

THE OFFICIAL

# NEWSLETTER

For Projects Abroad Costa Rica



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ProjectsAbroad

# EDITORIAL

## Part of a Greater Cycle



Arguably, the overarching aim of our volunteer programs is for volunteers to recognize their individual role as part of a global community. Whether it's a care, sports, teaching or conservation project, volunteer work is one of the best ways to to make an impact as an individual.

This idea of making a difference and being part of something larger, manifests itself in our conservation project in Barra Honda. Our volunteers see the full cycle of life in the park and they can then also see how they, as human beings, are part of that cycle. They see it in the bio-digester that collects methane from human waste to use as gas for the stove that cooks their meals. They see the importance of bats within the local eco-system; they see how their nightly hunts control the insect population and, therefore, also control diseases while simultaneously depositing new seeds in the forest and contributing to reforestation efforts. They see it in the bio-gardens that they help to construct in local schools, which collect waste water and filter it. This can then be re-used and will prevent water contamination in primary water sources.

More recently, the community in Barra Honda has seen the effects of climate change on this fragile environment. An exceptionally dry rainy season is affecting the patterns of the animals and the availability of water in this traditionally dry province. This makes conservation efforts, especially those concerning water, more vital than ever.

And the driving force behind these cycles is education. Volunteers can learn continuously from their surroundings and share their findings with the local community. This creates a unique opportunity for mutual learning, which leads to change.

Hola everyone, and greetings from Costa Rica! This month marks the end of the 2-Week High School Special volunteers, of which we hosted five different groups taking part in care and conservation work in Heredia and Barra Honda National Park during July and August. Furthermore, we have exciting updates regarding the bat surveys being carried out on our conservation project in Barra Honda. Finally, we've included a series of photos depicting some of the murals painted by volunteers in their placements with the help of local painter, Gilberto Ramirez.

Be sure to follow Projects Abroad Costa Rica on mytripblog.com and also on Instagram (@projectsabroadcostarica), and join our official group on Facebook. Lastly, if anyone has any stories that they would like to include in future Costa Rica newsletters, please send them (don't forget photos!) to [leesteenbergen@projects-abroad.org](mailto:leesteenbergen@projects-abroad.org). I wish you all the best of luck in the coming month, and most of all, happy reading!

**- Lee Steenbergen**

Communications Officer,  
Costa Rica



# GROUP TRIPS

## 2-Week High School Special Volunteers: Care and Conservation



Summer vacation is the perfect opportunity to take a few weeks and explore places that one doesn't generally have the time to explore throughout the year. These adventures provide a chance to gain practical experience in topics that were previously restricted to classroom lectures and videos. But there's a difference between reading about a topic or seeing it on television and actually getting your hands dirty moving the stones and planting the seeds of change.

The 2-week high school special volunteer project is just the opportunity for high school students looking to explore a new culture, a new language, and meet new friends from all over the world during their summer holidays. This summer, we welcomed around 50 high school students from Europe, North America, and Australia who came to Costa Rica to carry out one week of care work in day care centers around Heredia and one week of conservation work in Barra Honda National Park.

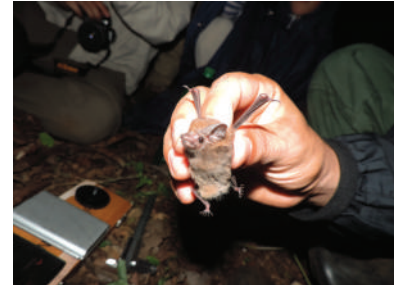
In Heredia, volunteers stayed with host families, and they enjoyed various social events such as dance classes, bowling, and movies in the evenings. During the days, the groups were dispersed among three different daycare centers where their duties consisted of playing with children and painting murals and statues designed by internationally renowned local painter, Gilberto Ramirez. "I come and I read books with the children, and I just play and talk to them," says high school volunteer, Anaïs Simeral of France. "At home I don't always meet new people all the time, and here it's non-stop."

In Barra Honda, they helped to carry out the various conservation projects going on in the national park, including tree planting and seed projects, the construction of bio-gardens in local schools, trail maintenance and recycling projects, as well as cave explorations and bat surveys. "The life in the jungle was very different from my life in Paris. The conditions of life were hard, but you get used to it quickly," says French high school volunteer, Alfred Chwat. "The people in Barra Honda were great--they love what they do and they love having volunteers."



# Project Update

## Barra Honda Conservation: Results from the Bat Survey



Costa Rica is known particularly for its diverse geography, flora and fauna, and nationwide initiatives to protect the natural biodiversity. It is, therefore, no surprise that our conservation project in Barra Honda National Park provides such a diverse range of projects for volunteers

A project that has already proven successful is the bat survey carried out by resident biologist, Eduardo Artavia, with the help of the conservation volunteers. Barra Honda is known for its 42 known species of bats that have been documented by Eduardo and Projects Abroad volunteers. Two of these species have only recently been confirmed.

“There was a list of species, but it wasn’t sufficient, so we decided to continue the inventory,” says Eduardo. “Species #41 was discovered during a testing of our AnaBat System, which is a machine that records sounds to locate bats. We went to the top of the mountain in the park, where we did a test with the machine and we obtained a recording of the frequencies of a bat called the *Cynomops Mexicanus*, or the Mexican dog-faced bat. There is no record of the *Cynomops Mexicanus* in the national museum or other registers, and it has only been recorded once in Costa Rica, in Guanacaste Province. So this record is very important and we don’t know all the places where the bat can be found because it has only been captured once. Next comes species #42, an insect-hunting bat called a ‘macrotis.’ It’s one that we expected to find here but we have never caught it before. We have only caught one individual and it was near a patch of tall cactus where there are a lot of insects. It’s very similar to another species that has already been reported here, except for a variation in its measurements.”

In light of his successes, Eduardo has been invited to present his findings in October at the 2014 symposium on bat research held in Albany, New York. This is sponsored by the North American Society for Bat Research and the theme is tent-roosting bats. “In 2011, we discovered that a species of bat, the pygmy fruit eater bat, was using the leaves of the panama tree as a shelter. No other bat has been reported to use the leaves of this tree as a shelter before. Additionally, this bat has only been found in smaller plants with softer leaves. Never before has it been found utilizing the tougher leaves of a taller tree.”

The opportunity to present at an international research conference is an enormous opportunity, not only for Eduardo personally but for Projects Abroad and the conservation efforts in Costa Rica. “Scientists from all over will be there presenting their findings and learning about the investigations being done around the world,” says Eduardo. “So when you say that you have been working in an area for four years and that you have made huge advances there, they start to notice that Projects Abroad and the people working with them are serious, that the work has a scientific base. They begin to see that this could be an important place to work, not only in terms of bat conservation but also in the other projects that we have going on here.”



# Costa Rica in Photos

## Art in the Community: The murals of Gilberto Ramirez



Top center: Painter, Gilberto Ramirez prepares to draw the outline for a new mural  
 Right: 2-week special volunteers paint a tapestry at their care placement, Semillitas de Vida  
 Bottom Center: Care volunteers from St. Anne's Girls' School with their finished mural Centro Infantil: Little People  
 Bottom Left: Finished mural done by 2-week special care volunteers at Centro Infantil: Osito Feliz  
 Top Left & Center: Street posts painted by the Oakham School Group in Nueva Cinchona