

Recent Nesting of the Caribbean Flamingo in the Dominican Republic

ESTEBAN GARRIDO¹, MILDRED D. MENDEZ¹, YOLANDA M. LEÓN^{1,2}, YVONNE ARIAS¹ Y LAURA PERDOMO^{1,3}

¹ Grupo Jaragua, Santo Domingo, Dominican Rep.

² Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo, Santo Domingo, Dominican Rep.

³ BirdLife International, Santo Domingo, Dominican Rep.
Email: trujin97@yahoo.es

Introduction

- Caribbean flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) nesting activity in Hispaniola has been historically documented for different localities through reports and anecdotal information dating from 1788 to 1978 (Keith *et al.* 2003)
- In 1979, Wiley and Wiley report on the widespread disturbance of Flamingo nesting sites in Hispaniola, through egg collection, free roaming cattle in nesting areas, and trapping of flamingoes.
- In 2003, Keith *et al.* concluded that "there were no active nesting sites in Hispaniola any longer".
- Similarly, Latta *et al.* (2006), wrote that even though they had received some unconfirmed reports, currently there were no active breeding sites in the Dominican Republic and Haiti.
- Thus, at the start of this study it was thought that no flamingo nesting occurred in Hispaniola any longer.

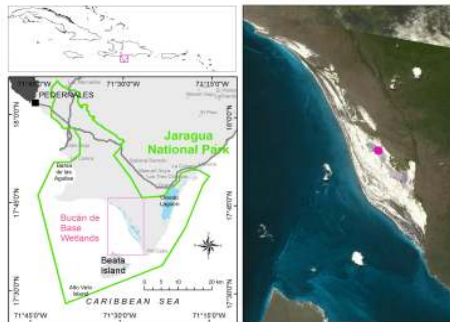


Figure 1. Maps showing general study area and the site where the nesting colony was found in 2008 (Terrucio Lagoon, in the Bucan de Base wetland area of Jaragua National Park). The pink dot on the right hand image is the precise location of the nesting site.

Methods

- In 2007 we received reports from locals in Oviedo (Pedernales Province) that they had seen flamingo nests in the wetland area of Bucan de Base, in Jaragua National Park.
- The lagoons formed in this area are mostly frequented by seasonal net fishers of tilapia (*Oreochromys mossambica*) and yellow fin mojarra (*Gerres cinereus*).
- In 2008, we travelled to the alleged flamingo nesting site with two of the key informants as our field guides.
- On 9 April 2008 we documented a recently active flamingo nesting site in the Bucan de Base wetland area (Garrido *et al.* 2010), in Bahahona Peninsula near Beata Channel (see Figure 1).
- Photographs and GPS position of the site were collected as well as threats observed.
- The site is locally known as "Laguna de Terrucio" (Terrucio Lagoon).
- The site was revisited in 2010 (aerial survey on 18 February and by foot on 15 January and 17 April) and in March 21-22 of 2011. However, during these visits we did not see recent nesting activity, although we saw many flamingos in the area (up to an estimated flock of 2,400 in January of 2010 and 2,600 in 2011).



Figure 2. View of a Caribbean Flamingo flock near the nesting site, in the Bucan de Base wetlands of Jaragua National Park, Dominican Republic. Photo: Y. M. León (February 2010).



Figure 3. Aerial view of the nesting area in Terrucio Lagoon in the Bucan de Base wetland area. Photo: Y. M. León (February 2010).



Figure 4. Two views of the Caribbean Flamingo nesting mounds and eggs found in April 2008 on the north shore of Terrucio Lagoon. Photo: Esteban Garrido.

Results and Discussion

- During the 2008 visit, on the north shore of Terrucio lagoon, we found two groups of 35 and 29 typical flamingo nesting mounds. The two groups of nesting mounds were separated by approx. 10 m. Between mounds, the distance was of approx. 40-50 cm.
- Thirty-seven mounds were empty, and 27 still had an egg laying on top, presumably abandoned. Older mounds, probably from previous years, were found nearby. Next to the nesting site, we saw a group of flamingos estimated at 1250 individuals, including 15 fledglings.
- The last time flamingo nesting was reported in this area was in 1977, when J.A. Ottenwalder found 29 nests, and again in 13 January 1978, when he saw three small nesting colonies (with 19, 28 and 30 nests; Ottenwalder, pers.comm. to Wiley & Wiley 1979).
- The lack of more recent reports of flamingo nesting at this site may be due to its remoteness and difficult access (5-6 hour walk from the nearest town, Oviedo) or to the fact that nesting does not occur every year. During visits in 2010-2011, no active nests were found (although many flamingoes were present, approx. 2400 in 2010 and 2600 in 2011).
- In 2010 and 2011, many human tracks were observed near the nesting site and some thatched roof huts indicating a greater human presence than before. This could be stressing the flamingos and impeding their nesting attempts, so access to this site needs to be controlled, as it may be the only remaining nesting site in Hispaniola.
- The remoteness of this site may be its key for its survival, unlike the other nesting sites in the DR (for example Enriquillo Lake). This lagoon is part of an intricate wetland where only some subsistence fishers pass by. Also, little free roaming cattle was seen in this area, even though it can be very common in some parts of Jaragua NP.
- This finding provides further support for the Important Bird Area (IBA) status of Jaragua NP (BirdLife International 2008) for the Dominican Republic as well as for the plans to designate this area as a national Ramsar site by the Ministry of the Environment.



Figure 5. Aerial view of the Bucan de Base wetland area, looking towards the east (Beata Channel in the horizon) Photo: Y. M. León.

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