

Culebra

National Wildlife Refuge

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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1909. Portions of the Culebra Archipelago were designated as a wildlife reserve in 1909 subject to naval and lighthouse purposes. Numerous islands of the archipelago as well as the Flamenco Peninsula were used for gunnery and bombing practice by the U.S. Navy until their departure in 1976. The following year, jurisdiction of those areas was transferred to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. On-site administration for the Refuge was established in 1983.

Approximately one quarter of the Culebra archipelago's total land mass is now included within the Refuge.

- Acres: 10,331.
- Location: the refuge office is located in Lower Camp, a short drive from Culebra airport.
- Administered under Caribbean Island NWRs complex.

Natural History

- The refuge is comprised of lands on the main island of Culebra and 22 smaller islands in the same vicinity.
- The refuge contains diverse habitats including tropical dry forest, mangroves, and grasslands.
- The refuge supports a tropical island fauna and flora representative of the most healthy coastal resources viewable in Puerto Rico today. The absence of development in refuge units protects fragile marine ecosystems from damage by erosion and sedimentation, helping to keep surrounding waters clear. While our trust resources benefit, visitors can enjoy spectacular views both above and below the water line.

- The largest seabird nesting colony occurs at Peninsula Flamenco, where 50,000 Sooty Terns nest.
- Mount Resaca contains the largest remaining forest, an area of rock-strewn canyons and ravines forming a unique habitat known as the boulder forest.
- Leatherback and hawksbill sea turtles use refuge beaches for nesting.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- Two-person staff.
- 40,000 visitors annually.

Refuge Objectives

To protect and manage significant seabird colonies and endangered marine turtles, as well as restore and protect native tropical vegetative communities.

Management Tools

- Environmental education/interpretation.
- Law enforcement.
- Wildlife surveys.

Public Use Opportunities

- Hiking, wildlife observation, and nature photography are available (boat access only) on Cayo Luis Pena and Isla Culebrita daily from sunrise to sunset. Water taxis in town offer transportation. There are no facilities present so please go prepared with adequate water and sunblock. The Culebrita lighthouse is closed to the public because of the dangerous condition of the building. **Do not enter!**
- All other refuge lands are closed to the public because of their sensitive nature or unexploded military bombs.

Calendar of Events

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week.

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Questions and Answers

Does the refuge have an office for visitors?

An office is located in Lower Camp, a short drive from Culebra airport.

Are sea turtles found in the vicinity of the refuge?

Yes, leatherback and hawksbill sea turtles nest on Culebra beaches, and the adjacent seagrass beds provide shelter and food for green sea turtles.

Is it true that seabirds nest on the refuge in large numbers?

A nesting colony of approximately 50,000 Sooty Terns is located at the Peninsula Flamenco unit; however, it is closed to the public due to its sensitive nature. Offshore cays also provide a variety of habitat types for 13 species of seabirds, most numerous during the summer.