

# LAST – Latin American Sea Turtles

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COSTA RICA



## PACUARE VOLUNTEERING

General Information



2015



## WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF COSTA RICAN SEA TURTLES!

**LAST (Latin American Sea Turtles) is part of WIDECAST's (Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network) Latin American Program in Costa Rica, including efforts not only on the Caribbean Se but also on the Pacific coast. WIDECAST is an expert network of biologists, managers, community leaders and educators in more than 40 nations and territories, committed to an integrated, regional capacity that ensures the recovery and sustainable management of depleted sea turtle populations.**

**We as LAST ask ourselves: What would a sustainably managed sea turtle population look like? What would it look like to a government? To a fisher, a coastal community, a child? To an hotelier, a dive operator, a tourist? What would it look like to a reef, a sea grass bed, a sandy beach? Each of these entities, and many others, relies upon and/or benefits from the sea turtle population in measurable ways.**

**Borrowing the parlance of sustainable development, a sustainably managed sea turtle population might be defined as one that meets the needs – ecological, economic, socio-cultural, political, aesthetic, and spiritual – of the present without compromising the ability of the population to fulfill these roles in the future. To this end, LAST seeks to bring the best available science to legislation and policy; to education, training and outreach; to conservation and advocacy; and to in situ research and population monitoring.**

**If policies aimed at sustainability are our goal, what do such policies look like? What role can an individual (a community, a nation) play? This site is designed to empower you to make more informed choices; choices rooted in the belief that the decisions we make today will create the choices and opportunities of tomorrow, just as the decisions of past generations have painted the landscape that we see today.**

**JOIN CONSERVATION! EXPLORE, LEARN AND ACT!**

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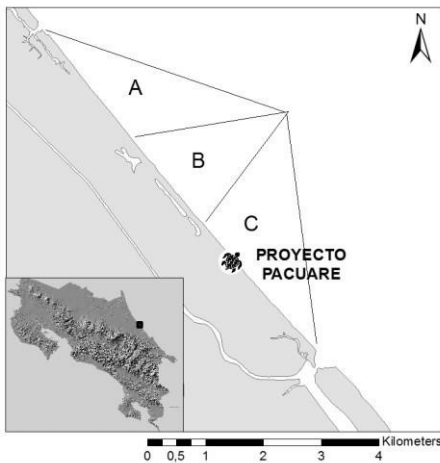




## About us

LAST (Latin American Sea Turtles) is part of WIDECAST's (Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network) Latin American Program, including conservation efforts not only on the Caribbean but also on the Pacific coast. WIDECAST is an expert network of biologists, managers, community leaders and educators in more than 40 nations and territories, committed to an integrated, regional capacity that ensures the recovery and sustainable management of depleted sea turtle populations. In 1986 WIDECAST started working on protecting the Leatherback Sea Turtle nesting population at Gandoca beach in Costa Rica. Since then we have been realizing even more projects alone and in cooperation with other organizations. WIDECAST and its partners have put a strategy into practice combining conservation and sustainable development through activities that directly benefit both, the people and the environment. The focus has been on establishing the conditions for a self-sustaining process, involving work in the broad areas of conservation, economic development, training and education, organization, and advocacy.

## Pacuare Nesting Beach



The project is located in the north of the Caribbean province Limón, 1km northwards of the Pacuare River Mouth. The beach is part of the 50km coastline stretching between Tortuguero National Park and the port of Limón, one of the biggest ports of Costa Rica. It is an important nesting beach for Leatherback and Green Sea Turtles and sometimes also visited by the rare Hawksbill Sea Turtle. Moreover the tropical rainforest, mangroves and rivers are home for a lot of exotic animals like monkeys, sloths, crocodiles and a numerous variety of birds

and insects. Surrounded by this lush and beautiful nature, you will find the community-based volunteer project of LAST.

This conservation project works together with the local community of Pacuare, former poachers have been trained in sea turtle conservation and work together with volunteers to protect the critically endangered animals. The project does nightly and daily beach patrols, operates a hatchery and a small field rescue center for injured turtles. Volunteers take an important part in Pacuare, as their fees generate an income for the local inhabitants. LAST strives to increase



alternative livelihoods for coastal communities to take the need for poaching and hunting turtles away and to achieve a long lasting sustainable sea turtle management.

In Pacuare, sea turtle conservation efforts started in April 2004 when Paul Lepoutre took the initiative to establish a volunteer program for the protection of sea turtles. His approach was rather unique and has the special attention and support of various organizations around the world, most notably the World Wildlife Fund. In December 2011, it became the responsibility of LAST (by then WIDECAST) to carry on the good work and to expand conservation efforts. We have now additionally to our beach monitoring and hatchery operation a Rescue and Rehabilitation center. With this, we are not only able to protect the nesting females and their babies but also to offer emergency treatment for injured or by the police confiscated sea turtles that they regain their strength and health for a life in the ocean again. Furthermore, we have brought an environmental education and outreach program on it's way, to inform and disseminate about sea turtle conservation and involve also nearby schools and communities in conservation activities.



Between March and October volunteers, international and local research assistants patrol the beach from 8:00 pm to 4:00 am in different shifts and in different sectors. It will take at least 4 hours to patrol the beach effectively and if a nesting turtle is found, the eggs will be collected



and relocated into a hatchery. The turtle work will be done following an official protocol and involves tagging, taking biometry and other important data of the turtle. Former poachers now trained in conservation techniques together with previously trained volunteers (they assist in taking data, biometry and collecting eggs) carry out the important work and are also responsible for guarding the nests at the hatchery and releasing baby turtles. At the rescue center volunteers help caring for recuperating turtles

as well as maintaining the facilities. Additionally, volunteers are involved in the daily operations to keep the running of the project smoothly (this could involve cleaning, gardening, kitchen work, painting, maintaining, beach cleaning etc., depending on season and needs). The remoteness of Pacuare beach, the beautiful environment and the basic living conditions at the project site offer an exclusive condition for volunteers. The lack of electricity (only available during sunny days as it is solar driven and mainly for work equipment use), phones, cars, shops and other modern life facilities enriches the quality of an extraordinary experience and

allows connecting people with nature, creating the best environment for making a difference in the life of these amazing creatures – the marine turtles.

The main threats for sea turtles on this public beach are caused by humans: egg poaching and hunting nesting turtles are contributing to a population decline of all species. Especially in the Caribbean, the consumption of sea turtle meat and eggs or the utilization of turtle shell for jewelry production is rooted in long-lived local traditions and a strong belief that sea turtle eggs serve as aphrodisiac. On top of these dangers, sea turtles also face the negative effects of global warming and contamination, which results in nest and habitat loss due to beach erosion or entanglement in fishing gear and trash. Through the involvement of local inhabitants of this very isolated very small community, the Pacuare sea turtle project provides not only a unique opportunity for volunteers to experience a community-based Costa Rican conservation project but also offers a legal and sustainable revenue for community members. The data taken from nesting females improves our understanding of their behavior and helps coordinating conservation efforts worldwide.

Although we receive main nesting activities from the Leatherback Sea Turtle, there are also Green Sea Turtles and some Hawksbill Sea Turtles coming to the beach to lay their eggs. Like all sea turtles species, they are listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the Green Sea Turtle is ranked as “Endangered” and the Leatherback and Hawksbill Sea Turtle as “Critically Endangered”, which means: if we don’t take serious measures now, it is very likely that they will become extinct in the future. Therefore every helping hand is welcome in Pacuare. Each season the project recruits national and international volunteers as part of the conservation project. The project also welcomes school classes and university groups to work as part of the environmental education program.



## How can you help

The main work of the volunteers at our project is assisting the staff of the project with the data collection, protection of eggs and nesting turtles and rescue and rehabilitation center duties. It involves night patrols and hatchery shifts as well as daytime work like beach cleanup, or small projects, including initial construction of the hatcheries amongst others.

## Night Patrols

A group of volunteers, led by an experienced patrol leader, walks one of the sectors of the 7.1km long beach searching for nesting females. An average night patrol will take 4 hours but can last longer in case of sea turtle encounters.



Once a turtle is encountered on a night patrol, the volunteers work directly with it, taking carapace and nest dimension measurements, collecting eggs and taking data. The collected eggs will be

relocated on the beach or taken to the hatchery where the volunteers on shift will build a new nest (according to measurements that were taken) and rebury the eggs. The number of eggs, nest location and turtle identification information (*tag number*) are then recorded by the hatchery attendant for further data analysis, for example hatchling survival rate.



LAST applies a non-confrontation policy with poachers while patrolling the beach. Encounters with poachers are likely during turtle season but no communication and interfering proved to be the best way of dealing with illegal activities, as we are a conservation organization and not the police.

## Hatchery Work

The main tasks in the hatchery will be relocating nests (as described above and after having had a profound training), monitoring nests, keeping out predators (ants, crabs, dogs), taking temperatures and measurements and releasing hatchlings. The approximate incubation time for all sea turtle eggs is 60 days, therefore midway through the season the duties of the hatchery volunteer increase as the hatchlings begin to emerge. At this time, all nests in



the hatcheries must be checked every 10 minutes during the day and every 15 minutes during the night.

If hatchlings are encountered they must be counted and released in the evening to an appropriate location along the high tide line and observed until they reach the sea. Hatchlings are never released directly into the sea. All work must be done according to standard protocols and rules

and after previous training.



The hatchery has to be built every year new, so conditions are best for the relocated nest. This means hard work (shoveling, sieving, exposure on sun, installing a fence and a small shelter, etc.)

## Rescue Center

When a new patient arrives at the rescue center, the turtle has to be observed and diagnosed first. Volunteers participate in maintenance and treatment duties, like changing the water in the turtle tank, feeding, measuring the patient or others depending on the health status of the turtle. The rescue center facilities are still very basic, so every task will include physical work, as everything needs to be done by hand.



## Please NOTE

*The idea of working to help save the endangered Sea Turtles is a very romantic one. The reality is a very different experience. When deciding if this is the type of work you would like to be involved in, please remember:*

- Safety and sea turtles always come first!
- We address threats like: illegal poaching, hunting or environmental damage.
- Most of the work is at night, either working between the hours of 8:00 PM and 4:00 AM on night patrol walking on average 14 km in the dark on soft, wet sand, or working in the hatchery watching it.
- There may be times when volunteers will be asked to work both during the day and night, and more than 30 hours/week, but also times when volunteers don't have a lot to do and have to spend their time on their own.
- Night patrols will still take place during the rain.
- There will be some nights when there are few or no turtles nesting. Patrols will still take place. We cannot be sure when or if turtles will nest. However, remember that during your patrol or hatchery shift, even if you don't see a sea turtle this is scientific data.
- Pacuare is on the Caribbean coast with a tropical climate. This means it is hot with almost 100% humidity; it rains frequently and sometimes heavily. Your cloth and other





personal items may suffer under the consequences and will need more maintenance (cleaning and washing) than you are used to.

- In the area there are sand flies and mosquitoes that are unpleasant. Don't forget your repellent AND some anti-itch cream!
- The place is situated in a very remote location only accessible by boat.
- The place is situated in an isolated location, being in the middle of the rainforest. Accommodation and food are basic and adapted to the local habits.
- It is absolutely necessary to respect local habits and to consider at all times, that you are in a small village where everybody knows everybody and everything – including you as a LAST volunteer.
- Working hours in marine conservation project and schedules vary and can change according to the situation/available material/weather/tide or patient.
- **Working with the turtles is a brilliant and unforgettable experience, and we can use any help. However, this experience is not for everyone.**

*"My experience with WIDECAST was quite challenging but even more rewarding. Once I saw a leatherback laying her eggs in front of me, the long walk, the sand fly bites and the late hours were all worth it! I honestly wished I had more time!", Latavia from Canada*

## Lodging and Meals

The **price per night is \$40**. The project is located in a very remote area, bordered by the sea on the front and a canal on the back, and therefore it is only accessible by boat. Volunteers sleep in shared cabins belonging to the station of the project area. Accommodation is very basic and rustic. Volunteers are sleeping in shared cabins and bunk beds on the project site. **Three meals a day will be provided** and tea and coffee is available too. In low season we sometimes ask volunteers to help out in the kitchen.



Everybody has small lockers available for personal valuables like passport, you will only need to **bring a padlock**. Electricity is only available from solar panels and has to be used rationally. Volunteers wash their cloth by hand – another reason why we recommend light, fast drying clothes. Water is provided from a well and there is no internet and cell phone signal (only with good luck

and depending on the device). Volunteers will be told how you can call for help in case of an emergency once you arrived at the project site.

Please have in mind: There is no shop in Pacuare, so everything, volunteers may need additionally to the meals of to feel comfortable, must be purchased prior to their arrival in Pacuare or in Bataan. Once at the project site, there is no shop available.

Accommodation	✓
Food and drinks	✓
Training	✓
Volunteer's Manual	✓
Practical training	✓
Travel costs	NOT included, about \$50
Free time activities	NOT included

## Rates and Payments

Besides the price per night, there is an additional cost for the boat transportation that is **\$45 per person (round trip)**, please take in mind that we only offer transportation for volunteers on **Mondays and Thursdays**, this, for logistics issues. We can make the transport service any another day of the week, but this will have an extra cost.

There is a **minimum stay** of of 7 nights/8 days.

Our prices reflect the needs we have as a non-profit organization dedicated to sea turtle conservation and the improvement of local livelihoods. Rates support our expenses and make possible to provide you the introduction, theoretical and practical training, volunteer's manual, equipment and material for conservation work, environmental education, workshops for socioeconomic alternatives, professional assistance, three meals a day and lodging.

The total fee should be paid before traveling to the project through the Register Form on-line at: <http://www.rescuecenter.com/turtleProgram.php> We accept Master Card, Visa, American Express, Discover; you can also pay by Western Union, Money Gram and Bank Wire. If you have any questions please write to: [info@rescuecenter.com](mailto:info@rescuecenter.com). **Travel costs are not included** in the fee. Volunteers should plan approximately US\$ 15 for the public bus from San Jose to Pacuare (one way).



In case you are older than 20 and have some environmental/biological background, and want to participate for 2.5 month, you can apply for one of our Research Assistant positions. Just ask for further information at [info@rescuecenter.com](mailto:info@rescuecenter.com).

## What you can expect from us

- Food for three meals a day
- An educational scientific presentation about sea turtles and how to work with them
- Practical training in data collection on the beach and in the hatchery (how to take measurements, tagging, tissue sampling, weighting, relocating etc.)
- Access to staff and biologists for gaining insight professional conservation work
- The opportunity to speak Spanish with the locals and English with the volunteers
- A unique opportunity to gain valuable field work experience in the conservation of endangered species

## What we expect from you

- You must be in good physical condition (on night patrol you will walk on average 14 km in the dark on soft, wet sand), able to work hard and live in basic conditions.
- Not severe eyesight problems (most work is at night without artificial lights).
- Be open minded, flexible and enthusiastic about handson work
- You must have travel/medical insurance
- You must not abuse illegal drugs, drink alcohol during working hours/or work under influence of them.
- You must be 18 or older; volunteers younger than 18 years need a supervisor with written permission and liability waiver signed by their parents.
- We recommend having basic knowledge of Spanish.



## What to bring?

To make your stay an unforgettable experience you have to be prepared well. Please read the following list carefully.

### Documents:

- A photocopy of the first page of the passport (with photography)
- A copy of the health insurance!

### Clothing:

Pack for hot weather and dirty conditions. **Lightweight, DARK and fast-drying articles are best.** Don't bring denim. It NEVER dries in tropical humidity.

- 2-3 sets of dark-colored field clothes (black!), long sleeves for the patrols

- Besides sufficient t-shirts and shorts, also light long sleeved shirts and long trousers for the night, it is the most effective mosquito protection
- Raincoat or poncho (dark)
- Quick dry shorts/ shirts for day work
- Plenty of socks/ underwear
- Swimsuits
- Sunglasses/ hat
- Towels

Footwear:

- Close-toed beach shoes that can get wet (for example dark crocs work very good) – essential!
- Hiking shoes – comfortable and broken in
- Tennis shoes/ sneakers for free time
- Flip flops/ sandals for free time

Gear:

- Headlamp with **RED LIGHT** – **essential for night work** since sea turtles don't get disturbed by this light.
- Padlock
- Extra batteries, or a solar charger with rechargeable batteries
- Waterproof watch
- Sunblock
- Mosquito net, insect repellent and anti-itch
- Alarm clock - **essential**
- A water bottle
- Day backpack
- Plastic bag for your backpack should it rain on the boat

Personal Items:

- Toiletries (biodegradable products are best)
- Personal first aid kit with personal medication
- Camera, cell phone, notebook, books, games, instruments, music player etc. **Don't forget, these items safety are under your own responsibility. Electricity may not always be available, humidity, salty air and sand may damage your electronic devices and have in mind, that Pacuare is a remote and rather poor community.**
- Money for transportation, phone calls, souvenirs or other activities.

***Seasons (roughly)***

*Leatherback turtle: March 1<sup>st</sup> – July*

*Green turtle: July 1<sup>st</sup> – October 31<sup>st</sup>*

*Hawksbill (very few nests): May 1<sup>st</sup> – October 31<sup>st</sup>*





## How to participate

Volunteers are welcome to the project every Monday or Thursday for a minimum stay of 7 nights / 8 days.

To participate, just fill in the online [Register form](#). Before leaving to the project, please contact us at [info@rescuecenter.com](mailto:info@rescuecenter.com) to confirm your reservation and to give you final information and instructions on how to get on your way to the project.

## Other Services

### Airport pick up

If you need an airport pick-up we can arrange that for you. Just get back to us after you have your plane ticket and send us the airline, flight number and arrival time with enough time. Ask about prices and details our volunteers coordinator.



### Stay in San José

If you come to Costa Rica between Monday and Friday, we can offer you to stay on your first and/or last night(s) at LAST office in San José, Tibás our dorm. The room is part of the office which gives you the opportunity to meet and communicate with the people from LAST before going to the project. Meals are not included. Of course, you are free to stay where you would like during your time here and explore additional options. We can recommend Casa Yoses, Hotel Aranjuez and Costa Rica Backpackers, for example.

## Contact Information

### Rescue Center

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