Desecheo
National Wildlife Refuge

photo: USFWS

photo: D. Palmer

photo: J. Saliva

photo: Susan M. Rice

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Refuge Facts
■ Established: 1976.

■ Acres: 360.

■ Location: the island is located 14 miles from the west coast of Puerto Rico.

■ Administered under Caribbean Islands NWR complex.

Natural History
■ Desecheo island has seen many custodians over the years, including Spain, Puerto Rico, the U.S. military (bombing and survival training), National Institute of Health (introduced rhesus monkeys for medical research), and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

■ At one time, the largest Brown booby nesting colony in the world; today, no seabird nesting takes place on the island.

■ The native forest (which includes the endangered Higo Chumbo cactus) has been severely degraded by introduced rats, goats, and monkeys.

Financial Impact of Refuge
■ No staff.

■ No visitors annually.

Refuge Objectives
To restore and protect historic seabird colonies and natural island ecosystems.

Management Tools
■ Law enforcement.

■ Feral animal control.

■ Bird and plant surveys.

Questions and Answers
Is the refuge open to the public?
No, this island refuge is closed for public safety reasons, due to the presence of unexploded military ordnance.

If the refuge is closed to the public, why do dive boat operators take customers there?
Federal jurisdiction does not include waters surrounding the island. Trespass on the refuge itself would be handled by Federal law enforcement officers.

Why was the refuge established?
The refuge was established in 1912 to protect several colonies of nesting seabirds including the world's largest Brown booby colony. Seabird nesting has virtually disappeared from the island due to past military bombing, illegal hunting, fires, and the introduction of goats, rats and nest-predating rhesus monkeys.