

Laguna Cartagena

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: Cindy Staicer



photo: S. Davis



photo: J. Saliva



photo: National Audubon Society

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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1989.
- Acres: 1,059.
- Location: easiest access is at the pedestrian gates in Maguayo, PR on Route 305, or near Hacienda Desengano on Route 306 south of Route 101.
- Administered under Caribbean Island NWRs complex.

Natural History

- The present lagoon is a remnant of what was once a large open expanse of water and one of the most important freshwater habitats for migrating waterfowl and aquatic birds in Puerto Rico. Due to agricultural practices, about 90 percent of the lagoon is covered with cattail.
- In addition to the lagoon, there are uplands that include pastureland, abandoned sugar cane fields, and 263 acres in the foothills of the Sierra Bermeja. These hills, geologically the oldest in the Caribbean, protect native forest with many endemic plant species.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- No staff.
- 1,000 visitors annually.

Refuge Objectives

To restore and maintain this locally important wetland ecosystem for the benefit of endangered species and migratory birds.

Management Tools

- Water management.
- Forestry.
- Law enforcement.
- Plant control.
- Education/interpretation.

Public Use Opportunities

- Hiking.
- Wildlife observation and nature photography.

Questions and Answers

What has been done to alleviate the flooding situation in the town of Maguayo, which is directly east of the refuge lagoon?

Due to past agricultural practices, most of the lagoon is now choked with vegetation which impedes the normal flow of water. As a consequence, Maguayo occasionally floods during periods of heavy rain. In 1995, the Service initiated a challenge-cost-share restoration project. To date, accomplishments include construction of a water control structure, removal of some vegetation using a dragline, and partial completion of a water diversion canal in the lagoon.

Is the refuge open to the public?

Yes, the refuge is open during daylight hours, seven days a week.

What bird species might I see at the refuge?

Historically, almost half of the birds in Puerto Rico have been seen in the area. Visitors may see the Smooth-billed Ani, Magnificent Frigatebird, several species of herons, the endangered Yellow-shouldered Blackbird, and others.

Why is cattle grazing allowed on the refuge?

Limited grazing is being used as an intermediate management tool to reduce buildup of grass fuel loads, and to open grass areas to facilitate woody vegetation regeneration.

Is waterfowl hunting allowed on the refuge?

Prior to becoming a refuge, the area was open to waterfowl hunting. At present, the refuge does not have sufficient numbers of birds to justify a hunt.