

Culebra

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: R. Colón-Merced



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photo: Ana Román



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Photos, top to bottom:

Resaca Beach, Culebra PR.

Leatherback hatchling

Sooty tern

White-tailed tropicbird

Refuge Facts and Natural History

In 1909, portions of the Culebra Archipelago were designated as a wildlife reserve in accordance with an Executive Order signed by President Theodore Roosevelt. Administration of the Culebra lands was the responsibility of the U.S. Navy and the wildlife reserve designation was subject to naval and lighthouse purposes. Several of the small islands of the archipelago, as well as the Flamenco Peninsula, were used for gunnery and bombing practice by the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps until their departure in 1976.

The following year, portions of the Navy-administered lands were transferred to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and jurisdiction over other portions was transferred to the Service. On-site administration of the refuge was established in 1983. Approximately one quarter of the Culebra archipelago's total land mass is now included within the Culebra NWR.

- Acres: Approximately 1,510.
- Location: The Refuge office is located in the San Ildefonso Ward, Lower Camp.
- Administrated under Caribbean Island National Wildlife Refuges Complex.
- 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, grasslands, lagoons, and rock-strewn canyons.

- The refuge supports a tropical island fauna and flora representative of the healthiest 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 of the Caribbean occurs at Peninsula Flamenco and near cays, were 40,000 Sooty Terns nest (Saliva J. E., 2009).
- Mount Resaca contains the largest remaining forest of Culebra island, 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.

Refuge Objective and Purpose

The Refuge objective and purpose are: to administer the lands as wildlife refuge and breeding ground area for native birds, for its particular value in carrying out the national migratory bird management program and for the conservation, management, and restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

Management Tools

- Environmental education / interpretation.
- Law enforcement in coordination with the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources of Puerto Rico.
- Wildlife monitoring and surveys.
- Habitat restoration.

Public Use Opportunities

- Hiking, wildlife observation, and nature photography are available (boat access only) on Cayo Luis Peña and Isla Culebrita daily from sunrise to sunset. 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.

Questions and Answers

Does the refuge have an office for visitors?

Yes, the Refuge office is located in the San Ildefonso Ward, Lower Camp.

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 40,000 Sooty Terns is located at the Peninsula Flamenco unit and near cays; however, it is closed to the public due to its sensitive nature. The 22 offshore cays administrated by the refuges provide a variety of habitat types for 24 species of seabirds, from which 14 of them nesting during the summer.