



**PROJECT REPORT
COSTA RICA VOLUNTEER TRIP
October 18 - 27, 2022**



ConservationVIP Volunteers with the KABEK-Families Pro-Quetzal Project in San Gerardo de Dota

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 2022. Thirteen volunteers traveling from the United States, including Trip Leaders Janice Ballak and Kelly McCoy, met in San José, Costa Rica to begin the journey. Marco “Tex” Fallas, our Guide from Costa Rica Sun Tours, joined the group for the orientation meeting and stayed throughout the trip. Our Costa Rica Sun Tours Driver, Sergio Miranda met the group on Day 2 and drove and helped the group throughout the trip.

Work focused on the three main regions in the Central and South Pacific areas of Costa Rica and one in the Highlands: Tárcoles, to work on Scarlet Macaw habitat; in Savegre on the Pacific coast at the Hacienda Baru National Wildlife Refuge; and the trip's primary work project, aiding in protecting the sea turtles that nest on the South Pacific Coast beaches of Punta Banco. The sea turtle community projects in Punta Banco 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." Work in the highlands in Cerro de la Muerte centered on restoring the Resplendent Quetzal habitat.

Volunteers contributed a total of 397 hours towards the following projects: built one almond tree nursery, planted 55 almond tree saplings on the beach, painted new community tree nursery signage, replaced 15 wood planks at the Punta Banco sea turtle hatchery, aerated sand at the Playa Burica sea turtle hatchery, rebuilt sea walls at the Punta Banco and Tiskita sea turtle hatcheries, engaged in night and morning patrol where 190 sea turtle eggs were laid and safely moved to the hatchery, exhumed 644 sea turtle eggs and cataloged them by stages, released 80 hatchlings, removed old nest and assembled new nest, then moved and erected one Resplendent Quetzal nest and refreshed the viewing trails at the project site.

DETAILED TRIP REPORT SPECIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

San José:

The first day, October 18, the group met at the host hotel for an introductory meeting and orientation to the work projects of the days ahead. Costa Rica Sun Tours guide Marco "Tex" Fallas joined in and shared his infectious excitement about the work locations.

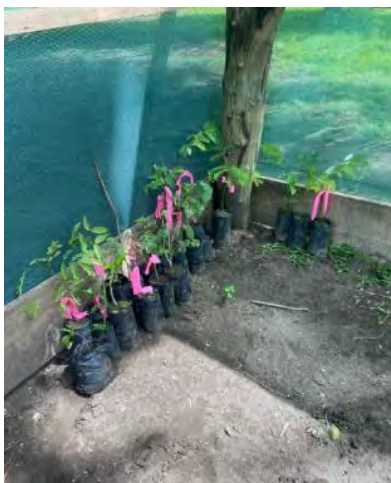
Tárcoles:

The following morning, bus driver and all-around helper, Sergio Miranda drove the group through the metropolitan highways of a busy, noisy San José and eased us into the less crowded, more rural communities to the area of Tárcoles, a small coastal village to begin the first workday. The coastal communities along this area have established a corridor of beach almond tree (*Terminalia catappa*) nurseries. The almond tree is the main food source for the endangered Scarlet Macaws.



Volunteers built a new tree nursery to replace the one built in 2021 which was destroyed by storms and a fire. They measured out an area and dug post holes two feet deep and attached a wood skirt around the base level. One of our volunteers who enjoys the art of lettering, created a plaque for the community tree nursery!

Group rebuilds the Tarcoles Tree Nursery



As the nursery was being built the second group of volunteers planted 55 of 70 tree saplings along the beach front. These saplings were almond trees and other indigenous trees that support the almond tree habitat. This group of saplings was more mature compared to saplings collected the previous season. Each volunteer dug holes 2-3 feet deep, removed the root cover, then planted and watered the trees.

The rest of the group planted almond tree saplings along the beach front and visited a mature almond tree grove.



Scarlet Macaws enjoying Almond Trees at the project worksite. Scarlet Macaw Photo courtesy of Emilio Chaviano

Later that afternoon the group boarded the bus and headed to the next worksite approximately 2.5 hours away at Savegre. Along the way we have some great wildlife views!

Upon arriving at Hacienda Baru Wildlife Refuge the group settled into their rooms and ate dinner before retiring for the evening. We saw many Toucan species and a lot of interesting insects and amphibians.



Savegre:

The next morning, before breakfast, some of the group members enjoyed a nature walk with "Tex"! The group spotted many birds and this sloth nesting above the lodge.



Project work on this day included a turtle hatchling release, where 77 Olive Ridley Sea

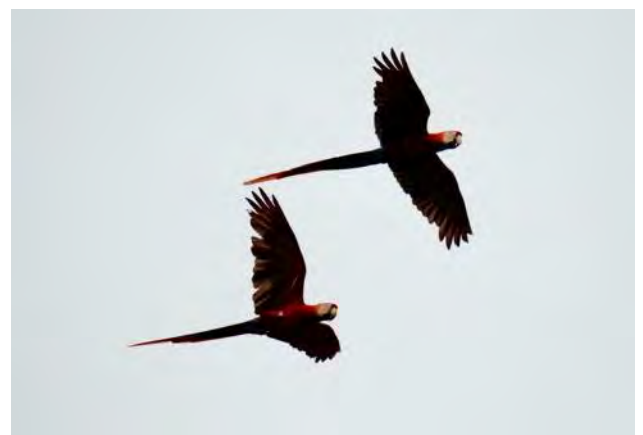
Turtles made their way down the beach to the ocean. Then volunteers did a beach clean-up, picking up four bags of trash. Along the beach clean up the group spotted Black Vultures making a meal of the remains of a mature Green Sea Turtle.

This year Hacienda Baru Wildlife Refuge was awarded the Costa Rica Blue Flag designating it as a protector of natural spaces and meeting the national criteria. The Blue Flag Ecology Program was founded with the purpose of **improving education and information regarding the environment**. Since then, it has been helping to promote the protection of the natural surroundings and increasing public knowledge in this regard.

Olive Ridley Sea Turtle hatchlings being released to the ocean at Hacienda Baru Wildlife Refuge. Beach cleanup and witnessing the circle of life along the beach.



Following these two projects, the group prepared to leave, said goodbye to our hosts and began the long drive to Punta Banco. Along the way there was a lunch stop, a stop to stretch and bird watch. The final stop was at a grocery store to use the facilities, grab a few personal groceries, beverages, and snacks before arriving in Punta Banco before nightfall! *Avian photos courtesy of Emilio Chaviano*



Punta Banco Sea Turtle Project:

Upon arrival at Casa Marea Alta in Punta Banco the lodge owner, Clyde Aspinall, met the group and assisted with getting everyone settled into their rooms. This would be our work location for the next five days.

The next morning, volunteers were greeted by Thomas Koebling, Program Manager of the Punta Banco Community Association, who provided an orientation to Proyecto Conservación Tortugas and the community projects. Then he introduced the group to conservationists and community leaders, Wilberth Vargas Guerrero and Guillermo Baltodano Jiménez who would be leading our work for the next several days.

Special note: Punta Banco had been receiving quite a bit of rain prior to and during our visit. During our work we realized the wetness and humidity have impacted the nests

more than usual and the group did not have an opportunity to participate in sea turtle hatchling releases. Compared to other years at this time, sea turtles that made nests laid fewer eggs than usual. We also noticed that during nest exhumations, fewer eggs successfully hatched. We are witnessing the impacts of climate change.

Throughout the stay in Punta Banco, volunteers worked at three community sea turtle hatcheries, Tiskita, Punta Banco, and Playa Burica, all located within a short walk of each other. One night patrol and a morning patrol covering the three hatcheries turned up two nesting Olive Ridley turtles that laid a combined 190 eggs. The nests were safely moved to the Punta Banco and Tiskita hatcheries, respectively.



Punta Banco Hatchery Area

Following a briefing, Day 4, the group walked over to the Punta Banco hatchery to begin a maintenance project replacing 15 planks around the foundation of the hatchery. The group split up with some tasked with removing debris around the hatchery, then the next group dug ditches around the hatchery, while two more removed nails from the old planks. While this was happening the rest of the group began work fortifying the sea wall that protects the hatchery with organic material from the beach.

Work resumed after lunch, with placing new pressurized wood planks around the foundation of the hatchery, fortifying the organic sea wall, and then did a beach clean-up.

After dinner, part of our group participated in night patrol, covering the Punta Banco and Playa Burica hatcheries which turned up one nesting Olive Ridley turtle that laid 115 eggs before returning to sea.

Workday at the Punta Banco Hatchery





Tiskita Hatchery & Playa Burica Areas

The following day, volunteers received an early morning wakeup call from “Tex.” We had another opportunity to participate in the protection of a nesting turtle on a morning patrol. This time a mature Olive Ridley Sea turtle nesting laid 75 eggs. This nest was safely moved to the Tiskita hatchery.



After breakfast, volunteers walked over to the Tiskita hatchery area and worked on three projects. First, Guillermo explained the process and importance and process of exhuming sea turtle nests from the hatchery. Then a group of four volunteers participated in exhuming and collecting the data from Tiskita nests alongside community members Guillermo and Justin (Wilberth's son). All together 266 eggs were exhumed from three nests.



	Exhumación	Exhumation	Name
Código del vivero Nursery code (pddh)	K5	K7	K9
Fecha de exhumación Date of exhumation	22/10/22	22/10/2022	22/10/2022
Hora Hour	0935	0940	1020
Sin desarrollo No development	3	10	2425
Estado 1 Stage 1	1	1	4
Estado 2 Stage 2	34	80	32
Estado 3 Stage 3	33	18	19
Estado 4 Stage 4	0	0	0
Pipped Cracked	0	0	0
Neonatos Muertos Dead	0	0	0
Neonatos Vivos Alive	0	1	2
Cáscaras Egg shells	17	1	2
NOTES:			

While this work was happening, the rest of the group began work to fortify and protect the habitat around the Tiskita nursery, using washed up trees and other organic debris to fortify the sea wall and then planting 35 coconut tree seedlings around the hatchery. Following a beach clean-up, the group took a lunch break.

After lunch we headed over to the hatchery at Playa Burica. Our goal was to aerate the sand in the entire sea turtle hatchery. Everyone took turns shoveling and turning over the sand. While some did this work, others participated in a beach clean-up.

Rest Day

Most of the group participated in a hike at the Tiskita private wildlife refuge. Others relaxed and enjoyed the grounds of Casa Marea Alta.

Tiskita Hatchery & Community Dinner

The morning of October 24, Day 7, after breakfast the group returned to the Tiskita Hatchery and spent the morning exhuming four nests collecting data on 378 eggs and completed work on the organic sea wall that protects this hatchery.





Due to rain, after lunch the group relaxed at the lodge. Then we headed to a celebratory community dinner!



Volunteers say goodbye to Punta Banco and Casa Marea Alta !



Cerro de la Muerte in the Highlands:

The following day, after a long drive from Punta Banco, the group arrived at Cerro de La Muerte at the Paradiso Quetzal Lodge. Situated at 8,858 feet above sea level, volunteers brought out the sweaters and huddled by the wood fireplace, a change from the heat and humidity of the previous five days.

Following breakfast, the next morning, the group joined Eric Granados, Project Manager, and David Serrano and William, members of KABEK–Families Pro-Quetzal project. Eric led the group in the process of how to build and assemble a pre-made Quetzal nest as well as trail maintenance of a trail and stair on William’s farm which is a private refuge that leads to a Quetzal viewing area. He also explained the word “Kabek” in the local indigenous language translates to Quetzal. The KABEK–Families Pro-Quetzal project has helped William to sustain the habitat and has included perching posts around the trees. The group was lucky to have some amazing close-up sightings of this magnificent bird. During our time together Eric also demonstrated how the nests are built and why they are important in sustaining the Resplendent Quetzal habitat.



Volunteers disassembled an old Resplendent Quetzal nest, reassembled a new nest, then relocated and erected it.



*Volunteers engaged in the maintenance of the trail and stairs that lead up to the Resplendent Quetzal viewing area.
And our views of this magnificent, rare bird!*





Following lunch at the lodge, the group boarded the bus for the last time to head back to San José where we enjoyed a final dinner celebrating this successful trip!

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. Volunteers also assisted on three other Costa Rican projects: building an almond tree nursery to provide for the endangered Scarlet Macaw and assist rangers with clearingup beach debris at Hacienda Baru Wildlife refuge. Volunteers also contributed to the protection of the endangered Resplendent Quetzal nesting habitat.

It is worth mentioning that ConservationVIP® is the **only** volunteer group working in Punta Banco and with the Resplendent Quetzal project. In all, this group donated 397 hours of demanding work in a hot and humid environment while being able to experience some of the most incredible landscapes, nature, and communities in Costa Rica. This October 2022 volunteer work group had some amazing wildlife sightings including interesting avian, insect and amphibian sightings!

Special moments: During the final night at Punta Banco, volunteers, along with local sea turtle patrollers, were honored at a small community dinner, complete with food, and music. Small awards provided by Costa Rica Sun Tours and ConservationVIP® were presented to members of the community association who did exceptional work in finding nesting sea turtles and collecting the eggs.

Rarely does our community “El Jefe” the boss, Guillermo dance. But the evening was so joyous that one of our volunteers, Michele, was great at pulling this out of him. The entire place exploded with smiles, joy, and happiness. This image simply expresses what we do. This is our favorite shot of the whole week!

**Acknowledgements:**

ConservationVIP® wishes to offer special thanks to all of the volunteers who worked so hard to keep these projects going; to Costa Rica Sun Tours for arranging all the moving pieces on this trip; and to the best guide ever, Marco Fallas; to our incredible bus driver, Sergio Miranda who worked side by side with us; to Doña Miriam for setting aside part of her land for the almond tree nursery; for the park rangers at Hacienda Baru Wildlife Preserve getting us started; to the Punta Banco Community Association leaders; Thomas Koebling, Wilberth Vargas Guerrero, and Guillermo Baltodano Jiménez; and to KABEK - Families Pro 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 incredibly special place, and shared their time and this special place with us.

PURA VIDA!!