

Puerto Rico

The Atlantic Coast Joint Venture

Partners working together for the conservation of native bird species in the Atlantic Flyway region of the United States.

The Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (ACJV) is a partnership of federal, regional and state agencies and organizations focused on the conservation of habitat for native bird species in the Atlantic Flyway of the United States from Maine south to Puerto Rico. The joint venture coordinates planning and delivery of bird habitat conservation, resulting in more effective and efficient conservation and the ability to focus limited resources on continental, national, flyway and regional bird conservation priorities.

Grant Programs Working Towards Conserving Habitat in Puerto Rico

•North American Wetland Conservation Act Grant

In 2005, a \$50,000 small grant was awarded to the Lajas Valley Restoration Project; partners provided \$183,000 in matching funds and \$170,400 in non-matching funds. This project is the first of four phases to restore a 350-acre wetland at the Laguna Cartagena National Wildlife Refuge. Fifty years ago, the construction of an irrigation drainage canal increased and stabilized water levels in the wetland, allowing cattails to overgrow an area that once had supported over 20,000 wintering waterfowl and 100,000 migrating shorebirds. Project goals are to remove cattails and manage their growth, construct dikes and canals, and install water-control structures to simulate the wetland's natural cycle of flooding and drawdown.

•San Miguel Natural Reserve Receives Two Significant U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Grants

Partners in Puerto Rico recently received \$2 million in grant funds for the acquisition of 445 acres for the San Miguel Natural Reserve in the Northeast Ecological Corridor, a proposed 3,200-acre natural reserve containing an array of coastal habitats seldom found in other parts of the world. The Puerto Rico Department of Environmental and Natural Resources and the Trust for Public Land each received \$1 million in grant funds from the National Coastal Wetlands Grant Program and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. Each provided over \$5 million in matching funds toward the acquisitions. The Reserve includes marine, estuarine, and palustrine wetlands, and will protect beachfront for the endangered leatherback turtle and 14 other federally listed species. This project will benefit Northern Pintails, Lesser Scaup and Mallards, as well as Ring-necked Ducks, American Wigeon, Wood Ducks, Redheads and Canvasback. The project area is also of critical importance to other waterfowl including the West Indian Whistling Duck, Ruddy Duck, Masked Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, White-cheeked Pintail, Northern Shoveler, and Hooded Merganser. At least 50 species of birds also depend on the site's wetlands, including seabirds, coastal waterbirds, wading birds and marshbirds.

•Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Grants

Four Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) Grants have been awarded in Puerto Rico, providing over \$525,000 in grant funds matched by over \$3,000,000 in partner funds.

Building a Baseline Foundation for Conserving Important Bird Areas will use funds to investigate and document the occurrence and abundance of priority migratory birds within 700 existing and potential Important Bird Areas in Puerto Rico, Central America, and the Caribbean. This information, together with data on other priority birds, protection status, and site threats will be used to systematically identify the highest-priority sites and initiate conservation actions. Partners also will establish and manage an Internet portal for sharing project information with more than 100 local participants and stakeholders; manage data and map sites in the grantee's World Bird Database; and develop a directory of the top 20 site action projects.

Expanding a Shorebird Monitoring Network in Puerto Rico through Local Participation will expand on current efforts of the Puerto Rican Ornithological Society, Inc. volunteer-based Shorebird Monitoring Network. In addition to the 13 coastal bird-monitoring sites, two new sites will be monitored to determine species presence and abundance, and will statistically analyze and compare the data among the 15 sites.



West Indian Whistling-duck and Wetland Conservation Project seeks to reverse the decline of the globally threatened West Indian Whistling-Duck and the continuing loss and degradation of wetlands throughout the Caribbean through research and region-wide public education and awareness program.

The Río Encantado Migratory Bird Wintering Habitat Conservation Project is part of a larger initiative to protect and manage important migratory bird habitat in the northern Karst region of Puerto Rico. This area is a priority area the conservation of neotropical migrants. The project includes the following activities: protection and management of bird populations; maintenance, management, protection, restoration of bird habitat; and community environmental education, emphasizing the importance of the Karst region as one of the most important habitats for Neotropical migrants, endangered species, and the most important aquifer recharge area on the island.

Cooperative Efforts

•ACJV Establishes Cooperative Agreement with Puerto Rico Ornithological Society

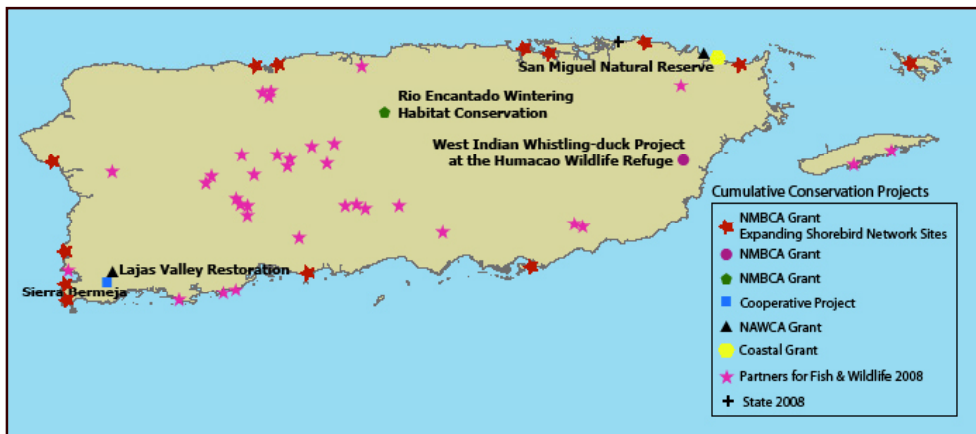
In August 2004, the ACJV entered into a cooperative agreement with the Puerto Rican Ornithological Society (<http://www.avesdepuertorico.org/>) to work cooperatively to protect the area of Sierra Bermeja. The objectives of this cooperative effort are to implement the Sierra Bermeja Conservation Plan through completing a conservation plan; participatory adoption of the plan by communities, landowners and students through workshops, media presentations and other means; a targeted education/awareness initiative focused on landowners, teacher and students of Cabo Rojo and Lajas; and advocacy to decision makers and through the media in favor of land acquisition in the Sierra Bermeja area.

Sierra Bermeja provides habitat for at least 20% (72 species have been reported) of the bird species recorded in Puerto Rico. The Sierra is one of the few locations in the island where a high percentage (75%) of endemics coexist. Twelve endemic species are present, including two species of global conservation concern, the Critically Endangered Puerto Rican Nightjar and the Endangered Yellow-shouldered Blackbird, both of which are federally listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

•Puerto Rico-U.S. Virgin Islands Bird Conservation Region

Although Puerto Rico-U.S. Virgin Islands Bird Conservation Region (BCR 69) is not an official Bird Conservation Region under the framework of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative at this time, it is recognized officially by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service as a discrete planning region for the conservation of bird habitats and bird populations in the Caribbean Basin.

When Puerto Rico became a member of the ACJV, a new bird conservation relationship began, a relationship extending throughout the Caribbean Basin, the Atlantic Flyway, and others parts of North America, and which is based on the conservation needs of shared species and hemispheric bird conservation values. There are existing partnerships and quality bird conservation work being conducted in BCR 69. However, new partnerships are being forged and priority conservation of bird habitat in BCR 69 is being planned. Ducks Unlimited Inc. is working on establishing a chapter to fund raise for wetlands conservation. New relationships have been established between the ACJV and the Caribbean Islands NWR Complex, Puerto Rico Department of Environmental and Natural Resources, the U.S. Forest Service, Puerto Rican Ornithological Society, and Ducks Unlimited. USGS Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units at Mississippi State University, North Carolina State University, and University of Florida, are all working with these partners to provide better information for bird conservation efforts in Puerto Rico.



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Georgia, Maine, Maryland,
Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New
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Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South
Carolina,
Vermont, Virginia, Puerto Rico,
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.,
National Fish & Wildlife
Foundation,
Wildlife Management Institute,
The Nature Conservancy,
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,
National Park Service,
U.S.D.A. Forest Service, U.S.G.S.
Patuxent Wildlife Research Center



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