



Volunteer Program

Description

Sea Turtles Conservation and Research Program. It is developed by the Gandoca Association and ASVO.

Location

Gandoca-Manzanillo Refuge, in the Gandoca sector, is located in the southern

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Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, in the province of Limón in the canton of Talamanca. Specifically it is at 12 km north of Sixaola, on the frontier with Panama.

Climate

In this area, Tropical-Humid Forest predominates, with an annual average temperature of 26° C and an annual precipitation between 4,500 y 6,000 mm, so that it has been considered one of the rainiest zones of the country.



Flora

In this place there are 400 species of trees, 2,200 species of plants like sea grape, coca, coconut palms, water lilies, aquatics ferns, bully trees (pilón), canfín, and mountain calabash.



Fauna

Among the mountains and plains of Gandoca one can see jaguars, ocelots, Baird's tapirs, manatees, weasels, sloths, and monkeys; and on the beach, turtles of various types, including Hawksbill, loggerhead, and green; as well as various bird species.

Justification

The project was founded for the protection of marine turtles, and at the same time to improve of the quality of life of the local community. When the project began, the community was dedicated to the taking of eggs and illegal trade in turtle meat. This happened not because they were bad people, but because this was the only way

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that families could make a living. The birth of the conservation idea implied taking from the community their only method of surviving, so the project had to guarantee that a monetary resource would flow to the community, to convince a village dedicated to hunting turtles to conserve them. With this promise to generate constant work for the local people, they were trained to become volunteers and to work in the different activities within the program.



Thus the Gandoca Development Association was born, with the advice and support of ASVO, with the aim of developing within the community a project of conservation of marine turtles, particularly the leatherbacks (“baulas”), hawksbills and the greens, which are the ones that nest in this zone, and which are in danger of disappearing.

As well as protection of marine turtles, the project also deals with patches of humid forest and marsh forests of great importance. The project is doing important work in creating a model of conservation, with the involvement of the local community.

Specific information about the project

General Objectives

- 1) To protect and investigate, in a professional, systematic and integrated manner, the



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marine turtles who come to lay their eggs on the 6 kilometres of beach at Gandoca.

- 2) To promote a policy of conservation among the inhabitants of the community of Gandoca.
- 3) To develop environmental education plans in the communities of Gandoca and San Miguel, as well as in the adjacent zones that have a direct or indirect influence on the area.



Specific Objectives

- 1) To make the community of Gandoca aware of the need for, and to bring them to aid in, the protection of the marine turtles that come to nest in their community.
- 2) To begin and execute a methodology of control and protection of the marine turtles.
- 3) To promote educational activities within the Gandoca community and neighboring communities, in order to incorporate the social activists in activities that contribute to the protection and recovery of the environment.

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General Tasks

Volunteers will have the opportunity to participate in the following activities:

- Recieve training in working with marine turtles.
- Mount nightly protective beach patrols to protect marine turtles.
- Aid in beach cleaning activities
- Identify and record turtle trails.
- Look for and find turtle nests.
- Count the eggs and relocate them to a more secure location (nursery).
- Monitor turtle nests.
- Aid the baby turtles in their return to the ocean.
- Aid in taking the temperature of the nests.
- Aid in biometric measurements (length and width).
- Support activities in maintenance of the infrastructure.
- Have time to enjoy the beauties of the area.
- Participate in cultural activities.





The project consists of three well-defined marine turtle seasons:

1. Leatherback turtle (“baula”), (*Dermochelys coriacea*) This is the largest marine turtle, growing to a length of up to 3 metres, and attaining a weight of up to 900 kg; it lives 60-70 years, does not have a hard shell, and feeds on medusas (a form of plankton). It can dive to 1000 m and its heartbeat slows to almost zero. **For the Gandoca conservation project, the leatherback season begins on March 1, and ends the first week in June.**
2. Hawksbill turtle (“carey”) (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). This turtle is found alone or in small groups around the rocky coasts and coral reefs of continents and islands. It lives on sponges, algae, crustaceans and fish. It does not have teeth, but uses its sharp beak to feed. It can withstand water as cold as 10 degrees C. **For the Gandoca conservation project, the Hawksbill season also begins on March 1, and ends the first week in June**
3. Green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*). This turtle can grow to more than 1 m long and can weigh up to 140 kg. The females come to the beach at two years or older to lay eggs, with an average of 2.8 to 6 nests per season, laying an average of 114 eggs per nest. Green turtles feed on marine vegetation. **For the Gandoca conservation project, the green turtle season begins on June 15, and ends on October 15.**



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Communities near the project

Sixaola: Located 12 km from Gandoca, at the frontier with Panama.

Other nearby protected area:

Hitoy Cerere Biological Reserve: Located about 50 km from Gandoca.

For free time and diversion

The volunteer can take a journey through the canals and the Gandoca lagoon by boat and observe the diversity of birds and animals, such as monkeys, which are always located near the canals.

Recommendations

- Don't drink alcohol or use intoxicating substances.
- Keep your room clean.
- Maintain good personal cleanliness, as well as good behavior and language.
- Don't sit at the table without a shirt.
- Bring personal effects and bedding.



Equipment

- Bedding (blankets, sheet)
- Mosquito repellent
- Mosquito net
- Sunscreen
- Personal articles (toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, etc.)
- Sandals
- Closed toe shoes, such as tennis shoes or hiking boots.



Space and capacity

Minimum: 1 volunteer

Maximum: 24 volunteers

Preference for male or female? NO

Level of Spanish needed? Basic

Age limit? Over 18

Volunteer work hours

From 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. However, the principal work will occur at night, in protective turtle patrols and collection of turtle information.

Skills or experience level of volunteers

Ability to work in a tropical environment, good health, and a desire to aid in the conservation of marine turtles, and natural resources in general.

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Housing

Volunteers are housed in cabins with shared bedrooms. There is electricity, potable water and a public telephone.



Food

Volunteers receive three meals a day (breakfast, lunch, supper) in the cabins where they live. The food is a typical Costa Rican diet based on rice, beans, pastas, basic grains, meats, vegetables and fruits.

Other details

In this site, volunteers do not have access to a strong box for storage of articles of value.

Contact Us

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