



EQUILIBRIO AZUL'S VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Help us protect Ecuador's marine biodiversity!

2011

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Turtle Project	3
Marine Bird Project	4
Environmental Education Project	4
Volunteering Categories	5
Research Assistant Volunteer	5
VAI Profile	5
Environmental Education Volunteer	6
VEA Profile	6
General Volunteer	7
VG Profile	7
Required Languages	7
Age Range	7
Free Time	8
Lodging and Meals for EA volunteers	8
The Reef: the volunteer house of EA in Puerto López	8
Puerto López	8
The house at La Plata Island	8
Volunteers & Meals	9
The application process	9
Other documents	9
Notes for Volunteers	9
What does EA expect from its volunteers?	10
Cost of EA's Volunteering Program	10
Refund Policy	11
Things to bring	11

Introduction

Volunteering is one of the most altruistic activities that exist, since you give your time and effort to contribute to a noble cause and not in exchange of a salary. In the case of Equilibrio Azul (EA), our noble cause is the conservation of Ecuador's marine biodiversity. It is thanks to the help of volunteers, who believe in the importance of marine conservation, that we can carry out our projects and let the World know about their importance.

Through a volunteer program with EA, not only will you gain an invaluable experience, but also you will get to know yourself better as a person. You will share unforgettable moments with EA's staff, local people and with the biodiversity of Ecuador's coast. You will forge friendships that may last a lifetime and will directly contribute towards the conservation of Ecuador's marine biodiversity.

It is important to point out that EA is a non-for-profit organization whose mission is the conservation of Ecuador's marine ecosystems and resources. EA works under the guidelines of Ecuador's Ministry of Environment (In Spanish, Ministerio del Ambiente del Ecuador - MAE). The joint work between MAE and EA has allowed the achievement of important advances in terms of conservation.

We hope that the information presented here will answer most of your questions about our volunteer program. Nevertheless, do not hesitate to contact us (voluntarios@equilibrioazul.org) anytime; we would be pleased to help you with anything we can.

EA accepts volunteers throughout the year, and they can be integrated to our projects in course at any time. Currently, EA needs the volunteers for the following projects:

Turtle Project

Until very recently it was believed that Hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) only nested in the coasts of Central America. However, in 2008 EA found that this critically endangered species, also nests in the beaches of the Machalilla National Park (In Spanish Parque Nacional Machalilla - PNM), in Ecuador's Pacific Coast. Since then, EA with the aid of volunteers, has been doing research to learn more about this enigmatic creature and its distribution in Ecuador.

EA also carries out projects with Green Sea Turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) and Olive Ridleys (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), and also a sea turtle egg hatchery program in La Isla de La Plata (La Plata Island), the only one of its kind in Ecuador.

The Turtle Project requires EA staff and volunteers to travel periodically to La Plata Island and stay there for around eight days at a time. As a volunteer you will help with the following Turtle Project activities*,

- Diurnal and nocturnal patrols of beaches inside and outside the PNM
- Measurement and tagging of turtles
- Egg counting and nest tagging
- Egg transfers to an egg hatchery site (if required)
- Installation of transmitters on turtle shells
- Telemetry activities onboard a boat
- Capture and recapture of turtles in the sea.

(*Note: All the activities described above are subject to change according to needs of our projects. Equilibrio Azul DOES NOT guarantee that you will participate in all of these activities during your volunteering period.)

Marine Bird Project

Marine birds are bound to the sea, and therefore they represent good indicators of the ocean's health. Marine birds show important interactions between fisheries, and for this they are subject of incidental capture by fishing hooks and nets. Because of this, it is necessary to evaluate the impact of fisheries in marine bird populations to be able to protect these animals.

Marine birds are bound to the sea, and therefore they are good indicators of the ocean's health. Marine birds show important interactions with fisheries, and for this reason they are subject to incidental captures by fishing hooks and nets. Consequently, it is necessary to evaluate the impact of fisheries on marine bird populations to be able to protect these animals.

EA carries out a monthly census of marine birds in La Plata Island. During this census, EA's staff and volunteers, travel to La Plata Island to count birds and to record their different life-stages. Among the birds that we record are Blue Footed Boobies (*Sula nebouxii*), Red Footed Boobies (*Sula sula*), Nazca Boobies (*Sula granti*) and Galapagos Albatrosses (*Phoebastria irrorata*). The bird census is an activity that requires a lot of physical effort because it involves long walks of about 8 km every day. In addition, great patience is needed in order to properly count the birds, especially during breeding season when the colonies are numerous and extensive. As a volunteer you will participate in at least one marine bird census every month.

As an EA volunteer you will help with the following Marine Bird Project activities*:

- Census of different marine bird species.
- Data collection on the state of the species mentioned above in species-specific forms
- Monitoring of bird nests to determine the success of each species
- Getting nest GPS points in each colony of marine birds
- Depending on the season, capture, measurement and tagging of marine birds

(*Note: All the activities described above are subject to change according to needs of our projects. Equilibrio Azul DOES NOT guarantee that you will participate in all of these activities during your volunteering period.)

Environmental Education Project

In order to do conservation properly, it is necessary to work with the community and transmit the results of scientific research. EA takes this fact into consideration and therefore, has developed the Environmental Education Program. The main objective of this project is to educate people from Puerto Lopez and its surrounding areas about EA's conservation projects and the importance of respecting the environment.

Volunteers are a fundamental part of the Environmental Education Project carried out by EA. It is thanks to volunteers that EA has been able to create an Ecoclub in Puerto Lopez, which presently is made up of 20 kids. Through this Ecoclub kids have participated in activities such as beach cleaning, construction of small gardens and excursions to the PNM. Also, through the Environmental Education Program EA has been working with primary schools in the construction of murals and gardens. Still, there is much more that needs to be done and the ideas and suggestions of our volunteers are always welcome.

As a volunteer of EA you will help with the following Environmental Education Project activities*,

- Beach and marine floor cleaning in Puerto López and its surrounding areas. For this you will be using snorkeling equipment.
- Planning of activities for the Ecoclub.
- Preparation of environmental education activities for schools in Puerto López.
- Planning and execution of communication & diffusion activities of not only EA's projects but also other important environmental topics to the local community. Volunteers often contribute with ideas for possible communication campaigns or help execute active campaigns.

(*Note: All the activities described above are subject to change according to needs of our projects. Equilibrio Azul DOES NOT guarantee that you will participate in all of these activities during your volunteering period.)

Volunteering Categories

Our experience with volunteers has shown the necessity to create different types of volunteer programs. EA has developed three types of programs that vary in the main activities but that have some activities in common. Each type of volunteer is essential for the execution of EA's projects.

Research Assistant Volunteer

(In Spanish, Voluntario Asistente de Investigacion - VAI)

Under this category you will dedicate most of your time to biological data collection that is of great importance for the projects carried out by EA. Prior studies in marine biology or related sciences are preferable but not essential. More importantly, candidates must have the capacity to learn field sampling techniques and know how to apply them in the field satisfactorily.

VAIs are trusted with the review and analysis of the data collected in the field, therefore it is necessary that the candidates have experience with elementary statistical analyses (for example: creating tables, bar charts, histograms, etc.) and data entry in a data base. In addition, you will participate to a lesser extent (40% of your time) in all the environmental education activities that take place. For instance, you will walk the beaches collecting trash and participate in education activities with the schools of Puerto Lopez and the children of the Ecoclub.

Every volunteer whom EA accepts must contribute with the maintenance and cleaning of the Volunteer House as well as of EA's field equipment. Minimum three hours per week will be dedicated to these tasks. Please read the reference schedule so that you have a clear idea of the activities done by an EA volunteer.

VAI Profile

- Great interest towards environmental issues, specially marine conservation issues
- Ability to learn sampling techniques and to apply them satisfactorily in the field
- Ability to learn and to put in practice statistical concepts
- Ability to learn how to collect data and to enter it to EA's data base
- Leadership skills to coordinate small research projects and to assist satisfactorily with the execution of the EA's projects.
- Predisposition to assist EA's staff with environmental education activities
- Predisposition to walk beaches collecting trash

- To work under the sun
- To work within the water
- Predisposition to camp and patrol beaches during the day and night
- Patience and great work ethics
- Preferably,
 - Formal education in areas such as,
 - Biology, Marine Biology, Ecology, Environmental Sciences
 - Experience doing field work
 - Experience doing sampling in the field
 - Experience working with children.
- Enthusiast.
- Ability to work on your own or as part of a team
- Willingness to learn about the environment and the local people
- Availability to be part of EA's volunteer program for at least two months

Environmental Education Volunteer

(In Spanish, Voluntario de Educacion Ambiental - VEA)

As an Environmental Education Volunteer (VEA) you will participate in all the activities that EA carries out in this subject. You will dedicate part of your time to work with children of primary schools in Puerto Lopez and its surrounding areas, teaching them about the importance of conserving marine ecosystems (May to October). In the past, the Environmental Education Volunteers have also helped with the design and creation of murals and gardens for schools.

As a VEA you will help with the creation, development and execution of projects, programs and activities that EA carries out through the Ecoclub. Garbage is a big problem in Puerto Lopez and to help manage it EA has developed a beach and marine floor cleaning program and education programs that teach people about the harmful effects garbage has on marine life. In addition, as a VEA you will participate to a lesser extent (40% of time) in all the marine research activities that EA carries out. For instance, you will patrol beaches to find evidence of nesting activity, help capture turtles in the sea, and help with the monthly census of marine birds in La Plata Island.

Every volunteer whom EA accepts must contribute with the maintenance and cleaning of our Volunteer House, as well as of EA's field equipment. Minimum three hours per week will be dedicated to these tasks. Please read the reference schedule so that you have a clear idea of the activities done by an EA volunteer.

VEA Profile

- Great interest towards environmental issues, with emphasis on marine conservation ones
- Great interest to share ideas and to educate the public in general, and the children in particular
 - Leadership and creativity to develop and execute small environmental education projects
 - Leadership and creativity to develop and carry out diffusion/communication projects of EA's work and other environmental issues
 - Great interest to interact with children
 - Ability to create an environmental conscience among the public

- Predisposition to walk beaches and collect trash
 - To work under the sun
 - To work within the water
- Predisposition to camp and patrol beaches during the day and night.
- Preferably,
 - Formal education in areas such as,
 - Environmental Education, Biology, Ecology, Sociology, Education
 - Experience
 - With environmental education campaigns
 - Working with children, young people and adults carrying out environmental activities
- Ability to learn sampling techniques and to apply them satisfactorily in the field.
- Leadership to coordinate small environmental education projects and to assist satisfactorily with the execution of the EA's projects
- Enthusiastic
- Ability to work by yourself or as part of a team
- Willingness to learn about the environment and local people

General Volunteer

(In Spanish, Voluntario General – VG)

This type of volunteer spends half of his/her time helping with the research activities and the other half with environmental education activities. EA does not expect these volunteers to take the initiative of creating or managing projects (although they are welcome to do so). EA expects these volunteers to help VAIs, VEAs and EA's staff with their daily chores.

VG Profile

- Great interest towards environmental issues, with emphasis on marine conservation
- Ability to learn sampling techniques and to apply them satisfactorily in the field
Predisposition to camp and patrol beaches during the day and night.
- A careful and responsible person who can assist EA's staff with data collection of great importance.
- Predisposition to assist EA's staff with environmental education activities.
- Predisposition to walk beaches collecting trash.
 - To work under the sun
 - To work within water
- Patient and hard working
- Enthusiastic
- Ability to work by yourself or as part of a team.
- Willingness to learn about the environment and local people.

Required Languages

Spanish (at least basic level). Presently, our staff only speak basic English.

Age Range

20 or older

Free Time

When all the daily chores are done (approximately 6 hours per day), volunteers can use their free time as they wish. In Puerto Lopez and its surroundings areas there are several tourist attractions that can be visited. For more information about doing tourism in Puerto Lopez, EA recommends that you contact the "Friends of the Sea - Tour Operators" (<http://www.equilibrioazul.org/english/operators.html>).

It is possible that depending on pending work, volunteers will be required to work on Saturdays and Sundays. This happens especially during turtle nesting season (November to April) when there are many tasks to be fulfilled.

Lodging and Meals for EA volunteers

The Reef: the volunteer house of EA in Puerto López

The Reef, EA's volunteer house, is located two blocks away from Puerto Lopez's beach front. This house lodges up to 10 volunteers. It has electrical power, hot water, flushing toilets, kitchen with refrigerator, grill for BBQ, hammocks, and WiFi. The house does not have washing machines, although there is a spot to wash cloths by hand and hanging wires to dry. Also, note that there are laundromats in Puerto Lopez where you can take your dirty laundry.

The volunteer's rooms have 2 bunkbeds, this means that 4 people sleep per room. Sometimes volunteers will have to share rooms with volunteers from the opposite sex. The bathrooms and showers are also shared by all the volunteers. For this reason, we ask volunteers to constantly help keep the house clean and organized.

In the house there are computers that are used mainly for research activities. Nevertheless, the volunteers can make limited use of these for important personal matters.

The volunteer house also functions as a research center and here is where EA keeps its boat, and other research equipment.

Puerto López

Puerto Lopez, with a population of approximately 17.000 inhabitants, is located in the Pacific coast of Ecuador, Manabí province. The climate is tropical and the average temperature is 26 degrees Celsius.

This port is one of the main fishing ports of Ecuador. Most people in Puerto Lopez are small scale fishermen, which means, that they use fishing techniques that have a relatively small impact compared to the industrial fishing. Puerto López is also a tourist destination and attracts thousands of national and foreign tourists throughout the year. In late August starts the whale season, and thousands of tourists come to Puerto Lopez to watch these amazing creatures. In Puerto López you will find lodging of varied quality and price. In addition, you will find laundry service and Internet Cafes.

The house at La Plata Island

There is a house in La Plata Island where the personnel of EA and the volunteers stay during several days at a time to carry out research activities. This house is the property of the Ministry of Environment of Ecuador. The services available in this house are basic. For example, drinking water is brought in from the mainland and there is limited electrical power. Hence, it is not possible to take a daily shower while in the island.

It is very important that the volunteers are aware that they will be required to live in the Island eight days in a row once a month. This means eight days with very little comfort, limited food and lots of hard work.

Volunteers & Meals

EA's program does not cover meal expenses neither in Puerto Lopez nor in La Plata Island. Nevertheless, the volunteers can make use of the stove, refrigerator, plates and other kitchen implements that are available in the houses. Also, note that EA asks its volunteers to refrain from consuming canned tuna while in the house. As it is well known the canned fish industry (especially tuna fisheries) causes a huge impact to the marine environment.

The application process

It is very easy to apply to EA's Volunteer Program,

1. Download and read the full version of Equilibrio Azul's Volunteer Program (which is actually this document)
2. Fill out the on-line application form
3. Attach a letter of interest (telling us why you want to volunteer for us) and your curriculum vitae (e-mail both to voluntarios@equilibrioazul.org)
4. Once we have accepted you, you must send us a small photo (passport photo size) in JPG format. This is necessary to obtain your Machalilla National Park identification card.

Note: Before being accepted as a volunteer you must show evidence that you possess health and accident insurance.

Other documents

Also, note that at the end of your experience as a volunteer we'll ask you for your comments/suggestions (this is anonymous). You can do so by filling in our paper or on-line forms.

- On line Commentaries/Suggestions Form

Notes for Volunteers

It is important that before you decide to join us as a volunteer, you consider the following points:

- Although EA's staff tries their best to accomplish all tasks as scheduled, sometimes these cannot be carried out due to various factors (i.e. climatic). For this reason, we ask volunteers to be patient and understanding. Schedules in Ecuador, and especially in its countryside, are not as fixed as they are in developed countries.
- With respect to the turtle capture, it is important to notice that we cannot always capture them. The capture success depends on tides, climate conditions, and seasonality. It is rare, but possible, that during your voluntary work you might not manage to see a single turtle.
- It is important to point out that all volunteers who are accepted by EA will have to contribute to a greater or lesser extent with all of EA's projects. For example, most of the activities of VAIs are related to research but they must also get involved with environmental education activities. Similarly, it is expected that VEAs, besides

doing their environmental education work, patrol beaches looking for turtles and with the marine bird census.

- It is important to point out that EA volunteers only engage in scuba diving activities when there is a project-specific requirement. Scuba diving is an activity that requires a certification before being able to enter the water. If a volunteer is licensed to dive, there are several tourism operators in Puerto López that offer diving tours (<http://www.equilibrioazul.org/english/operators.html>). If you want to learn to dive during your stay in Ecuador and obtain your PADI certification at the same time, please contact us for more information (voluntarios@equilibrioazul.org)
- Finally, it is important to be aware that EA reserves the right to expel volunteers who do not comply with the house rules and the terms set in the Volunteer Contract (http://www.equilibrioazul.org/documentos/contract_volunteer_ea.pdf). It is the volunteer's obligation to read, understand and to accept all the rules, procedures and the terms expressed in the Volunteer Contract.

What does EA expect from its volunteers?

EA expects volunteers to,

- **Help clean the house every day (according to the house cleaning schedule)**
- **Help with all of the Environmental Education activities (including gardening work with school kids, doing Eco Club activities, beach cleaning, etc.)**
- Follow the rules of the house of both, Puerto López (The Reef) and La Plata Island.
- Follow the instructions of EA's staff and especially of the field coordinators.
- Help keep the volunteer house organized and clean.
- Work at least 6 hours per day and if necessary, during weekends as well.
- **Keep a good spirit**, even during rough field conditions.

Cost of EA's Volunteering Program

EA uses the money you pay to become a volunteer to maintain the volunteer house, to subsidize projects (especially environmental education projects), and to cover the expenses related to the use of field equipment. Please contact us for more details about the cost of EA's Volunteer Program.

The Cost of the Volunteer Program includes,

- Lodging at the EA's volunteer house located in Port Lopez and lodging at the house in La Plata Island during the length of the program.
- Drinking water in the volunteer house.
- All transportation expenses that are directly related to the EA projects.
- Training, field coordinator and field equipment/material.
- Volunteer ID card.
- Letter certifying that you participated in EA's Volunteer Program

The cost of the Volunteer Program does NOT include:

- Transportation to and from Puerto López, or within Ecuador.
- Meals

- Lodging outside the volunteer house of Puerto López or La Plata Island.
- Personal expenses such as laundry, telephone calls, etc.

Refund Policy

EA does not take responsibility if volunteers cannot begin or finish the program in time due to travel issues (e.g. lost suitcases, missed flights, etc.) or health ones. EA can't refund any money paid to the volunteer program.

Things to bring

It is requested that volunteers bring the following things:

- Alarm clock (obligatory)
- Head lamp (if possible one that has a red light) to use during sea turtle nesting monitoring. (obligatory)
- Insect Repellent
- Sunblock
- Sleeping Bag (obligatory)
- Sleeping Mat (strongly recommended)
- Poncho or Water proof coat/jacket.
- Towels
- Fast drying clothing
- Bathing suit
- Sandals (i.e. tevas)
- Comfortable shoes for long walks
- Hat/cap for the sun
- Warm Jacket (i.e. fleece)
- Snorkel and mask (obligatory)
- Camera
- Sunglasses
- Personal first aid kit (for personal use)
- Rechargeable batteries
- Pocket Knife