

Jacob Ashton (Natural Sciences) – Costa Rica, Summer 2016

I was fortunate enough to spend the summer months in a Costa Rican tropical paradise. I was staying with a family who had decided to up sticks from London and go about renovating an ecolodge, nestled within rainforest adjacent to the warm waters of the Golfo Dulce.

I undertook a variety of tasks, along with two other students, to earn my keep. We tutored their three kids in a variety of subjects, as well as accompanying them swimming in the bay or exploring the forest. We also helped out with various manual tasks, including constructing a tree nursery from scratch, which now hosts saplings of a variety of indigenous species. For my Part II Zoology project, I also undertook butterfly surveys in disturbed and undisturbed areas, capturing lots of photos along the way. The family were always keen to learn any biological knowledge about the area, in preparation for when they would accept visitors, and we were more than happy to oblige in sharing what we knew.

I was especially interested in the wildlife of the area, and would take any excuse for a foray into the jungle, be it camera trapping, bird watching, or filming a documentary on leafcutter ants. The biodiversity was absolutely overwhelming, and lots of it very happy to make your acquaintance as well. A day never went by when we didn't see scarlet macaws shrieking overhead or green iguanas clambering around the papaya trees. Coatis and peccaries also roamed in groups, investigating any trespassers curiously. Chattering capuchins and booming howler monkeys occupied the treetops, whilst frogs, lizards and snakes lurked in the undergrowth. Caracaras would join a run along the beach, although it was worth keeping an eye open for the tracks of the crocodiles that inhabited the nearby swamps. To cool off afterwards a snorkel amongst shoals of brightly coloured fish and the occasional ray was always on the cards. A leisurely kayak could very easily become chaperoned by bottlenose dolphins, and a boat trip was almost inevitably interrupted by meeting a humpback whale and her calf. Paradise was an understatement.