

A local man's adventures in Costa Rica

La Tortuga Feliz
By DaddyMac

Since my camera got wet the first day after I arrived in Costa Rica and is presently out of commission, I decided to write a descriptive narrative of my travels starting with La Tortuga Feliz ("the Happy Turtle"). If you have awareness and concern for the preservation of the sea turtle, what follows will be of interest to you as the reader.

La Tortuga Feliz is a privately run project for the protection of sea turtles. It is also a non-profit organization which has Dutch (Holland) financial backing. When the money paid by volunteers to work the project does not cover the cost of expenses the guys with the deep pockets help out. There can be as many as 70 to 80 volunteers per month on the project when the sea turtles come on the beach to lay eggs. The sea turtle lays anywhere from 60 to 140 eggs in a nest depending on the breed of the turtle. Volunteers can stay from one week or longer - as is the case with the Welsh manager that runs the camp who has been there five years. There is a fee to volunteer on this project, which I initially disagreed with, but since realized the fee is necessary to offset operation costs. The fee is used for things such as maintenance and upkeep of the camp, food for the volunteers, as well as tools and supplies to do the work. The current rate is \$200.00 a week, which includes your lodging and food. Considering the cost to stay at the cheapest hotels and hostels, plus the expense of food, the cost per day at the project is extremely reasonable.

To get to the project you must take a bus to the village of Bataan near the Caribbean coast just north of the port city of Limon, then a 60 minute taxi ride on a gravel road through the banana plantations. You are dropped off at a boat landing next to a small river - the width of this river varies from 12 feet wide down to 3 feet in some areas. It's not uncommon to be forced to hack your way through fallen branches with a machete or to possibly drag the boat across shallow water areas. On the boat ride to base camp you are treated to monkeys playing in the trees while the sloths watch as you pass below.

The boat takes you to a remote area that has no name. It is basically an island since the ocean is on one side and the river on the other with larger rivers running down the ends and into the ocean from inland. This area is about 500 feet wide and extends maybe six miles in length. The government says it is uninhabitable land, so anyone that wants to live there just puts up a fence to show their property boundary and builds. Those that choose to live there are basically "squatters". Presently the population consists of the volunteers from La Tortuga Feliz, a family or two, a number of ex-poachers that now accompany the volunteers patrolling the beach, and of course the actual poachers that still kill the sea turtles and take their eggs. At the far end there is an abandoned house taken over by a dozen drug runners and fathers not wanting to pay child support. There is no grocery store, no police, no hospital, no cars,

no fire department, no electricity... you are in the bush. In an emergency our camp has a satellite phone to call the coast guard who would send a boat or helicopter to us. Our everyday medical needs are handled by Patricia, a local Tico mother and wife that is also our camp cook. Cut yourself with a machete? Just go to Patricia to patch you up. There are also a couple horses on the island if you really need to go somewhere in a hurry, otherwise you walk.

When the boat docks at camp you are greeted by volunteers already there and everyone unloads bags and supplies brought in from Bataan. Surprisingly enough there are a number of buildings such as they are. A kitchen with dish washing area, an office, a library with books in various languages, a bathing area with hand sink and toilet, cabins with bunk beds and a "rancho" which has benches and tables for eating and socializing.

The toilet area mentioned is under a roof but pretty much open everywhere else. When showering or on the toilet you're exposed from above the neck to the lower leg and knee area. This is the only bathing area for the camp and your privacy is at a minimum when more than one person is using this facility. Rain water is collected in large barrels and used for the purpose of washing cloths and dishes. Cooking and bathing water is pumped from a well approx ten feet in the ground and piped into a reservoir on a platform in the trees. There are solar panels, batteries and the necessary equipment to provide some electricity for low wattage lights since it gets dark at about five in the afternoon.

The cabins are wood structures - some connected together, basically wood framing and plywood walls. Walls extend eight feet high with an open area above to the roof for air circulation. Again no privacy among the volunteers - everybody knows what each other is doing. A room has three bunk beds, six beds total. Karen, a girl from Holland, and I arrived together so we took a cabin to ourselves for the first week. Then we were joined by Nikki from England and Jessica from Germany for the second week. Spanish and English are primarily spoken; however German, Dutch and French are common. The average age of a volunteer is probably in the twenties and eighty percent are female, so it is hard to separate guy and girl sleeping arrangements - you just find a comfy bed and make yourself at home. Lockers are provided to secure valuables. Our cabin had a resident bat that flew around the room at night eating mosquitoes and flying insects. Our bat was a welcome intruder because we did not have any mosquitoes biting us throughout the night. When sleeping at night in your bunk you could feel the air move on your face as the bat circulated around the room. We also had spiders, crabs and lizards as room mates. Of course you shook out your shoes in the morning just in case a scorpion spent the night in one of them.

That first morning after Karen and I roomed together we were having breakfast with everyone and during a silence

I asked Karen, "Did I make any old man noises during the night?" Everyone looked in my direction and laughed - DaddyMac was accepted by this much younger group of volunteers.

Food is prepared Costa Rican style by Patricia. She is a Tico (someone who lives in Costa Rica and a native) that is married with her husband and daughter and the resident nurse. It was amazing how good the food was considering we are without refrigeration and a formal kitchen. Meat was served on Mondays and Thursdays when Robert comes back with new volunteers and supplies from Bataan. Other than that, meals are meatless - breakfast might be eggs, pancakes, beans and rice with pineapple and lots of strong coffee. Lunch varies but basically is some kind of soup or simple fare. Dinner, the largest meal of the day, consist of beans, rice, veggies, pizza, soy burgers, spaghetti or similar items.

There are six dogs at camp rescued by Robert and Daniela, the camp managers, after they were left to roam the beach for food. Costa Rican folks don't think about dogs as pets, they are to guard and protect their property and nothing else. When not needed they are left to fend for themselves. All the dogs in camp get along well and are extremely friendly. They realize how lucky they are to have a home here at La Tortuga Feliz. There is a fence around the perimeter of the camp to keep the dogs in and the bad guys out. The dogs do not bark when volunteers come and go throughout the day and night when on their way to the beach for patrol or to the hatchery. But if a Tico walks by they are barking and racing along the fence to let all know someone doesn't belong there.

There may be the impression of danger here but as with anywhere you need to use common sense for your personal safety and security. Everyone on the island has to get along since each, at one time or another, needs to depend on the other when the occasion arises. At the end of the day and just before dark it is common to see the Tico's, the poachers, the drug runners and the volunteers from La Tortuga Feliz playing football (soccer) on the beach together.

Volunteers are responsible for the care and upkeep of the camp. This includes cleaning the kitchen, cleaning the pots / pans and dishes, cleaning of the toilet facilities, racking leaves, garden work and the like. These duties are in addition to those duties with the turtles.

The purpose of La Tortuga Feliz is the protection and keeping of the sea turtle. Without organizations like this poachers and predators would reduce the sea turtle population to extinction. In nature the sea turtle has to survive natural predators, such as the bull shark and other obstacles of the sea - La Tortuga Feliz understands these consequences the turtle must face in the wild. It is the poachers and wild dogs that reduce the turtle population unnaturally that we are concerned with here. Without intervention one turtle in a thousand will survive.
to be continued....

December birthdays celebrated at Brasstown Manor



Brasstown Manor held a birthday party for residents on Friday, December 19, 2010. Marty Taylor, Florence Steed, Ezelle Randall and Lorraine Allen are among those celebrating a December birthday as Lori McClure of Bank of Hiwassee looks on. CONGRATULATIONS and HAPPY BIRTHDAY! NT(Dec22,12)CA

January garden chores from your Georgia Master Gardeners

By Jo Anne Allen
Master Gardener

For winter blooms, plant flowering quince, witch hazel, and leatherleaf mahonia.

To encourage new blooms, deadhead pansies (remove spent blossoms) and fertilize monthly with fertilizer that contains nitrate nitrogen (best for plants growing in cold soils).

Prune trees and shrubs while they are dormant with the exception of those that bloom in the spring. They should be pruned just after they bloom. Evergreen shrubs can also be pruned late this month.

Be sure to water evergreens before the soil freezes if severe weather is forecast, because the roots are not able to take up water when the soil is frozen.

If you have Helleborus orientalis (Lenten rose) planted in your garden - look for blooms beginning this month to mid-spring.

Cold days are great for sitting by a fire and planning your spring landscape changes and vegetable garden.

Watch for poison ivy when working outdoors. Even though the vine is leafless this time of the year, the branches can still cause a powerful reaction if accidentally touched.

Prune nandinas any time between now and early spring by cutting out one third of the oldest canes.

Remove amaryllis stems with the faded blooms. Keep it indoors with your houseplants then plant it outdoors in May.

Watch for borers, overwintering insects, and scale on broadleaf evergreen trees, fruit trees, shrubs, roses, and perennials. Apply dormant oil spray when these pests are detected.

Plant ornamental trees and shrubs this month if the soil is not frozen.

If the ground is dry, till soil in your vegetable garden to help eliminate insects and weeds and incorporate manure or compost to get the soil in good shape for spring plant-

ings.

Use water at room temperature when watering houseplants. Spray houseplants with insecticidal soap if you detect spider mites, mealy bugs, or scale on the leaves.

Chop unwanted bamboo and English ivy to the ground. Follow up with weed killer on the leaves in April.

Water outside containers planted with pansies and evergreens regularly.

Order flower and vegetable seeds for starting indoors.

When pruning, make sure that your tools are sharp. For large branches, first cut through the bark on the underside of the limb to be pruned to keep it from tearing. Next, cut from the top, close but not flush with the trunk. The swelling at the base of each branch is the branch collar and this should not be cut.

Instead of salt, use sand on icy walks and driveways. Salt damages plants and lawns.

If you have not already done so, prepare your vegetable garden area for spring planting when the ground is frost free and not soggy. Apply lime if your soil test indicates that you should. Contact your county extension office for soil test directions.

Request mail-order seed and plant catalogs.

Give houseplants a half turn every month so they do not become misshapen.

For winter interest in your landscape, birch trees,

crape myrtle, deciduous magnolia, kousa and red-twig dogwood, stewartia, and sycamore all have interesting bark.

Shrubs such as forsythia, spirea, and kerria can be divided now.

Repeat houseplants as needed and fertilize using a water-soluble fertilizer at eight-week intervals at half the recommended strength.

Inventory your garden tools and replace or repair as necessary. Sharpen your tools and clean rust from them with steel wool. Coat blades with a light oil and rub linseed oil on wooden handles to help preserve them.

Have your lawnmower serviced so it will be ready when you are for spring grass cutting.

Apply herbicide to winter broadleaf weeds.

Now is a good time to install edgings around flowerbeds and construct walls, terraces, and walkways, when weather permits.

Water trees and shrubs during dry periods. NT(Dec22,A6)

Food Pantry...continued from page 1A

ished and deprived if not for the food pantry," Commissioner Kendall said.

The vision that Mullins and Hicks shared was building a food pantry and getting volunteers to run it, Commissioner Kendall said.

"These two men planted the seed that got it all started," Commissioner Kendall said.

Mullins and Hicks wouldn't let the commissioner deflect all the praise in their direction.

"Bill Kendall was sold on the idea as well," Hicks said. "It was with the help of Commissioner Kendall that the food pantry was born."

Both Mullins and Hicks say that their lone objective was helping their fellow man.

"Any time you can help your fellow man, that alone is a just reward," Mullins said.

Commissioner Kendall knew that Ninth District Opportunity was in cramped quarters at the Senior Center. He commissioned the construction of a 15 x 20 square foot building on Jack Dayton Circle.

A portion of the building was used for Ninth District; the remainder was used for a food pantry.

Since it opened June 1, 2008, the pantry has become the focal point of a community trying to help those less

fortunate than themselves. In some cases, those who have helped the food pantry are now utilizing the resource for themselves because of less than prosperous economic times.

Community Coordinator Teresa Stephens of Ninth District says that the food pantry, through its affiliation with the North Georgia Food Bank, has been a God send to the Towns County community.

In 2010, the pantry has served 16,769 households versus more than 11,000 in 2009. In 2010, the pantry utilized 12,361 volunteer hours. Also in 2010, the pantry has handed out 476,293 pounds of food versus handing out 300,076 pounds in 2009.

"So far, we've helped 169 families in 2010 for Christmas," Stephens said. "The Weekend Nutrition Program is serving 320 children this year."

"The nutrition program for children is in jeopardy," she said. "It's going to be hard to continue without some help. We may not make it through the school year."

Stephens said the pantry has become a lifeline for many local families.

"We're serving 80 homebound families (without transportation)," she said.

The Rev. Glen Eller, president of the Towns

County Ministerial Association praised the work of the pantry's volunteer helpers.

"The statistics tell us what is going on," he said. "Thanks to Commissioner Kendall, David Mullins and Jim Hicks, this community lifeline is thriving."

"Because of our buying power at the North Georgia Food Bank, \$5 can feed a family of four for a week," said Volunteer LaRanda Mauldin. "It's hard to believe how much this food pantry has helped this community in such a short time."

She said that \$20 buys 100 pounds of food.

Towns County Chamber of Commerce President Angel Long attended the meeting. She was there to present a \$1,000 check to the food pantry. It was a portion of the proceeds from the group's annual Christmas Tour of Homes.

"Because of the funds we raised with the tour, we're able to make a donation of \$1,000 to the food pantry," she said. "On behalf of the Towns County Chamber of Commerce I would like to say a special thank you to Commissioner Kendall, Sheriff Chris Clinton and Towns County EMS."

"This check is in honor of Commissioner Kendall, Sheriff Clinton and his fabulous staff and Towns County EMS," Long said.



TOWNS COUNTY SCHOOLS
STUDENTS REACHING THEIR HIGHEST POTENTIAL

2010 - 2011 Calendar

Pre-Planning	August 3 - 4, 2010
Open House	August 4, 2010
First Day of School	August 5, 2010
Labor Day Holiday	September 6, 2010
Progress Reports	September 8, 2010
End of 1 st Nine Weeks	October 6, 2010
Fall Break	October 7 - 11, 2010
Report Cards	October 12, 2010
No School (Election Day)	November 2, 2010
Progress Reports	November 11, 2010
Thanksgiving Holidays	November 22 - 26, 2010
Early Release	December 17, 2010
Christmas Holidays	Dec. 20, 2010 - Dec. 31, 2010
Teachers & Students Return	January 3, 2011
End of 2 nd Nine Weeks	January 11, 2011
End of 1 st Semester	January 11, 2011
Progress Reports	February 15, 2011
No School	March 11, 2011
End of 3 rd Nine Weeks	March 15, 2011
Report Cards	March 17, 2011
Spring Break	April 4 - 8, 2011
No School	April 22, 2011
Progress Reports	April 26, 2011
No School	May 6, 2011
End of 4 th Nine Weeks	May 25, 2011
End of 2 nd Semester	May 25, 2011
Early Release	May 25, 2011
Graduation	May 27, 2011
Teacher Work Days	May 26 - 27, 2011

**NOTE CHANGES: Students will attend school on Jan. 3 & 17, Feb. 21, & March 14
**January 12, 2010 will be the first day of the second semester

Board of Education Approved Revision on December 16, 2010