

PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS

Puerto Rican Nightjar *Caprimulgus noctitherus*



**Sociedad Ornitológica
Puertorriqueña, Inc**



Puerto Rican Nightjar on a nest © Armando Feliciano.

Background

It is likely that Puerto Rican Nightjar once occurred in a range of forest habitats across Puerto Rico (to USA). However, today it is thought to be restricted to an extremely small area in the south-west of the island where it occupies dry limestone forest, drier sections of the lower cordillera forest and perhaps dry coastal forest. Surveys conducted in the 1980s and 1990s found 712 singing males in 98km² of fragmented habitat suggesting a total population of between 1,400-2,000 individuals. More recent surveys have found further populations in south-central and south-eastern Puerto Rico, and the population estimate may be revised upwards accordingly.

The species favours closed-canopy forest, comprised mainly of semi-deciduous hardwood trees, with abundant leaf litter and an open understorey. It is also present in a range of dry, open scrub habitats and a few birds have been found within *Eucalyptus robusta* plantations. It is found at elevations up to 230m, but is more commonly encountered above 75m. The greatest threat to the species comes from habitat loss and degradation, with the most important remaining stronghold for the species, Karso del Sur IBA, currently threatened by a proposed windfarm. It is calculated that this development could wipe out 5% of the total breeding population if given the go ahead.

Actions being implemented

1. In collaboration with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, work is underway to prepare a revised **Species Action Plan** (SAP). As of November 2009 the action plan has been completed in Spanish, and research contributing to the action plan is being developed by the government.
2. In August 2008 plans were made for a **research project** to be carried out by the Mississippi State University, and work took place from March to May 2009. The study assessed the current geographic range of the species, finding the species over a broad region of southern Puerto Rico and suggesting its range outside protected areas was much greater than previously thought. A scientific paper is in the process of being written based on the results of the project, and the species may be downlisted to Endangered on the IUCN Red List as a result of its extended range.
3. The priority conservation actions identified by the SAP will be implemented through a newly-established **Puerto Rican Nightjar Conservation Network** and facilitated by the Species Guardian. Population estimates have already been established for the areas of Guánica forest, Susua forest and Guayanilla hills, and this research is to be published soon. In October 2008 the Site Support Group for Sierra Bermeja IBA sent an official letter calling for its protection.

4. Vitally, **community awareness** is being raised through school presentations and the dissemination of educational materials, and in November 2008 the Species Guardian lead the presentation of the birds chapter of the educational project Seeds for the Environment at an elementary school in Peñuelas.



Left: habitat of the Puerto Rican Nightjar at Sierra Berneja; right: local schoolchildren taking part in activities aimed at raising awareness of the species.

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