

UVolunteer Weekly Reports

Week 1:

My arrival to Costa Rica was warm and welcoming. I was well oriented to where I was and how to get safely from San Jose to my project site. Once I started working at La Reserva I became oriented to the forests and the mission of the project. On the first day of work, I was lead by Omar, one of the workers on the reserve, around the perimeter of half of the property, helping to clear trails and repair damaged fences. We repeated this the next morning for the second half of the reserve on the other side of the mountain. Over the course of the first week we worked on a variety of tasks on the farm, like feeding and watering the chickens and tending to the permaculture gardens. Omar and I helped to build sides to the raised beds where the vegetables are grown and also transplant some vegetable starts. Also during the week Omar and I walked through both sides of the reserve collecting tree seedlings that later in the day we transplanted in the nursery. In the middle of the week we went out to one of the biological corridors that the reserve created and maintains, to replace some of the dead components of the “living fences”. In between some of the tasks we would go into the forest and collect leaf litter to be used as mulch for the permaculture gardens. On the Sunday after my first week of work, a friend of the managers of the site, Roberta and Dan, threw a fundraiser fiesta/bbq to help raise money for the reserve. It was quite successful and a lot of fun with good food, live music and boat rides on Lake Arenal.

Week 2:

This week we got a lot accomplished for the reserve and have something that will give a memorable touch to my having volunteered. Omar and I worked on building six benches placed around the reserve, along routes Roberta uses to give tours about the forest. It took us two full days but we completed the project and they look and work great. Omar and I tested them out, sitting and listening to the sounds of the forest. Another project we worked on for the week was we weeded the entire nursery, which consisted of close to five thousand

tree seedlings. We also spent some more time collecting mulch from the forest floor. We spent one full day walking the entire length of one of the biological corridors replacing dead posts with new live cuttings. It was a cold, wet windy day but satisfying working on making the corridor the animals need to migrate from one forest to the next.

Week 3:

We started the week off with a big project that we continued to work on all week. We began the expansion of the nursery. Omar and I cleared away part of the pasture that comes adjacent to the nursery. The grasses growing there were over six feet high. Once we had removed the vegetation we leveled the ground to make sections where we could place containers, or black plastic bags filled with soil. The leveling also helped in providing the soil media we would use to fill the bags. By the end of the week we had built three sections and had filled over a thousand containers with soil. We also planted a variety of native tree seeds that had been pretreated by boiling them in water and soaking them overnight. We sowed Guanacaste, roble de sabana, corteza negro, rosewood, mahogany, and guapinol. At the end of the week a class from a local school came to the reserve. They were studying ecotourism and wanted a tour of the forest. Roberta led them through the reserve, highlighting many of its ecological treasures. Dan and I followed along making sure everyone stayed together. It was a neat experience to see everyone interested and asking questions about the forest.

Week 4:

This week we have spent more time in the nursery working on getting more seeds sown and tree seedlings established. Omar and I swept the forest collecting more tree seedlings and giving them new homes in plastic bags. Early in the week we inventoried all of the tree species currently in the nursery and tallied the number of seedlings for each species. We came up with 70 different species of trees, with approximately six thousand trees. Other jobs included, collecting firewood, cleaning seed, weeding and watering the new plants.

Roberta and I talked about some of the new projects coming up for them and the meetings they had been going to since my arrival. It was great to get the insight into some of the community outreach and the ways they go about expanding the forest in the province. My time here has been very productive and I have experienced and learned a lot about the plants and animals of the tropical forest.