



Puerto Rican Parrot Interagency Recovery Program

The Puerto Rican Parrot (*Amazona vittata*) is an endangered species protected by the Endangered Species Act since 1967. This endemic species is the only native parrot in the United States, and it is considered one of the most endangered birds in the world. In a cooperative effort to work towards the recovery of this species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (PRDNER), and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), joined forces through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to outline the management of the parrot both in captivity and in the wild towards the common goal of recovering the species.



Puerto Rican Parrot; Photo by Pablo Torres, USFWS

The MOU established three levels of collaboration: operational, management, and an executive level.

The Interagency Operational Committee (IOC) is represented by the operational Project Leaders from each agency. This committee is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the project and the implementation of the policies and directives.

The Interagency Management Committee (IMC) consists of the on-the-ground managers from each agency (i.e., USFWS Field Supervisor, USFS Forest Supervisor, and the PRDNER Director of the Bureau of Fisheries and Wildlife). The IMC provides management oversight to the IOC.

As part of this recovery program, the agencies currently manage Puerto Rican parrot populations in the wild and in captivity at three different geographic locations (i.e., El Yunque National Forest (EYNF), and Río Abajo Commonwealth Forest (RAF) and Maricao Commonwealth Forest (MCF) to ensure protection from diseases and natural disasters.

The USFWS manages the Iguaca Aviary located at EYNF, and the PRDNER manages the Jose Vivaldi Aviary at RAF. These aviaries are essential to support the wild populations through the release of captive-bred parrots, and through fostering, which provide emergency care of sick and injured wild nestlings. Both aviaries work in synchrony to produce parrots to boost the wild populations.

Project Accomplishments

Important actions have been successfully completed to further the recovery of the Puerto Rican Parrot. Prior to the devastating impacts from Hurricane Maria in 2017, several actions were successfully completed by the interagency effort to further recovery of the Puerto Rican parrot. 1) In 2006 a second wild population of parrots was successfully established at the Rio Abajo Forest; 2) in 2017, the highest number ever of wild parrots was recorded at EYNF; and 3) in 2016 the initial steps to establish a third population in the wild at the Maricao State Forest were completed.

However, because of the impacts from Hurricane Maria in September 2017, the entire wild population at EYNF was lost; RAF lost 40% of their wild population and the Maricao third population project was placed on hold; and the physical infrastructure at the two existing aviaries and the Maricao release site was severely affected.

Since then, the focus of the interagency effort has been to repair and strengthen the physical infrastructure of the support facilities with approved hurricane supplemental funding.

The reintroduction program with the release of captive-reared parrots was reinitiated in 2020 at EYNF and RAF, and the third wild population effort at MCF in 2022.



Wild chick fledgling from natural cavity at the Río Abajo Forest; Photo by Jesús Ríos-Cruz, USFWS

These reintroductions are considered a success due to the high survival rates and breeding activity of released birds. So far, the wild parrot population at RAF is estimated to be 320-340 individuals, 100-105 at EYNF and 100-105 at MCF. Another achievement has been the discovery of breeding pairs of parrots utilizing natural cavities in RAF and MCF. The use of natural cavities is a significant milestone in the history of the program as it helps achieve one of the recovery plan goals: to obtain self-sustainable parrot populations in the wild.

On January 20, 2022, FS El Yunque National Forest (EYNF) opened El Portal Visitor Center for the first time since it was destroyed by Hurricane Maria in 2017. The Caribbean ES Field Office provided support to the FS and helped establish a permanent live display of Puerto Rican parrots at the El Portal Visitor Center.

The Puerto Rican Parrot Recovery Program has received numerous requests for technical assistance from biologists and researchers from many countries, including the Bahamas, Cuba, Guatemala, El Salvador, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Venezuela, Perú, Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, Spain, Iran, Israel, Philippines, and New Zealand.

What are the next steps?

For over 20 years, FWS has been very successful at establishing partnerships with federal and Commonwealth governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local groups to enhance the recovery efforts for threatened and endangered species and our goal is to continue working together in this effort.



Wild birds in Maricao Commonwealth Forest; Photo by Jesús Ríos-Cruz, USFWS

Although there has been progress in the recovery efforts of the Puerto Rican parrot, the species is still classified as endangered. The estimated total number of Puerto Rican parrots, including wild and captive is now over 900 individuals. The goal is to continue enhancing the habitat to provide more cavities and to increase numbers in the wild by releasing and creating breeding opportunities for parrots.



Wild parrots nesting in artificial cavities in El Yunque; Photo by Marisel Lopez-Flores, USFWS

Updated: February 2026