

© 2009 BirdLife International
Juan de Dios Martínez Mera N35-76 y Av. Portugal
Casilla 17-17-717
Quito, Ecuador.
Tel: +593 2 2277059
Fax: +593 2 2469838

americas@birdlife.org
www.birdlife.org

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Important Bird Areas AMERICAS

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Laura Perdomo & Yvonne Arias



The Critically Endangered Ridgway's Hawk (*Buteo ridgwayi*) is confined to Los Haitises IBA (DO018) where the small population is declining.
Photo: Lance Woolaver; www.rarebirdseyarbook.com



Country facts at a glance

Area:	48,730 km ²
Population:	9,365,800
Capital:	Santo Domingo
Altitude:	-40–3087 m
Number of IBAs:	21
Total IBA area:	721,264 ha
IBA coverage of land area:	13%
Total number of birds:	306
Globally threatened birds:	14
Globally threatened birds in IBAs:	14
Country endemics:	0

General introduction

The Dominican Republic occupies the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola which, at 77,900 km², is the second largest island in the Caribbean. The Republic of Haiti, with which the Dominican Republic shares a 360-km border, occupies the rest of Hispaniola. The island lies 80 km east of Cuba, 90 km west of Puerto Rico, and 150 km from northeastern Jamaica. The topography of the Dominican Republic is dominated by four principal mountain systems that run from north-west to south-east, namely the Cordillera Septentrional (Northern Mountain Range); the Cordillera Central (Central Mountain Range), which extends into Haiti where it is called the Massif du Nord; the Sierra de Neiba, which extends into Haiti as the Montagnes du Trou d'Eau; and Sierra de Bahoruco, which in Haiti continues as the Massif de la Selle. These parallel mountain ranges are responsible for the longest and most voluminous rivers in the Caribbean: Yaque del Norte, Yaque del Sur, Yuna-Camú, and Nizao. The country also contains the largest number of lakes and lagoons in the insular Caribbean, including Lago Enriquillo, the largest body of still-water in the region. The diverse habitats (five distinct ecoregions are recognized) include 1500 km of coastline, freshwater and brackish wetlands, dry forest, broadleaf forest and pine forest, xeric areas, savannas, and dunes. The climate is warm, with a mean annual temperature of 27°C.

“Hispaniola is considered to have the highest biodiversity in the Caribbean with high rates of endemism across taxonomic groups.”

Hispaniola is considered to have the highest biodiversity in the Caribbean, distributed across an intricate mosaic of environments and microclimates that have formed as a result of a complex geological history. This has produced sites which range from 40 m below sea level (e.g. Hoya de Enriquillo), to those at more than 3000 m (within the



Sierra Martín García IBA (DO010) —a poorly studied area in need of conservation action.
Photo: Ricardo Briones

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Cordillera Central), as well as sites such as Isla Alto Velo that support unique species confined to only 1 km². Rates of endemism across most taxonomic groups are high. However, most habitats (but especially cloud forest and moist broadleaf forest) that support these endemic species have been (and continue to be) severely affected by deforestation and other human pressure. With the growing human population concentrated

in coastal regions, habitats in these areas (e.g. beaches, coastal wetlands and mangroves) are suffering from multiple threats. Not only are the habitats being destroyed directly by cutting forests, draining or polluting wetlands and urban and agricultural expansion, but invasive alien species (including plants, predatory and grazing animals) are impacting what habitat remains and the species that rely upon them.

Conservation and protected area system



The Environment and Natural Resources General Law (No.64-00) is the legal framework that protects wild areas and biodiversity in the Dominican Republic. This law allows for the creation of sector-specific laws such as the Law of Protected Areas (No.202-04) which regulates the National System of Protected Areas. However, attempts in 2004–2005 by the president and the legislature to eviscerate the national parks system by selling-off protected lands for tourism and development activities shows how fragile the parks are from a legal standpoint. In response, conservation and academic groups are working towards modifying the nation's constitution to declare the National System of Protected Areas as inalienable, non-sequestrable national treasures, and not subject to statutory limitations.

The National System of Protected Areas has improved in terms of the quantity of protected areas and their management categories over the last 20 years. In 1980, only nine areas (4.2% of the country's land area) were legally protected, but this number increased to 19 (11.2%) from 1981 to 1990, and to 86 areas (25.4%) between 2002 and 2008. The Jaragua-Bahoruco-Enriquillo Biosphere Reserve is unique in the country, embracing a number of protected areas and the Lago Enriquillo Ramsar Site. The Directorate of Protected Areas administers the management of protected area system, although a number of NGOs collaborate with or have been assigned to protected areas (e.g. Grupo Jaragua to Jaragua National Park, and Fundación Moscoso Puello to

Valle Nuevo) under co-management agreements with the Directorate. However, in spite of this enlightened approach to management, only 10 of the Dominican Republic's national parks have management plans, and for only six is there some level of implementation.

The protected areas of the Dominican Republic face multiple threats to the effective conservation of their biodiversity. These include uncertainties in land ownership, the lack of an appropriate system of compensation for the expropriation of land for conservation purposes, lack of clear policies for the administration and management of funds generated by protected areas, inadequate management of the areas, as well as delayed local development as a result of centralized policies. Knowledge of regulations and permitted uses of the protected areas is lacking, as is a general awareness of their importance, value and the ecological services they provide. Together with imprecise boundaries, these deficiencies lead to disturbances such as expansion of agricultural activities (including cattle grazing), as well as forest fires, deforestation, illegal hunting, fishing, and trafficking of endangered species. Other threats relate to the expansion of unsustainable tourism, mining, and hydro-electric projects. Finally, poverty levels in communities adjacent to the parks have led to unsustainable land-use practices and illegal human settlement both within the protected areas and their buffer zones. The threats faced by the nation's protected areas (many of which are IBAs) are indicative of what is happening to biodiversity across the country.



Slash-and-burn agriculture in Los Haitises IBA (DO018) is threatening the integrity of this critical ecosystem.
Photo: Lance Woolaver

Ornithological importance



Of the 306 bird species reported for the Dominican Republic c.140 are breeding residents. Hispaniola is also an important over-wintering area for Neotropical migrants, with 136 species recorded. The Hispaniolan avifauna exhibits exceptional levels of endemism. The island is covered by the Hispaniola Endemic Bird Area (EBA 028) with 36 restricted-range species, 34 of which are known from the Dominican Republic. The remaining two species, Grey-crowned Palm-tanager (*Phaenicophilus poliocephalus*) and Thick-billed Vireo (*Vireo crassirostris*), have only been recorded in Haiti. A total of 28 of the restricted-range birds are endemic to the island, the others being shared with adjacent EBAs. For example, Vervain Hummingbird (*Mellisuga minima*), Stolid Flycatcher (*Myiarchus stolidus*), Greater Antillean Elaenia (*Elaenia fallax*) and Golden Swallow (*Tachycineta euchrysea*) are all shared with Jamaica. Six of the restricted-range species represent genera endemic to Hispaniola, namely *Calyptophilus*, *Dulus* (also a monotypic family), *Microliga*, *Nesocittes*, *Phaenicophilus* and *Xenoligea*. Endemism is also high at the sub-specific level with over 35 subspecies described from Dominican Republic.

“Six of the restricted-range species represent genera endemic to Hispaniola.”

There are records of 23 threatened or Near Threatened species in the Dominican Republic, including one Critically Endangered, four Endangered, nine Vulnerable, and nine Near Threatened species. However, three of the Near Threatened species are not represented in IBAs since they are not considered to sustain significant populations in the country, namely Back Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*), Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) and Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*). The Critically Endangered Ridgway's Hawk (*Buteo ridgwayi*) is now confined to Los Haitises (DO018) where the small population is declining. The Endangered Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*) maintains a small breeding colony in the Sierra de Bahoruco (DO006), and this IBA also supports critical populations of the other Endangered species, namely Hispaniolan Crossbill (*Loxia megalaga*), La Selle Thrush (*Turdus swalesi*) and Bay-breasted Cuckoo (*Coccyzus rufigularis*). Many of the globally threatened birds are restricted to the high altitude broadleaf and pine forests.



The Vulnerable Hispaniolan Amazon (*Amazona ventralis*) and Hispaniolan Parakeet (*Aratinga chloroptera*) are both captured for the illegal pet trade.
Photo: Lance Woolaver

The Dominican Republic is also important for large breeding and wintering populations of waterbirds and seabirds. Laguna Limón (DO019) and Laguna Cabral (DO008) support the largest reported population of the Near Threatened Caribbean Coot (*Fulica caribaea*), with up to 6000 and 3000 individuals, respectively. Laguna Cabral is also home to some of the largest wintering concentrations of ducks in the Caribbean with up to 160,000 individuals (of various species) reported. Seabirds are primarily concentrated on the satellite islands around the Dominican Republic's coast. They are relatively poorly known in terms of colony status and size, but the Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*) colony (of 80,000 pairs) on Isla Alto Velo is one of the largest in the Caribbean. Monitoring of the other known breeding islands would provide valuable information that may result in new IBAs being defined.



Cayos Siete Hermanos (DO001) supports globally significant numbers of breeding seabirds.
Photo: Ricardo Briones

IBA overview



Dominican Republic's 21 IBAs (Table 1, Figure 1) have been identified on the basis of 45 key bird species that variously meet the IBA criteria. These species include 20 threatened and Near Threatened birds (see Ornithological importance above), all 34 restricted-range species, and

six congregatory species. Of the 21 IBAs identified, 20 support critical populations of globally threatened birds; 17 are home to important assemblages of restricted-range species and five support globally significant populations of congregatory waterbirds or seabirds.

Table 1. Important Bird Areas in the Dominican Republic

IBA code	IBA name	Adm unit	Area (ha)	A1				A2	A3	A4				
				CR	EN	VU	NT			A4i	A4ii	A4iii	A4iv	
DO001	Cayos Siete Hermanos	Región Norte o Cibao	3,084										X	
DO002	Loma Nalga de Maco-Río Limpio	Región Norte o Cibao	20,349	1	7	2	X							
DO003	Parque Nacional Armando Bermúdez	Región Norte o Cibao	78,957	3	7	3	X							
DO004	Sierra de Neyba	Región Suroeste	18,711	2	5	3	X							
DO005	Lago Enriquillo	Región Suroeste	40,610		3	2	X							
DO006	Sierra de Bahoruco	Región Suroeste	112,488	4	7	3	X						X	
DO007	Parque Nacional Jaragua	Región Suroeste	165,448	4	2	X		X					X	
DO008	Laguna Cabral	Región Suroeste	5,615		1	2	X		X					X
DO009	Bahoruco Oriental	Región Suroeste	2,964		6	3	X							
DO010	Sierra Martín García	Región Suroeste	26,487		4	3	X							
DO011	Valle Nuevo	Región Norte o Cibao	90,680	2	6	2	X							
DO012	Reserva Científica Ébano Verde	Región Norte o Cibao	2,993		4	2	X							
DO013	Loma Quita Espuela	Región Norte o Cibao	9,247		3	1	X							
DO014	Loma Guaconejo	Región Norte o Cibao	2,329		1									
DO015	Loma La Humeadora	Región Sureste	30,551	1	3	2	X							
DO016	Honduras	Región Sureste	523		1		X							
DO017	Bahía de las Calderas	Región Sureste	1,794		1	1								
DO018	Los Haitises	Región Norte o Cibao	63,416	1	3	2	X							
DO019	Laguna Limón	Región Sureste	1,083			1			X					
DO020	Parque Nacional del Este	Región Sureste	42,825		3	2	X							
DO021	Punta Cana	Región Sureste	1,110		1		X							

For information on trigger species at each IBA, see individual site accounts at BirdLife's Data Zone: www.birdlife.org/datazone/sites/



Jaragua Community Volunteers and other local stakeholders have played a vital role in IBA monitoring and educational activities at Laguna Oviedo within Jaragua National Park (DO007). Photo: Laura Perdomo

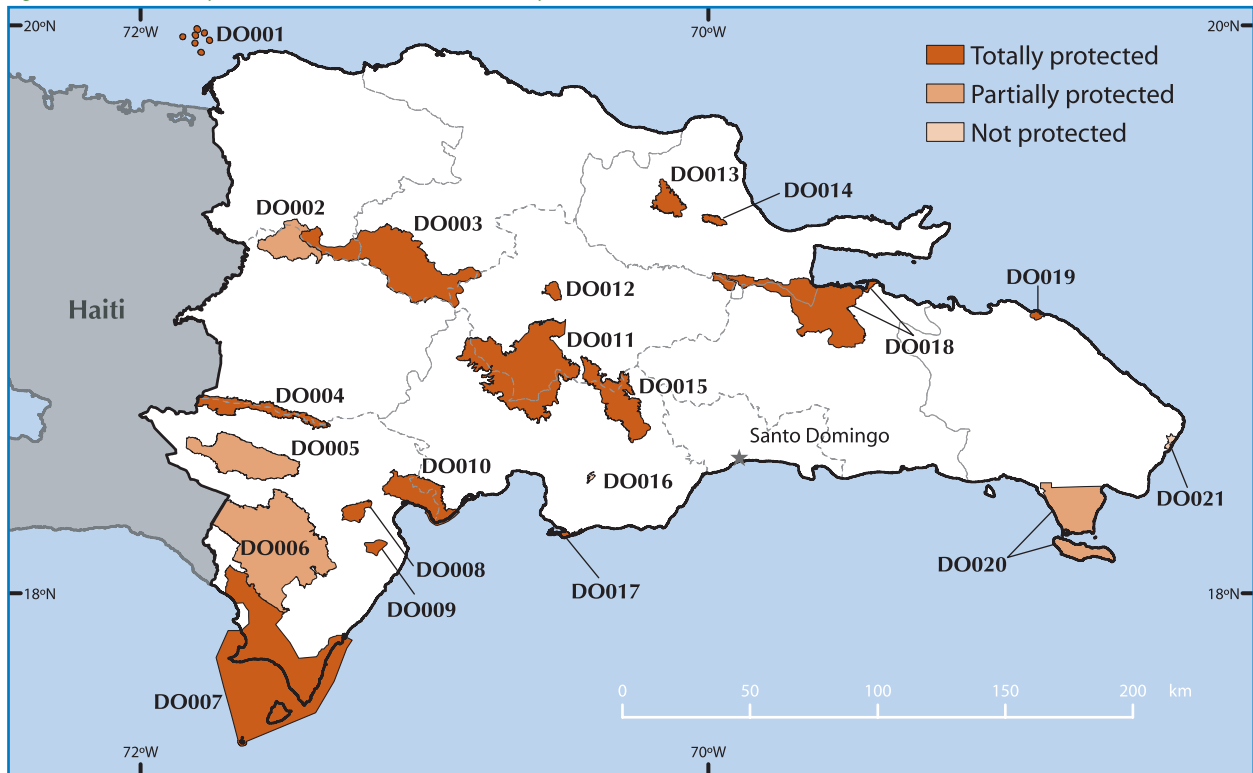
All but two IBAs belong partially or totally to the National System of Protected Areas, and thus are formally protected under a recognized management category. The IBAs of Punta Cana (DO021) and Honduras (DO016) lack any type of formal protection, whilst Loma Nalga de Maco–Río Limpio (DO002) is protected in part as a national park. The

majority of the country's life zones, habitats and vegetative associations are represented within the IBA network. Some of the IBAs are recognized under other international designations, such as the Lago Enriquillo Ramsar Site, the Jaragua-Bahoruco-Enriquillo Biosphere Reserve, and Los Haitises and Sierra de Bahoruco as Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) sites.



Flamencos at Laguna Oviedo (DO007).
Photo: Ricardo Briones

Figure 1. Location of Important Bird Areas in the Dominican Republic



Opportunities



Grupo Jaragua has been coordinating the IBA program in the Dominican Republic since 2002. Grupo Jaragua is a non-governmental, non-profit organization established in 1987 and whose mission is to bring about the effective management of Dominican Republic's natural resources and biodiversity through research and projects aimed at solving local conservation problems. Despite most of their efforts being concentrated in the Jaragua National Park and surrounding communities, Grupo Jaragua pays special attention to the development of the Jaragua-Bahoruco-Enriquillo Biosphere Reserve (which embraces three IBAs) through community participation projects. The participation of multiple key actors from government institutions, the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, community organizations, international cooperation agencies, and interested individuals has enabled the successful development and implementation of the IBA program in the country, as well as the achievement of local and national capacity building. The documentation of the Dominican Republic's IBAs represents a significant step in the program and will allow the development of more complete conservation agendas for these sites, including a National IBA Conservation Strategy, currently being drafted.

“A National IBA Conservation Strategy is currently being drafted to coordinate conservation in IBAs.”

Continuity has also been provided for key components of the IBA program due to coordinated activities among different projects, favoring activities such as monitoring, celebration of key dates in the environmental calendar (e.g. World Bird Festival), threatened species conservation, strengthening of the Local Conservation Group Networks and improvements to local livelihoods. These activities have helped create awareness of the IBA concept and maintained enthusiasm and interest among the general public. They have also assisted the adoption of the IBA conservation model among government authorities.



Valle Nuevo (DO011) is one of 11 sites monitored for threats (“Pressure”), condition (“State”) and conservation actions at IBAs (“Response”).
Photo: Ricardo Briones

State, pressure and response scores have been collated for 11 of the Dominican Republic's IBAs (DO001, DO003, DO005, DO006, DO007, DO008, DO011, DO013, DO018, DO019 and DO020), but should be monitored annually at all IBAs to provide an objective status assessment and highlight management interventions that might be required to maintain these internationally important biodiversity sites. Monitoring of the country's globally threatened birds (especially the Critically Endangered and Endangered species), waterbirds and seabirds is urgently needed, and can usefully inform the annual status assessment of the IBA network.

Box 1

Dominican IBA also protects important populations of other threatened and endemic fauna

The IBA Parque Nacional Jaragua (DO007) is located in the south-western corner of the Dominican Republic, on the Barahona peninsula. The IBA is globally important for threatened, range-restricted and congregatory bird species, as well as other endemic and threatened flora and fauna, including the Critically Endangered Dominican cherry palm (*Pseudophoenix ekmanii*) and Ricord's iguana (*Cyclura ricordi*). Two projects to engage communities in sustainable use initiatives were implemented by Grupo Jaragua (BirdLife in Dominican Republic) at Laguna Oviedo (a 27 km² coastal salt pond within the park), and at Fondo Paradí within the buffer zone. The projects aimed to contribute to the long-term conservation of bird habitats and their sustainable use. At Laguna Oviedo, infrastructure was constructed by the Ministry of the Environment and the Spanish Cooperation Agency as part of the project, including signage, a visitor center and observation tower to support sustainable activities for approximately 2000 tourists per year. Capacity building continues for local eco-guides to improve the quality of ecotourism services at Laguna de Oviedo. At Fondo Paradí, local community and Site Support Group members have participated as field guides, field work



Local Conservation Group at Fondo Paradí.
Photo: M. D. Méndez

assistants and in the organization of summer camps and awareness campaigns targeted at children. The group recently obtained funding to market locally produced honey to tourists.

Dominican cherry palm (*Pseudophoenix ekmanii*)
Photo: Yolanda León

Further information

National IBA Directory

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Contact information

Laura Perdomo (lauperdomo@gmail.com)

Yvonne Arias (yvonne.arias2@gmail.com)

Grupo Jaragua (jaragua@tricom.net)

Calle El Vergel No.33

El Vergel

Santo Domingo

Dominican Republic

Tel: +809 4721036

Fax: +809 4121667

www.grupojaragua.org.do



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A critical population of the Endangered Hispaniolan Crossbill (*Loxia megapalaga*) occurs within the Sierra de Bahoruco (DO006).
Photos: Eladio Fernández

