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900 HOURS ON NESTING BEACHES: ProTECTOR VOLUNTEER EFFORTS IN HONDURAS

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The work of volunteers in sea turtle conservation is indispensable, whether their contribution is over the short or long term. Participants working with ProTECTOR aid in a variety of research projects throughout the country of Honduras. During July - November 2012, five individuals donated their time to assisting graduate students and professors through the ProTECTOR Volunteer Program. Three of these worked in Honduras for only a few weeks, while two served as interns for up to five months. Although some volunteers were undergraduates or recent graduates in biology, others were individuals with professional careers in areas outside the realm of science. Volunteers worked at the Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge, on the Bay Island of Utila, and in the communities of Punta Ratón and El Venado, on the Pacific coast of Honduras. In all, volunteers assisted in patrolling beaches for nesting females, tagging adult turtles, monitoring nests, and collecting hatchling data. A related project involved profiling the terrain, slope, vegetation, and pollution cover of nesting beaches in Cuero y Salado and Utila. Altogether,

volunteers spent over 180 man-hours working in Cuero y Salado, over 500 hours in Utila, over 150 hours at Punta Ratón, and over 40 hours in El Venado for a total effort of over 900 hours. While working alongside professionals in the field of biology, individuals gained hands-on experience in the roles and duties of sea turtle biologists. ProTECTOR Volunteers provide assistance to each researcher that might otherwise be unavailable at a study site in Honduras. Furthermore, citizen scientists like these continue to help educate people in both the United States and Honduras about the importance of sea turtles, as well as the conservation and research efforts of ProTECTOR, through both word of mouth and social media platforms.