

Iberian Wolf Recovery Centre is a centre for wolves taken from illegal captivity and zoos, there is one group of 3 brothers and 5 pairs, parents and mates. Their aim is to educate the public about wolves and the dangers they face, in both Portugal and Spain and the wider world.

I spent two weeks on the outskirts of Mafra doing volunteering at the centre with 9 others from across the globe. There were three main jobs, water and observation, clearing the banks and enclosures, and feeding.

The first day I there we were given a presentation about Portugal and places to visit, we were then taken to the shops to buy food for the next few days. Then we helped on the last water round, was three a day to try to prevent mosquitos laying eggs. We then went back to the largest house and had dinner. Most days we cooked and ate dinner together, which meant a lot of food.

Doing the water round was very interesting. There was a lot of hills and it was very slippery, but the scenery was amazing. Got to see a lot of the wolves, either up close as they got used to us or watching us from a distance. Part of the water rounds was observation, watching the wolves to see how they interacted with each other, or how they did not interact. One of the wolves kept trying to eat the water from the hoses or grab it so we had to hold the hose just outside the enclosure.

The feeding was a different experience. The day before we had to weigh the meat and put it in a storage house to defrost, then we had to cut up and smash the small meat for the older wolves and the brothers. The larger bits of chicken and rabbit were just had to throw it over the fences. The cut-up meat had to be rolled into balls, so it could be thrown over. It was very messy and not all of the meat made it over the fence.

Most of the days was spent doing clearing the vegetation from the banks surrounding the enclosures. We had to do this to prevent fires and remove invasive species of plant so native plants could be grown. There was a lot of hacking of brambles and removing roots and plants. There were also a few small trees that were cut down. One of the days went inside one of the enclosures to work, we spent a half day clearing one of the hills. We could not stay for long as it would stress the wolves out, us being in their territory.

During the two weeks also went out of the centre to explore nearby places in Portugal such as Mafra and Sintra, where we saw a lot of castles and historic sites. We also tried Portuguese food and deserts which were really nice.

All in all, it was an amazing experience, being that close to the wolves and helping in their conservation.