

Dear Class of '55,

The 3 ½ week long trip to Costa Rica was one of the highlights of my college career and remains to be one of my greatest learning experiences to date. The daytime Biological field studies, interviews, lectures, discussions, middle of the night turtle patrols, and the 48 primary source documents we read during the trip ensured that we were steeped in firsthand experience with a fair amount of background knowledge. We worked with numerous conservation efforts during the course centered on animals including everything from frogs to sea turtles and got an insider's perspective on what conservation techniques work. We read about and saw in action a functioning form of local conservation. At Ostional where the arribada occurs, a mass monthly egg laying, the locals participate in the conservation of the Olive Ridley sea turtle and have a unique incentive in the form of a limited harvest of sea turtle eggs that are doomed to be destroyed by following turtles laying their eggs. This gives the locals an income as well as a reason to preserve the turtles.

Two of the biggest lessons that I took away from the study abroad trip are the necessity for working with local people for conservation efforts and the amount of work and dedication required to be a conservationist. When the local people don't support a conservation effort, it increases that effort's likelihood for failure. I came to realize that to preserve wildlife we must also help the people that must coexist with that wildlife. It is hard to reprimand a man for killing an endangered animal to feed his starving child. During one of the long nights (7pm-12am or 12am-5am) of patrolling the beaches of Las Tortugas and Ostional for turtles, I was considering the fact that I had not seen a turtle in quite a few nights and having seen only one during the trip thus far I was getting discouraged. Later that very night, I got to see my first Olive Ridley turtle. The feeling of trudging back and forth on a beach all night for many nights in a row and finally seeing a sea turtle was a renewing experience. My tiredness vanished as I saw the movement of a shadow and my adrenalin pumped. After that experience, I realized one of the great trials of the conservationist: The conservationist does such a great amount of tiring work and sometimes has no physical connection with the animals or ecosystems they try to preserve for great lengths of time. This separation can lead one to forget what they are toiling each day to preserve and end they are trying to reach. This is not a challenge unique to conservationist; this is a challenge that all people face throughout their lives: the loss of a vision. It is this challenge that I too will face as I leave college. Now that I know what I will face I feel prepared to meet that challenge head on and keep my eyes open to the vision of the future I wish the world to be.

Thank you, class of 1955 for helping to make this study possible for me.

Warmest Regards,

Adam Willis



The Psychology class and the Biology class together.