

FINAL REPORT OF MY VOLUNTARY YEAR WITH GIACCHE VERDI BRONTE

June 2024 - May 2025



Volunteer:

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Germany

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Projects:

When I arrived here in the start of June the current project was unfortunately already wrapping up which meant for me that there was no specific project to work on at the time. Instead I had a lot of time to learn Italian, mostly online but also with some of the local people, however that was a bit difficult since very very few people speak English here and my Italian at that point was not good enough to hold a conversation with local people. All the other volunteers and students that I lived with finished their within a few weeks after my arrival, which left me with only small research projects about alternative agriculture options for the harsh conditions that are present in Sicily.

In September new Volunteers arrived and the first small “project” was the almond harvest in the end of September which lasted for about 2 weeks. Over the span of October and the start of November there were again no active projects, however a lot of field work which had us occupied for most of the time.

Towards the end of November we then started our main project called “Farfalle per la Biosfera”. This environmental education project focuses on the role of butterflies in the local and global biosphere and their role as a victim of climate change and urbanization.

The project is split into two parts, the first one is a presentation held by the volunteers and Giacche Verdi in several local elementary schools in Bronte, Maletto and Adrano in the months of February and March, which aims to bring the information to the kids in a way they will understand the importance and urgency of change in order to slow

down climate change and give them ideas as to what they themselves can do at home or at school. Since this is the part of the project that is already completed i would say that it was quite successful, of course not all kids paid attention throughout the entirety of the presentation but it seemed to me like most of them did.



The second part of the project will take place a few weeks after my stay here is finished so unfortunately I will not be part of the activity itself. It is a follow up of the presentation in form of an educational path on the fields of Giacche Verdi.

It consists of informations about Placa Bajana which is one of the oldest parts of Bronte and the place where the educational path starts and ends as well as insight on the local wild animal species in and outside of the Simeto river and butterfly populations and some general information to the local geography.

The Volunteers will complete the path with the kids from some of the schools we held the presentations at. Building the Path was the majority of our work in the last weeks of my stay which consisted of clearing out areas on the field, constructing panels out of logs and sticks and creating the information panels themselves, some about the local plants and animals, some about the history of the place.

Work Life:

The life as a volunteer in Bronte is definitely very different to at home in Germany but in no ways bad. Work in the office starts at 9:30 in the morning, if we go on the fields we leave the office around 7:30, although depending on the weather it changes a little.

The work on the fields varies a lot, in summer we cut the tall grass under the trees, in autumn we do the almond harvest and every second year the pistachio harvest. Towards the end of the year we cut the pistachio trees and in January and February we planted crops and small fruit trees. In March we spent several weeks cutting the about 400 almond trees Giacche Verdi has. Since then most of the time on the fields was dedicated to building the educational path around one of the fields. It is safe to say that the work on the fields is never the same and when the weather is good the views on Etna and the Simeto river are incredible.



Work in the office was always either one of two things: learning Italian or working on the “Farfalle per la Biosfera” project, with some small tasks in between that lasted maybe a day or two. In all honesty, communication issues are a very common thing between the volunteers and Giacche Verdi so we sometimes have no idea what we are actually supposed to do, occasionally our ideas just get thrown out the window after being approved days or weeks before discarding days of work and if you come a few minutes to

late you get scolded even though they themselves are very often late by up to half an hour... But I would say that this has improved towards the end of my time there so I am sure that this will not be an issue anymore soon.

Apart from sometimes not feeling integrated into the work we have to do it can be really fun since all the volunteers work together in one room so when there is not much to do we sometimes play games or have good conversations with Andrea and Lidia who sometimes also tell us some stories about the towns and the life in Sicily. And of course the coffee breaks at Tartufo every morning were essential, by far one of the best places to go to in Bronte.

Everyday Life:

Apart from working the everyday life here is very calm, Bronte itself is quite small so there is not so much going on. Living together in a house with a bunch of other people is of course chaotic from time to time but I think we managed to live together as a group very well, most of us were very close and I still keep in contact with some of the people who already left earlier than I did. The House is quite big and the garden is fairly large as well with a big lemon tree and enough space to plant different vegetables and crops which we did in the last few weeks. The kitchen is unfortunately a bit small for the amount of people we are so cooking was sometimes a little bit difficult since we did not cook all together very often. Since the tap water is not drinkable we had to get our drinking water from the fountain which was on the way to the office, slightly inconvenient if you forget in the morning but something I got used to very



quickly. Everyday life for me also means doing sport, Mount Etna is a perfect place to go running, biking and hiking. Towards the second half and especially the end of my stay running became a big part of my life and I spent countless lunch breaks and evenings running up the road to Piano del Grilli, and on the weekends I drove to Nicolosi and Piano Provenzana a few times to go running. As somewhat of a final challenge here I decided to run 100km around the entire Volcano in a single weekend which was one of the most incredible experiences I had during my stay here and it brought me on a potential career path I never thought I would be on. Apart from running on Etna, it is also an incredible mountain to just observe and view, especially during eruptions which were plentiful in the last 12 months. In the

start of July I saw an eruption for the first time and it was quite a big one, I spent the entire afternoon and evening watching it and taking photos. This would also be the last eruption I would see during the day, the next four eruptions I saw in the following weeks were all during the night,



leading up to the biggest eruption of the last three years in the middle of August, where I spent the entire night watching the volcano and taking pictures, definitely one of the most incredible things I have ever seen. After said eruption it was very quiet for a few months until it erupted again in the middle of February this year, although nowhere near as big, and it has been erupting more or less every week since that event, with one lava flow reaching over the Pista Altamontana at around 1800m altitude. Since February I have been to this now mostly cold lava flow several times and even though it has been 4 months now in some spots the rocks are still warm... Seeing an eruption of Etna was the one of the things I really wanted to see during my stay here and I think I can call myself very lucky to have seen so many now, since it is difficult to describe it I would just show some pictures.

