

JARAGUA NATIONAL PARK, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Total Protected Area: 339,515 acres (137,400 ha)

Ecoregion Represented: Hispaniolan Dry Forests & Mangroves

Partner Institution: PRONATURA

Jaragua National Park is the largest protected area in the Dominican Republic and in the insular Caribbean. Located in the extreme southwest of the Dominican Republic, Jaragua combines a unique array of natural communities. The park's landscape is characterized by dry forest and scrub on the southern slopes of the Bahoroco Mountains. The area also includes a variety of terrestrial, coastal, and marine environments, as well as two continental islands (Beata and Alto Velo).

Ecological Significance

There are 12 different types of vegetation communities including dry forest, dry shrubland, semi-deciduous forest, mangroves, and open savanna forest types. Fifty-four taxa of reptiles and amphibians have been identified, including 36 endemic to the islands of Hispaniola and 26 endemic to the island of Beata. The avifauna is represented by 130 species or 60 percent of the bird species of the country. All of the endemic bird species of the country can be found within Jaragua and the associated mountain ranges of the Sierra de Bahoruco adjacent to the park. The country's largest population of flamingos is here, and more than half of the bird species are associated with aquatic environments. Jaragua provides the nesting ground for at least three of four species of marine turtles that can be located in the park's waters: hawksbill, leatherback, loggerhead and green. Mammals are present with small populations of the primitive endemic insectivore *Solenodon* (*Solenodom paradoxus*) and the Hutia (*Plagiodendia aedium*), as well as 18 species of bats. Jaragua also hosts some of the largest lobster habitat and fisheries in the country. The beaches of Jaragua are among the most beautiful of the country and are continuously in the eyes of developers for tourism projects.

Important Characteristics & Site Conservation Targets

The geologic formation of this area took place in the Oligocene, approximately 50 million years ago. The substratum is formed of limestone of marine origin. The semi-arid climate and extreme variability of weather patterns has produced shallow, rapidly draining, alkaline soils. The constant breezes, erratic rainfall, porous substrate, and high temperatures have encouraged plants and communities selected for these extreme conditions. As a result, the parks contains rich and unique flora.

Principal Threats Affecting Biodiversity at the Site

Threats:	Rank	Strategy
Charcoal production		Promote the use of solar stoves and fuelwood lots.
Spontaneous cattle farming		Intervention of Government Agencies
Land Tenure		Marking and posting of park boundaries
Fisheries Capture of land crabs Capture of sea turtles/eggs		Marking of marine park boundaries Intervention of Sec. Estado Agri. And the Dominican Republic Navy
Mining Concession		Intervention/overseeing of activities by the local communities (community vigilance)
Insecticide/Pesticide		Water analysis/coordination with the regional department of vegetation sanitation
Agriculture Production		Marking of park boundaries, reunions with farmers. Coordination of activities with SEA.

The construction of the new Bahoruco and Paraíso Beach Resorts in the province of Barahona will probably increase visitation to the park. Without proper management the increase in tourist visitation to the park could prove to be detrimental to park protection objectives. The development of an ecotourism strategy implemented for the Jaragua region to strategically complement these conventional tourist efforts could provide benefits for the park and the surrounding communities. Sporadic poaching of flamingos has also been reported in the last year as well as a possible increase in the use of the remote southern beach areas of the park by drug runners. The continued use of the park as an open grazing area for cattle provides another potential threat to site protection. Local partners Grupo Jaragua and Pronatura have made strong efforts to engage the communities of the municipality of Oviedo in site management objectives. Relatively little work of this type has been carried out in the municipality of Pedernales, located on the western end of the park. The overharvesting of lobster, conch and several fish species continues to be a problem in the marine areas of the park.

Conservation Strategy at the Site:

- ❖ Through Parks in Peril funding, the physical infrastructure for protection was increased by building three guard stations in critical places, and two docks at the Oviedo lagoon. The boundaries of the park were marked and some of the local non-governmental organizations and community groups were strengthened.
- ❖ In August of 1999, Pronatura, with the Conservancy's assistance began activities to highlight the ecotourism potential of the park and increase the awareness of the communities and government about ecotourism. Surveys were made to identify the park's ecotourism potential, as well as that of neighboring sites and describe and assess the economic activities of the Pedernales Provinces, within which Jaragua National Park is located. Initial meetings with community leaders and local nonprofits have been promising. All of them support the strategy of moving forward preparing the communities and local government officers to present alternatives to the development of traditional tourism.

- ❖ Recently an outbreak of conventional mass tourism has threatened to impact the park, and there is a consensus among the many non-governmental organizations involved with the site that the communities and the Dominican Government need to have in hand a position paper that will help them to understand and promote the values of ecotourism. In addition, it should help define the future of the natural resources in the park. This strategy is being implemented through several activities conducted by Pronatura with USAID funds. The Oviedo Ecological Society and other local groups have used mass media to call the attention to the need for public authorities to control poaching.