

Navassa

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



photo: C. Lombard



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Photos (top to bottom):

Navassa National Wildlife Refuge.

Navassa Lighthouse.

Red-footed Booby.

Endemic Navassa Anole.

Refuge Facts

Discovered by Columbus in 1498 and then rediscovered in the 1856 Guano Rush. The guano deposits were worked until the company failed in 1898. Navassa became an increased hazard to shipping with the building of the Panama Canal. Consequently, the U.S. Coast Guard built a 162 foot lighthouse in 1917. In December 1999, jurisdiction was transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to be managed as a National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) for the purpose of protecting the unique ecosystem of Navassa Island, the adjacent coral reefs and marine waters.

- Acres: The Island covers 1,344. The refuge includes a 12 nautical mile radius of marine habitat.
- Location: Navassa Island is located 35 miles west of the Tiburon Peninsula of Haiti.
- Administration of Navassa NWR is accomplished by the Caribbean Islands NWR Complex. The headquarters of the complex is located in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico.

Natural History

- Over one million tons of bird guano was removed from the island between 1865-1901.
- Large seabird colonies present including the Magnificent Frigatebirds and over 5,000 nesting Red-footed Boobies.
- Home to four endemic lizard species.

Refuge Objectives

- To preserve and protect coral reef ecosystems and the marine environment.
- To restore and enhance native wildlife and plants.
- To provide opportunities for scientific research.

Management Tools

- Wildlife monitoring.
- Scientific research.
- Coral reef monitoring.
- Vegetation monitoring.

Questions and Answers

Is the refuge open to public?

No. The refuge is closed to the public. Access is extremely hazardous. There are no beaches on Navassa. The island rises abruptly from the sea with cliffs reaching heights of 20 meters or more.

What type of research has been conducted at Navassa?

Since the refuge's establishment, investigations and inventories have been conducted by personnel from the Service, NOAA, Smithsonian, American Museum of Natural History, U.S. Geological Survey, John G. Shedd Aquarium and universities. These have been focused on documenting the status of the coral reef resources and the inventory of terrestrial resources, including birds, reptiles and plants. The coral reefs of the island offer an opportunity to study a system that has been subjected to only minimal human impact.

For what purpose was the refuge established?

The refuge was established to preserve and protect the biodiversity, health, heritage, and social and economic value of coral reef ecosystems and the marine environment.

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