



Comunidad Protectora de Tortugas de Osa (COPROT)

Sea Turtle and Community Development Project



Background

COPROT was initiated in the middle of the 2018 turtle season (Sept/Oct) in response to a number of environmental and social issues in the rural town of Carate, Osa Peninsula, Costa Rica. The nearby beaches of Carate, Peje Perro and Rio Oro are some of the most important sea turtle nesting beaches in the South Pacific of Costa Rica, with approximately 4,000 nests being laid there each year by Olive Ridley (classified Vulnerable by the IUCN) and Pacific Green (classified as Endangered by the IUCN) turtles. There are also much smaller numbers of Hawksbills and Leatherbacks on occasions.

There are high levels of poaching and predation recorded on turtle nests in the area, and losses of up to 20% of nests per annum have been seen because of this. Development in Carate and the surrounding areas in the past 25 years has mainly been



driven by eco-tourism and is limited to the construction of eco-lodges and improvements to the nearby Corcovado National Park in order to cater for tourism and research. The area has a lot to offer, being called one of the most biologically intense places on the planet. These developments, although beneficial for the area, have had minimal impact on the opportunities or quality of life for local people in Carate. A small percentage have been able to find work as groundskeepers or in hospitality, but there are still a large number that need to carry out illegal or environmentally damaging activities in order to make a living; namely the gold-mining community.



The gold mining community of Carate has a long history, and since gold mining was made

illegal in 2010 there have been little alternative options for employment, support or training by governmental bodies. Gold-mining itself is highly ecologically damaging, dangerous, and is usually coupled with other illegal activities such as turtle nest poaching and hunting of wildlife.

Seeing the desperate need for more conservation and education in the area to protect the nesting beaches, along with the low quality of life and continuation of ecologically damaging activities carried out by local people, made us realize that giving the gold-mining community the opportunity to work in conservation could solve a number of pertinent issues at the same time.

We opened the idea up to the local people in September 2018, and we have been overwhelmed by their enthusiasm to work (completely voluntarily initially) and collaborate with the project. We are currently working with 4 individuals that have been assisting consistently with the beach patrols and hatchery work from the start, and are currently looking into collaborating with more community members working under the Asociación de Oreros (Gold-miners Association) and looking to get into sea turtle conservation or eco-tourism.

Highlights

This project has had a huge and immediate impact on the community, as all of the individuals involved in the project have now ceased to enter the National Park for gold mining activities for over a year, and we have next to no poaching (<2%) observed on the part of the beach where we have been working since initiating the project. This is an excellent way to get local people truly integrated into conservation, and it raises awareness on the benefits of environmental protection.



We have had excellent results with our hatchery for both seasons that have been managed by community members, and are proud to say that we achieved a hatching success rate of 91% overall and maintained a motivated and responsible workforce. For the 2020-2021 season we protected over 50 sea turtle nests, and hope to be able to double this next year in a new location!

We have also been working on protecting nests in situ from free-roaming dog populations by using woven bamboo mesh covers. This has proven to have a positive impact on the percentage of predated nests, and allows us to focus on conservation of the species without relying too heavily on the manipulation of nests and hatchery work. A collaborator of the project has had a paper published on this method in Marine Turtle Newsletters that can be seen following [this link](#).

We have continued working to develop this project over the last year by training local staff. We will also have a second hatchery nearby in late 2020 or early 2021. Our camp is now fully equipped with a double-story bamboo house, western toilets, showers, kitchen and a vegetable garden. We were awarded a grant from organization SEE Turtles to help us on this endeavor, and are thankfully supported by many of the hotels, eco-lodges and private land owners in the area.

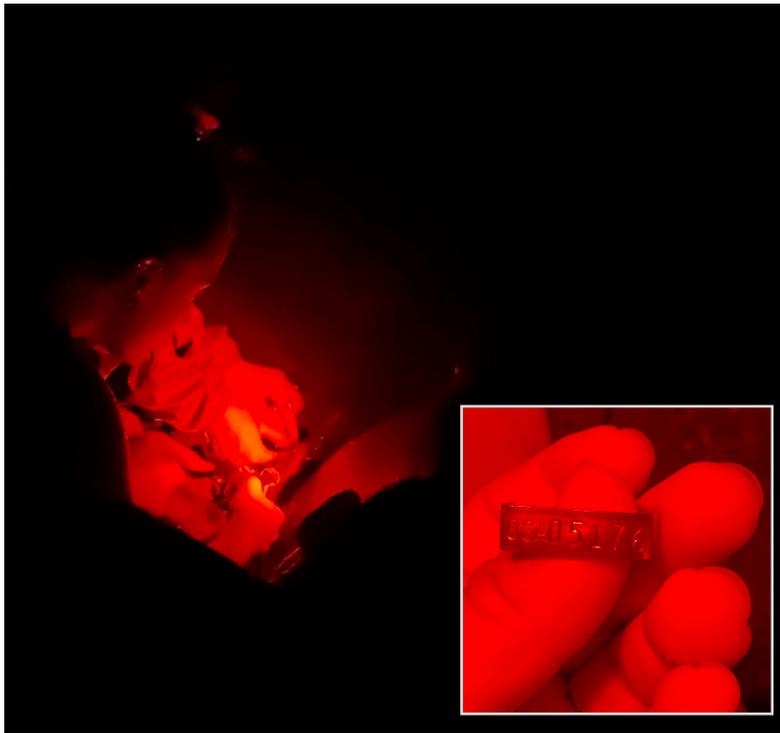
Further developments

Due to the successful development of our conservation camp, we are now focusing on recruiting assistants, interns and volunteers that will enable us to cover more of the beach than ever before (we covered 8 km during the 2020-2021 season, and are covering 10 km this year). We want to ensure that we are able to carry out night patrols regularly, nest relocations on the beach, morning census, and frequent educational activities to keep increasing the reach and impact of the project.



In order to fulfill our aim of promoting sustainable development, we will be looking to continue developing our permaculture project on the property, where we are able to grow/produce a considerable amount of our own food for people involved in the project and improve the productivity and sustainability of the land around us. We are also looking to improve our waste management and hopefully become a zero-waste organization soon! We are continuing to monitor climate change and looking to initiate a climate change project.

Due to the coronavirus situation, the economy and consequently the tourism sector in Costa Rica has plummeted. We are trying to revitalize the tourism industry in our region and increase awareness for sea turtle conservation. We have seen an increase in poaching in the last year and we are hoping to mitigate that problem by reminding people about the importance of protecting the vulnerable sea turtle populations.



We are also looking to start to more intensively manage the free-roaming dog populations by holding castration clinics, providing more education to local people, and beginning a capture and relocation project before the next turtle season...there is a lot to do!!

What do we need?

Conservation Assistants

Candidates should have prior experience with sea turtle conservation in the field, or a strong biological background and eager to learn. Role will involve morning and night patrol work (long hours during high season), hatchery and hatchling management, training and/or supervising volunteers, carrying out environmental education activities, data input and analysis.

Marketing/Promotion Assistants



Individuals that are able to assist us in spreading the word about our project, and encouraging other people to come out and help. Role will involve managing social media pages, searching for collaborators, sponsors and sources of funding, assisting in recruitment of volunteers to help with the project, coordinating any promotional activities or campaigns, website design/updating.

Volunteer Coordinators

Members of the team who can manage others and coordinate the activities of the group. It is also very important that volunteers and assistants have an amazing time enjoying beautiful Costa Rica as well as working hard on the project, so the volunteer coordinator should be able to make their experience memorable! Role will involve coordinating volunteers prior to departure, helping with any travel arrangements, coordinating their daily activities and work schedule, planning free time activities, project logistics (food delivery, finances etc.).

Permaculture Developers

Permaculture is something new to us, therefore we will require volunteers that already have a strong knowledge of permaculture practices and are willing to work hard to get this project going from scratch. Local staff and general volunteers will be there to support with the manual side in their time outside of conservation activities. Role will involve designing a basic permaculture start-up project that will be easy to manage using the project's resources, teaching others about permaculture practices and their benefits for sustainable living, looking into ways we can improve the productivity of the area and making positive changes to our lifestyle, and waste management assistance (composting, recycling, upcycling etc.).

Community Development Assistants

The community is the driving force behind this project, and we will need assistants to help to develop the community support side of the project. Role will involve giving English or computation classes, searching for training schemes that the local staff could undertake (first aid, construction, management of tourists, working in a team etc.), support with any other areas that could help provide our local staff with more opportunities or a better quality of life.

General Volunteers

Volunteers needed across the board! No experience necessary in any of the areas detailed above, but plenty of enthusiasm and the ability to work hard without constant supervision. This is a completely grass roots project that is in its early stages of development, so we need positive people that are highly driven to initiate change in developing communities!

A week in the life of a volunteer!



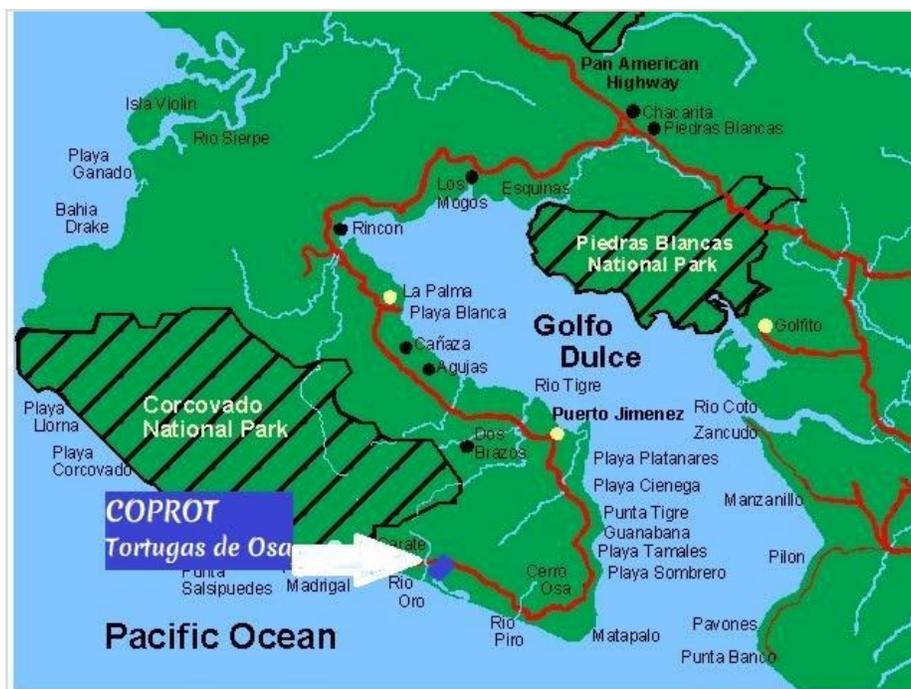
As a volunteer, you will participate in daily turtle patrols, morning patrols (3-5 hrs) or night patrols (4-7 hrs). On the patrols you will protect new nests, record data on the nesting female, excavate hatched nests, assist in the tourism element and release hatchlings! During the day, we will also have beach clean-ups, make bamboo cages to protect nests, give English lessons to our local staff, assist with presentations at our local schools, and assist with any tasks around our camp! Here is an example of what your week might look like volunteering with COPROT:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
05:00-08:00		Morning Patrol		Yoga class	Morning Patrol	FREE DAY	
08:00 – 10:00	Arrival at camp/ Orientation	Gardening/ planting seeds in the camp	Lesson/ discussion on sea turtle conservation	Painting signs and plaques	English/ Spanish exchange with local staff		Beach clean
12:00	Lunch						Lucnh
13:00 – 17:00	Bamboo cage making and distribution	Excavation session on the beach	Handcraft merchandisig with local community	Data entry and organizing	Making tags and bamboo cages		Beach time!
18:00	Dinner						Sunset Dinner
20:00 – 00:00	Night Patrol		Night Patrol		Game/Movie night		Night Patrol

Transportation

Getting Here

Our camp is located 6 kilometers from the small town of Carate, which is just outside of Corcovado National Park on the Osa Peninsula. You can find us on Google Maps under COPROT Tortugas de Osa. To reach the camp from San Jose, you must first get to Puerto Jimenez by plane or bus.



From San Jose

The bus between San Jose and Puerto Jimenez is with the company Transportes Blanco Lobo. There are two buses each day, as follows:

San José > Pto. Jiménez	Pto. Jiménez > San José
08:00	05:00
12:00	09:00

Arriving at the station half an hour to an hour before the scheduled departure time will give you plenty of time to buy your ticket. It takes 8.5 hours to reach Puerto Jimenez from San Jose, and the bus will stop twice during the trip for 15 minutes at a location with bathrooms and snacks. For a faster option, domestic flights with national airlines SANSA, Skyway or Aerobell are also available from San Jose to Puerto Jimenez. These flights take around 45 minutes and go through the mountains for some breathtaking scenery.

From Golfito

If traveling from Panama, you will need to get to Golfito before making it to Puerto Jimenez. There are several buses throughout the day to reach Golfito from the border town, Paso Canoas. From Golfito, there is a small ferry to take you across the Golfo Dulce to Puerto Jimenez in about 30 minutes. The ferry schedule is as follows:

Golfito > Pto. Jiménez	Pto. Jiménez > Golfito
07:00*	06:00
10:00	08:45*
11:30*	11:30
13:00	14:00
15:00	16:20*
17:00*	*No service on Sunday

Once in Puerto Jimenez, there are several hotels and hostels available to spend the night. We recommend Cabins in the Corner, as it is comfortable and inexpensive. It also has WiFi available, although it does not have a kitchen.

From Puerto Jimenez there is a local bus that leaves twice a week (Monday and Friday) at 6 am and 1:30 pm towards Carate from the terminal next to the Grupo Materiales hardware store. Hold on, because the ride can get bumpy! Tell the driver that you are going to COPROT at Rio Oro, and they will drop you off at the side road that leads to the camp, just before you reach the Rio Oro (Gold River). It takes about two hours to reach the camp from Puerto Jimenez, and you will see our sign on the road!





Getting Around

There are two buses that run on Monday and Friday (one in the morning, one in the afternoon) that pass by camp to take you in either direction towards Carate or Puerto Jimenez. During the heavy rainy season (Oct/Nov) flooding can make transportation more difficult and occasionally the bus is suspended for the day. The bus schedule is as follows:

Pto. Jiménez > Carate	Carate > Pto. Jiménez
06:00	08:30
13:30	16:00

You ought to know that on SUNDAY there are NO AFTERNOON BUS, just 6:00 from Pto. Jiménez and 8:30 from Carate. Because of COVID-19 there is ONE BUS on MONDAY at 6am.

Taxis are available in this region with advance notice, but for a price of roughly \$80 to Puerto Jimenez. It is also possible to walk to Carate, which takes about an hour along the beach or an hour and a half along the road.

Keeping in Contact

It is recommended that you buy a **KOLBI SIM** card for your phone for communicating while at camp (must be Kolbi as no other network providers reach to our area). There is very basic WiFi available at camp, but this is quite slow and has restricted use. There are a few eco-lodges in the area that have WiFi access that can be used if purchases are made (a drink or something) that can be visited in free time. There is a local property that is about an hour walk from camp that allows us to use their WiFi on Fridays and Saturdays.

Mail

Mail and packages take about 4-8 weeks to arrive. They can be received at:

[Insert name]

Correos de Costa Rica

Puerto Jiménez, Golfito, Puntarenas, Costa Rica. 60702.

The camp

The camp itself is set back around 100m from Rio Oro beach, and is comprised of a two-story rancho with the dormitory on the second floor, a western toilet and shower block, and a rustic partially open kitchen and communal area. We have a solar panel charger in the kitchen that you can use to charge your phones, laptops and other equipment. We also have a greenhouse and recycling unit. All buildings are made primarily with sustainable and/or upcycled materials in order to have the lowest possible impact on the environment. You will be provided with a single bunk bed (doubles are available upon request),

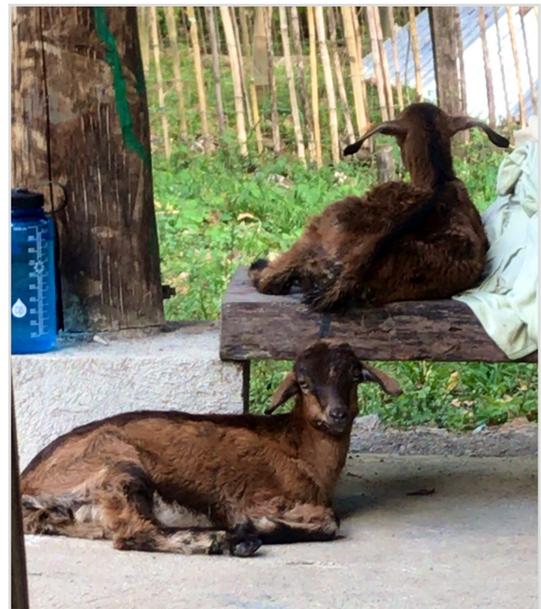


with a single sheet set. We usually have mosquito nets available, however it is advisable to bring your own just in case.

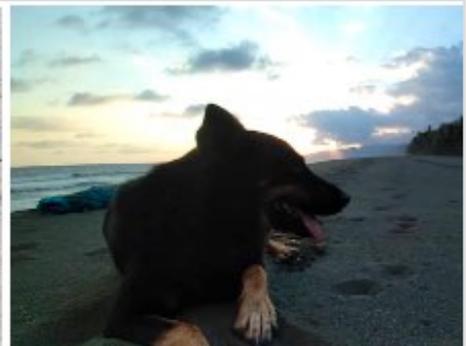
We have limited WiFi connection (only for working purposes) and a solar panel to charge phones/laptops/torches/etc. Just expect to be a bit disconnected while you're here! Also, we are very conscious about our waste, so everything needs to be reused, recycled or sent back to Puerto Jiménez as trash. One of our goals is to become a zero waste facility within the next 5 years, and have the least possible impact on the environment. Please consider this when planning your trip, and think about what you're bringing to the camp. It will be your responsibility to get rid of the big waste articles (like shoes, big containers, batteries...) before your arrival, or bringing them back with you when you leave. During your stay, please reduce the use of plastic and bring biodegradable soaps and shampoo when possible.



We share our home with several animals, each one of them has their own spots around the camp. There's Ginny the goat, who lives in the animal enclosure with six chickens that provide us with eggs. The chickens are released daily so that they can search for food outside the enclosure. We also have two baby chickens, that grow very fast! Betty is our beloved old dog, who spends the time sleeping next to us. Mowgli, our jungle cat, is full of energy and you can find him chasing lizards when he's not taking a nap in the kitchen. Finally, we have one baby goat, Becky, that was born in December, and the most recent members of the group! We expect that all the volunteers help us take care of our large family of animals.



The beach is only 100 m away from camp, so you can





always hear the sound of the waves from here. The tides in this part of the Pacific are too strong to swim or surf, but it offers a stunning view (specially on sunrise/sunset). If you enjoy water sports, there is Matapalo, one hour away, which is a popular region among swimmers and surfers, and it's more suitable for these kind of activities.

Rules and Safety

Since we are located in the jungle it is important to note if injuries happen it is essential to notify people and take care of it properly. Infections and viruses are possibilities, but with proper caution and care it should not dampen your time here! Some rules to follow and keep in mind, if you are planning to accompany research assistants on a night patrol it is advised to not put on any lotions or bug spray on one hour prior to patrols and wash hands thoroughly before. It is also important to walk around the camp at night with a torch so you do not step on any of our neighbours!



Food

The food we received at camp is mostly vegetarian. Meals are based on rice and legumes, such as lentils, beans, chickpeas... and also a variety of fruits and vegetables (some of them we bring them from Puerto Jiménez, but others are from our own land and the surrounding fincas). We also have eggs occasionally, from our own chickens, and sometimes meat or fish. These type of products can easily fit vegan/vegetarian diets, as well as gluten or lactose intolerance.

Volunteers and research assistants will share the responsibility of cooking and cleaning on a weekly schedule. People in charge of cooking and clean will cook breakfast, lunch and dinner for

everybody at camp. We normally have these meals together. Here there is an example of a typical menu:

- *Breakfast*: Pancakes, gallo pinto (rice and beans), and fried bananas, oats and fruit
- *Lunch*: Tortillas with refried beans and veggies, vegetarian rice/pasta, hummus with carrot sticks
- *Dinner*: Chickpeas with spinach, tortillas with black beans, vegetarian burgers and salad

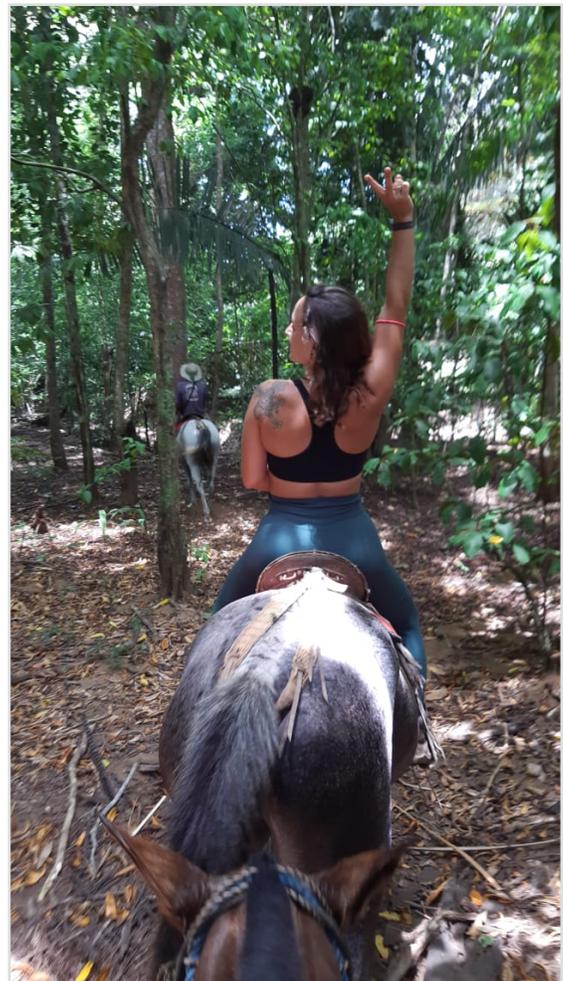
Prices

The cost of staying in camp for volunteers is 30 USD per night (with a 3 night minimum), or 200 USD per week, for longer stays. This amount covers food and lodging, as well as their training during their stay. Volunteers must cover their transportation costs to reach and leave COPROT, and any extra activity that they want to do during their free time. You can also contact us at tortugasdeosa@gmail.com and ask for information to be a research assistant (in that case, the project will cover the cost of food and lodging) and paid positions. Also, it is important to highlight that the cost of the volunteering will not be reimbursed once it's been paid.

Activities in your free time

We normally work very hard around camp, but there's always time to relax and explore. There are a lot of different activities in Península de Osa, that can be arranged in advance and may have discounts for volunteers. Here you have a list of some of these activities (the prices are just for guidance):

- Visit Corcovado National Park (70 USD multiple days, +125 USD for overnight stays)
- Surf in Matapalo (50 USD lesson + renting the boards)
- Horse riding (50 USD)
- Visit a chocolate factory (45 USD)
- Whale and dolphins seeing (50 USD)
- Enjoy the beach and the sea (Free!)





Contact us

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On the meantime

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keep

you informed of our daily activities!