

Keba Fitzgerald, Peace Corps Volunteer, Suriname (2000–2002)

Biography

My name is Keba Fitzgerald. I am 27 years old. I was born and raised in the Mojave Desert of southeastern California, in a small town called Ridgecrest that is nestled at the base of the Eastern Sierra Nevadas. I have two sisters and one brother—all older, and all married, and all in different states: Arizona; New York, and California.

After completing high school, I moved to Santa Cruz to attend the University of California. I pursued a bachelors degree in environmental studies, specializing in wildland conservation and natural



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history. During my studies there, I participated in a number of field programs, including two different wilderness

education field semesters with Sierra Institute, a semester as an intercampus exchange student to the White Mountain Research Center, a summer as a biological technician intern with the U.S. Forest Service, and a year as an international exchange student to the University of Adelaide in South Australia. Upon graduation, I spent a year working for a private environmental consulting firm in Nevada and two summer seasons working for the National Park Service.

Then I moved to southeastern Washington to begin the Peace Corps' Masters International program in environmental science at Washington State University. To be part of the

Masters International program, I applied jointly to the Washington State masters program and to the Peace Corps. I completed all of my graduate coursework before I departed for my Peace Corps service. Now, the project work that I do during my service becomes the basis of my master's thesis. When I complete my service, I will return to Washington State University for one final semester to write and defend my thesis. My hobbies include dancing (African, merengue, belly, modern, salsa), drumming (studied African drumming for 5 years), writing, backpacking and hiking, and yoga.

I am a parks and wildlife Peace Corps Volunteer serving in Suriname—a small country in northeastern South America, just north of Brazil and east of Venezuela. Suriname is a country rich in culture and language, history, and natural resources. More than 80 percent of the country is covered by the Amazon rain forest—and more than 90 percent of this forest is still intact! It is a former Dutch colony, which achieved independence in 1975. During my three-month training, I studied the Dutch language and lived with a Creole family in the capital city of Paramaribo, while also beginning my work with my assigned agency.

Now, I work with a semi-governmental organization named STINASU, which stands for the Foundation for Nature Preservation in Suriname. STINASU manages the country's network of natural reserves and nature parks. The director asked me to work in one of Suriname's nature parks, located in the interior rain forest, where I have been asked to design

and implement an ecological monitoring program.

Although I began working in the park in December, after my official swearing in as a Peace Corps Volunteer, STINASU hired a research coordinator for the park in March. He is my counterpart, and we work closely together, carefully designing and coordinating the research and monitoring program in the park. We spend about three weeks of every month living and working in the park—walking the trails and research transects every day and recording as much information as possible about the diverse animals that we encounter. In addition, we are seeking to expand our research and monitoring activities to include other nature reserves in the country. Soon we will be starting up satellite training programs in two other reserves. Additionally, we have been asked to spend a month at one of the beach reserves assisting with nesting sea turtle research. I am also actively working to promote environmental education programs in the park and on a national level throughout Suriname.



Keba by a waterfall in Suriname, South America



Keba (center) hanging out with nature park employees and a Dutch intern



Keba and her counterpart, Mitro, doing field research in a rain forest nature park in Suriname