

Laguna Cartagena

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



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photo: Mike Morell

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Photos (top to bottom)

Laguna Cartagena National Wildlife Refuge

Wildlife Observation

West Indian Whistling-Duck (Dendrocygna arborea)

Sunrise at Laguna Cartagena

Refuge Facts

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) acquired 773 acres of wetland and associated uplands from the Puerto Rico Land Administration in 1989. An additional 270 acres of uplands were added in 1996.

- Acres: 1,043
- Location: Lajas, Puerto Rico (PR). Access through pedestrian gates at the end of the dirt road at k.m. 12.2 of Road 101 or at pedestrian gates located at the end of Road 306 by the Maguayo community.
- Administration of Laguna Cartagena National Wildlife Refuge is accomplished by the Caribbean Islands NWR Complex. The headquarters of the complex is located in Cabo Rojo, PR.

Natural History

- The present lagoon is a remnant of what was once a large open expanse of water and one of the most important freshwater habitats for migrating waterfowl and aquatic birds in PR. Due to agricultural practices, about 90 percent of the lagoon is covered with vegetation.
- In addition to the lagoon, there are uplands that include pastureland, abandoned sugar cane fields and 270 acres in the foothills of the Sierra Bermeja. These hills, geologically the oldest and among the most interesting mountain ranges on the Caribbean plate, protect native forest with many endemic and endangered plant species, some found nowhere else on earth.

Refuge Objectives

- To restore and maintain this locally important wetland ecosystem for the benefit of resident and migratory birds including the protection and the recovery of endangered species.
- To protect and restore remnants of the subtropical dry forest.

Management Tools

- Water management.
- Forestry.
- Law enforcement, collaboration with PR Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.
- Invasive/exotic control and removal.
- Environmental Education/ Interpretation.

Public Use Opportunities

- Hiking.
- Fishing.
- Wildlife observation and nature photography.
- Environmental Education/ Interpretation.

Questions and Answers

Is the refuge open to the public?

Yes, the refuge is open only during daylight hours, seven days a week. For group reservations in advance or information please call 787/851 7258.

What bird species might I see at the refuge?

Historically, almost half of the birds in Puerto Rico have been seen in the area. Visitors may see abundant West Indian Whistling Ducks, Masked Ducks and many other rare species of migratory and resident aquatic birds.

What Service's areas are open to the public?

The Service's visitor center is located at the Cabo Rojo NWR. Adjacent to the visitor center there are hiking trails, and nearby are the Cabo Rojo Salt Flats which houses a small visitor center and trails for biking and hiking.