta Banco to San José, we stopped at the Paradiso Quetzal Lodge just in time for sunset. Situated at 8,858 feet above sea level, volunteers huddled by the wood fireplace and enjoyed a great meal and companionship.

After an optional morning 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 are built to replace those that had been lost from storms and loss of habitat near the Parque Nacional Quetzal and within the Quetzal District.



Driving a short distance to drop off the completed nest, the group took time to view Quetzals in their natural habitat.

Final Reflections

The primary goal for the Costa Rica Volunteer Trip is to protect the sea turtles that nest on the beaches in the Punta Banco area, assist two Costa Rican national parks, and contribute to the protection of the endangered Quetzal nesting habitat. It is worth noting that ConservationVIP®/REI® is the **only** volunteer group working in Punta Banco and with the Quetzal project. In all, this group donated approximately 493 hours of hard work in a hot and humid environment with everyone following Marco's genuine advice to "inspire folks to smile."

Special moments: During the final night at Punta Banco, our volunteers, along with local sea turtle patrollers, were honored at a community dinner, complete with food, music, and dancing. Small gifts, provided by REI® and ConservationVIP®, were handed out by our volunteers to members of the community association.



A truly meaningful and memorable milestone was reached during this extraordinary journey, that of deep trust. It is not easy to quantify a heartfelt sentiment, but because of the respect and attention from the volunteers honoring the culture, people, and place, the meaning of “Pura Vida” was felt throughout this adventure, more friendships were made, hugs were deeper and longer, laughter was contagious, and community acceptance and participation were at the highest level ever!



Acknowledgements: ConservationVIP® wishes to offer special thanks to Costa Rica Sun Tours for providing REI® gifts for the award ceremony; and to the best guide ever, Marco Fallas; and to our incredible bus driver, Álvaro; to ProParques volunteer Stephanie Joseph; to Punta Banco Community Association leaders; Reinoud Van Vreedendaal, Wilberth Vargas Guerrero, and Guillermo Baltodano Jiménez; and to Quetzal Project Manager, 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!**