

Action Plan for Conservation Organizations on the Island of Utila, Honduras

August 2017

Recommendations for volunteer programming

Activities

Volunteers fall on a spectrum in terms of their interest in research, work drive, scholarly inclinations, etc. The interests of those in the middle to higher end of the spectrum are reportedly somewhat less consistently met by conservation organizations.



Sample Projects (note that **volunteers can be involved in developing these or defining other projects**):

- Create a **library** with reading materials regarding the species of concern to your organization; consider including the thesis work, etc., of the students who have interned, etc., with your organization. The latter may be a way to help ensure that your organization is benefitting from the data collection. Those who collect data could be asked to submit a one page summary of findings to the organization. Opwall (www.opwall.com) has a research library which may serve as an example.
- Develop suggestions for how volunteers can use **down time**. For example, develop walking tours, arrange for Spanish language lessons, or develop educational modules (regarding Honduras, Utila, particular species, etc.,) that students can work through on their own time. Note that Brondo and Kent can assist with this.
- Explore ways to break down the barriers that limit research **permits** to help ensure projects are ongoing.
- Develop volunteer **exchange program** across organizations.

Providing Information

- Provide organization **missions** and goals pre-departure.
- Distribute a daily **schedule**.
- Provide links, PDFs, etc., with **information** regarding the key species of concern to your organization, as well as the community of Utila (history, livelihoods, current events, etc.).
- Communicate that **flexibility** is a valuable characteristic on Utila, where a rainstorm can lead to changes in a schedule.
- Develop an **exit reading packet** and debrief with the individual before he/she departs from Utila. For example, ask the volunteer to articulate 3 steps that she/he will take moving forward given the lessons learned on Utila. Volunteers will ideally carry what they have learned forward, but organizations need to be deliberate in facilitating this.

The Local and Mainland Communities

- Involve volunteers in **environmental education** programs.
- Develop programs to help engage volunteers with **Utila** in a holistic way. Ideally volunteer opportunities such as these increase knowledge of the communities in which the volunteers are immersed. There are a variety of ways to go about this, including lessons or readings on Utila's history, economy, and culture and providing information about local events such as soccer games.
- Add information in **Spanish** to websites.
- Maintain, develop or enhance opportunities for **locals and mainlanders to volunteer**. Word of mouth can be the most powerful way to get people involved; information needs to circulate both offline and online.

Successes

- The organizations attract a population that is generally easy going, understanding and committed. While there are exceptions, it seems that the recruitment, information and other processes work well.

- The experiences are largely positive and beneficial for volunteers; they likely enhance understandings of environmental degradation and the importance of conservation work.

Collaborations

- The **value of collaboration** was articulated by numerous interviewees—it is very much desired by most if not all who are involved to any degree with conservation work on Utila.
- There are many productive partnerships, collaborative projects, and connections already in place. **Celebrate** the ways you are working together. Invest in naming (including on websites and elsewhere) and maintaining these relationships, and from there, consider expanding or adding new ones. Note that productive arrangements persist in spite of challenges, such as the staff turnover at organizations. Examples include: Beach clean-up, environmental education, turtle monitoring, recycle plant, lionfish derby, and agreements between organizations and businesses.
- The following approaches have been discussed by collaborators on this project:
 - An island-wide **conservation coalition** involving organizations, municipality, businesses, locals, and others.
 - **Volunteer exchange program.**
 - Improved **communication and dialogue.**
 - **Cultural history project.**

Moving Forward

- Keri Brondo and Suzanne Kent are resources, for example:
 - for assistance with accessing research databases in U.S. for information on environmental education models, conservation work on other islands, etc.
 - social science research projects, including possibly how to seek funding.

Reports:

Available on request

- Livelihoods and Conservation on Utila. Report prepared as part of CCC collaboration. August 2017.
- Brondo, Keri and Suzanne Kent. Conservation Volunteering on Utila: Preliminary Findings. Powerpoint presentation to FIB, Kanahau, BICA, Coral Reef Alliance, and WSORC. May 8, 2017.
- McGee, Zack and Keri Brondo. “Resident Perspectives on Natural Assets and Vulnerabilities, Conservation, Development and Sustainability on the Island of Utila, Honduras.” Report Prepared April 2016.
- “Conservation, Development & Sustainability on the Island of Utila Honduras.” Report prepared for FIB, Kanahau, BICA, Coral Reef Alliance, and WSORC. March 29, 2017.
- Newton, Brandi. “Volunteer Expectations, Motivations, and Environmental Perspectives on Utila, Honduras.” December 2016.
- Daryl Stephens, Risako Sakai, Sam Cruze, Keri Brondo, Arleen Hill, and Suzanne Kent. “Volunteer Expectations, Motivations, and Environmental Perspectives on Utila, Honduras.” Report for Iguana Research and Breeding Station, Kanahau Conservation Research Facility, CORAL Reef Alliance, and the Bay Islands Conservation Association. June, 2016.

Additional Resources and Support

- Brondo and Kent can provide assistance with running volunteer surveys to compare previous data with new data if changes are made to programming.
- Kent and Brondo can provide assistance with accessing current research on a variety of topics through their university library systems.

Please note that this document reflects general findings and some points may not apply to all organizations.

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