

Katherine Gibson – Costa Rica, Summer 2018

For 2 and a half months this summer I worked at Golfo Dulce Retreat - an ecolodge located on the southern Pacific coast of Costa Rica, where the juxtaposition of ocean and tropical wet forest creates an environment which supports astounding biodiversity and is unparalleled in beauty.

Initially a lot of my time was spent researching the flora, fauna, topography and history of the Golfo Dulce region in order to best inform guests. This proved very useful when leading or assisting on expeditions to the nearby mangroves and primary rainforest. This reading has also come in handy for one of the other main biologist jobs: blog writing.

I pioneered a new series of information blog posts/fact files entitled 'all creatures great and small', which looks at some of the smallest but greatest species to grace the rainforest and ocean habitats of Golfo Dulce, uniquely inspiring awe despite their diminutive size. Examples of species I wrote about include golden silk orb weavers and rufous-tailed hummingbirds. The latter are a species close to my heart, because the last month of my trip was spent raising two little chicks after they were orphaned, and their nest destroyed in an almighty thunderstorm. This involved syringe-feeding every 20 minutes, so while it was a joy caring for them, I'm very pleased that they're now able to fly and feed for themselves!

While acting as a guide on rainforest and ocean trips was my main role, I was also involved in the hospitality side of things through baking bread and sweet treats for the guests on a daily basis and doing lots of gardening and odd jobs like painting signs and creating a new self-guided trail.

The other side of the work of a biologist volunteering at Golfo Dulce Retreat involves tutoring and generally supervising the owners' kids. I gave the eldest two – who are approaching their IGCSEs – two English Literature and one Geography lesson every week, in addition to some Biology lessons and assisting with Chemistry. With the youngest I did regular English lessons.

The last 10 weeks has been fantastic and an invaluable learning experience. My knowledge of a plethora of different species of animals and plants has increased hugely, and I've had the pleasure of working with and meeting staff and guests from all around the world.