

# LAST – Latin American Sea Turtles

## VOLUNTEERING AT PACUARE NESTING BEACH





## **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, which includes 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.**

**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, rely upon and/or benefit 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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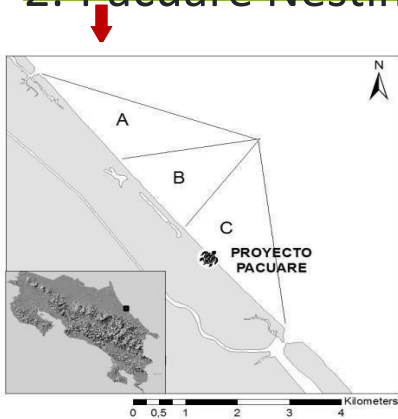
## 1. About us



**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.

## 2. Pacuare Nesting Beach



The project is located in the north of the Caribbean province of Limón, 1km north 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 and Loggerhead Sea Turtles. Moreover, the tropical rainforest, mangroves and rivers are home to 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 these critically endangered animals. The project does nightly and daily beach patrols and operates a hatchery. 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 received special attention and support from various organizations around the world, most notably the World Wildlife Fund. In December 2011, it became the responsibility of LAST (then WIDECAST) to carry on the good work and to expand conservation efforts, adding resources and knowledge to our beach monitoring and hatchery operation. Furthermore, we have initiated an environmental education and outreach program, to inform about sea turtle conservation and simultaneously involve nearby schools and communities in conservation activities.



Between March and October, volunteers, international and local research assistants patrol the beach from 7:00 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.

Additionally, volunteers are involved in the daily operations (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 an already 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 to 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 an 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, 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 the main nesting activities are from Leatherback Sea Turtles, Green Sea Turtles and some Hawksbill Sea Turtles and Loggerhead Sea Turtles also arrive on this beach to lay their eggs. Like all sea turtle species, these species are listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the Green and Leatherback sea turtles are ranked as “Vulnerable” and Hawksbill Sea Turtles as “Critically Endangered”, which essentially 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.



### 3. How can you help

The main work of the volunteers at our project is assisting the project’s staff 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 cleanups, or involvement in small projects, maintenance of the equipment, including initial construction of the hatcheries amongst others.



#### 3.1 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 collecting 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 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 determining 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 or interference has proven to be the best way of dealing with illegal activities, as we are a conservation organization and not the police.

#### 3.2 Hatchery Work

The main tasks in the hatchery will be relocating nests (as described above and after having had thorough training), monitoring nests, keeping predators out (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 20 minutes during day and 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. All work must be done according to standard protocols and rules and only after receiving training.

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

## 4. Please NOTE

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*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 7:00 PM and 4:00 AM on night patrols walking an average 14 km in the dark on soft, wet sand, or working in the hatchery monitoring 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 also 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 clothes 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 antiitch cream! But it is necessary to know that during the hatchery shifts and night patrols is not allowed to use repellent (for protection of the turtles and their eggs).
- 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 we can get. 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*

## 5. Lodging and Meals

The project is located in a quiet, remote area, bordered by the sea on the front and a canal on the back, therefore, it is only accessible by boat. The accommodation is basic and simple. Electricity is only available from solar panels and has to be used rationally. You will have to wash your clothes by hand – another reason why we recommend light, fast drying clothes.



Pillows, blankets and bed sheets will be provided.

Please have in mind: There is no shop in Pacuare, so everything volunteers may need in addition to the meals or to feel comfortable must be purchased prior to their arrival in Pacuare or in Bataan.

## 6. Phone calls

Probably you will have to use the phone to call somewhere. There are a lot phone boxes throughout the whole country. We recommend buying a prepaid call card. There are three different service providers in Costa Rica. You can find them in most shops, pharmacies etc. We recommend taking a phone card from ICE Kölbi (1000 colones), due to the fact that this is the only provider that works in Pacuare and in most remote areas. Phone signal and 3G internet is available only on the beach and only with KOLBI operator. Make sure the phone is unlocked to receive a Costarican SIM card



## 7. Rates and Payments

<b>Accommodation</b>	✓	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 it possible to provide 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.
<b>Food and drinks</b>	✓	
<b>Training</b>	✓	
<b>Volunteer’s Manual</b>	✓	
<b>Practical training</b>	✓	
<b>Travel costs</b>	NOT included, about \$50	
<b>Free time activities</b>	NOT included	



The total fee should be paid before traveling to the project, at the LAST office in San José, Tibás. We accept Dollars and Colones (preferably Dollars). Payment by credit card or debit card, or paypal has an additional 5% charge.

If you wish to pay in advance via PayPal, let us know and we will supply the necessary information. There is an additional fee of 10% for this payment method. Please ask for more details from our volunteer coordinator.

Travel costs are not included in the fee.

Volunteers should plan approximately US\$ 10 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 months, you can apply for one of our Research Assistant positions. Just ask for further information at [volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.com](mailto:volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.com)!

## 8. What you can expect from us

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- 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

## 9. What we expect from you

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- 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.
- No severe eyesight problems (most work is at night without artificial lights).
- Be open minded, flexible and enthusiastic about hands-on work
- You must have travel/medical insurance
- You must not abuse illegal drugs, drink alcohol during working hours or work under the 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.



## 10. What to bring

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### Documents:

- Valid passport
- A copy of your health insurance!
- Return flight ticket

### 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.

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

\*Dark clothing must be worn on night patrols, turtles will see reflected light from light-coloured clothes.

### Footwear:

- Close-toed beach shoes that can get wet, remember you will be walking 10 kms per night with those shoes, and make sure you feel comfortable. Hiking boots are NOT recommended since they get super heavy when it rains and they never dry. (Crocs work very well) – **Essential!**
- 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. Better if it switches directly to red without going through the white light
- Padlock
- Extra batteries, or a charger with rechargeable batteries
- Sunblock
- Insect repellent and anti-itch
- Alarm clock - **essential**
- A water bottle
- Day backpack for hikes

### 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 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.

## 11. WISHLIST

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The project and the community we are living with always welcome donations and gifts from LAST volunteers. Some things may be difficult to find in Costa Rica while in other countries they are common and a lot cheaper. If you'd like to help the project or its people here is a wish list that can guide you:

- Rechargeable Batteries (AAA)
- Battery charger (AAA)
- Headlamp (with red light)
- Waterproof notebook
- Pencil, pen, whiteboard marker
- Backpacks (dark colors as they are used during patrols)
- Board games, cards (adults and kids)
- Coloring books
- Books (adults and kids)
- English learning books (adults and kids)
- Movies (Spanish dubbed)
- Balls (volleyball and football)
- Walkie talkie
- Ponchos, waterproof jackets
- Plastic clipboard

## 12. How to participate

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Volunteers are welcome to join the project every **Monday or Thursday** for a minimum stay of 7 nights/8 days. To participate, just contact the Volunteer Coordinator ([volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.com](mailto:volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.com)).

### **Seasons (roughly)**

*Leatherback turtle: March 1st – July 31st*

*Green turtle: July 1st – October 31st*

*Hawksbill (very few nests): May 1st – October 31st*

Before leaving to the project, please visit our office in San José, Tibás personally. The visit enables you to confirm your reservation and to pay the participation money and allows us to give you final information and instructions on how to get on your way to the project.

## 13. Other Services

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### 13.1 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 our volunteers coordinator for prices and details.



### 13.2 Stay in San José

We can help you find accommodation for your first and/or last night(s) San José. Please contact us for prices and suggestions. 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 Gaudys Hostel, for example.

## 14. Contact Information

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### Asociación LAST

Apdo: 496-1100, Tibás,  
Costa Rica, América Central  
Phone: +506-2236-0947

[www.latinamericaseaturtles.com](http://www.latinamericaseaturtles.com)

E-mail: [volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.com](mailto:volunteers@latinamericaseaturtles.com)



### Tibás Office address:

If arriving by Taxi, show this address to the Cab driver: “Tibás, 200 metros norte y 25 oeste de la Municipalidad de Tibás, casa verde a mano izquierda, con rótulo de tortuga”

**Facebook:** LAST

**Twitter:** @widecast1

**Instagram:** last\_widecast

