



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Puerto Rican Karst



Haystack hills of northern Puerto Rico. Photo: L. Miranda

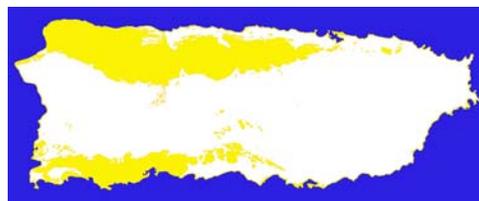


Karst San German. Photo: L. Miranda

Puerto Rican karst covers more than one third of the island's territory. It is divided into two major regions: the northern karst, which is located primarily in the subtropical moist forest life zone and the southern karst located primarily in the sub tropical dry forest life zone.

The karst region is old

The karst region originated in a marine environment, as many as 140 million years ago. Geological processes have created spectacular landforms, such as the haystack hills ("mogotes"), which are unique formations within the United States.



Large unfragmented forest

Due to its rugged topography the karst region of Puerto Rico holds the most extensive forest canopy cover on the island.

Coastal wetlands depend on the karst

Because of its complex hydrological dynamics, other ecosystems depend on the karst for their proper functioning. For example, Caño Tiburones in Arecibo, is one of the largest coastal wetlands in Puerto Rico. This wetland depend almost entirely on the karst for its water supply.

High biodiversity

The karst region harbors the richest biodiversity in Puerto Rico. More than 1,300 species of plants and animals are present in the karst. It is prime habitat for most of the native and endemic species of wildlife, including 30 federally listed threatened and endangered species. Many of these species are only known from karst ecosystems. More than 75 species of Neotropical migratory birds use the karst as wintering habitat.



The endangered Puerto Rican Parrot (*Amazona vittata*). Photo: J. Colón

High potential for recovery of endangered species

The northern karst belt of Puerto Rico has been identified as a viable release site for the establishment of the second wild population of the endangered Puerto Rican Parrot (*Amazona vittata*).

For more information please contact

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Goetzia elegans, typically found on mogotes. Photo: Eugenio Santiago

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