

Building a future on IBA conservation in the Dominican Republic

Title Grupo Jaragua (BirdLife in the Dominican Republic) are motivating communities in the Jaragua-Bahoruco-Enriquillo Biosphere Reserve to protect and value their natural resources, by getting them involved in conservation planning, environmental awareness activities and the implementation of alternatives for sustainable development. Jaragua-Bahoruco-Enriquillo Biosphere Reserve is located in the south-western region of Dominican Republic, very close to the Republic of Haiti. This region is one of the country's most impoverished regions, which contrasts with the high biological diversity (one of the highest in the country and probably in the Caribbean). The high unemployment rates and limited economic alternatives and development of this area pressures human communities living around it to use natural resources in a non-sustainable manner which in consequence creates more pressure on biodiversity and habitats. Grupo Jaragua, a national environmental, NGO has been balancing conservation needs for the past 20 years, 15 of which along side local community stakeholders. From 2002-2007 the GEF-funded *Sustainable Conservation of Globally Important Caribbean Bird Habitats* project was implemented in collaboration with BirdLife International. In 2008, Aage V Jensen Charity Foundation built on and gave continuation to project activities and processes on IBA monitoring and data collection, strengthening of Local Conservation Groups and stakeholder networks, and awareness and environmental education through the project *Saving the treasures of the Caribbean: developing community-based ecotourism in and around the Jaragua-Bahoruco-Enriquillo Biosphere Reserve, Dominican Republic*. ?Building on establish projects in Jaragua Bahoruco-Enriquillo Biosphere Reserve supports conservation sustainability?, said Yvonne Arias, President of Grupo Jaragua. Jaragua National Park, Sierra de Bahoruco and Enriquillo Lake IBAs (the three core protected areas of the Biosphere) were continuously monitored using the IBA Monitoring Framework during 2008 and 2009. ?Linking IBA monitoring with other technical field work results in an excellent knowledge of the state of the IBA, and expeditions were cost-effective?, said Laura Perdomo, Local Conservation Groups Coordinator of Grupo Jaragua. In 2008, during a visit to Bucán de Base location in Jaragua National Park, Grupo Jaragua discovered a new breeding population of Caribbean Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*. ?Since 2008, the population has been surveyed and a total of 1, 300 individuals counted. Moreover, it has been possible to monitor the flamingoes in Laguna de Oviedo (also within Jaragua) with a total population of 120 individuals?, Mildred Dawaira Méndez, Project Coordinator, Grupo Jaragua. Local Conservation Groups (LCGs) have been crucial on the implementation of this project. Voluntarios Comunitarios de Grupo Jaragua LCG developed a questionnaire to monitor the status of the Vulnerable Hispaniolan Parakeet *Aratinga chloroptera* in the Jaragua National

Park and its surroundings. The questionnaire's main purpose was to acquire traditional knowledge on nesting and/or presence of *Aratinga chloroptera* to improve scientific knowledge. A total of 21 people were surveyed. According to them, the site with most frequent flocks of fifty 50 *Aratinga* was mainly in Mapioró. They also confirmed a nesting site in Marraquete near Mapioró; area outside Jaragua National Park. Livelihoods improve through developing local enterprises and carrying out alternative activities that generate some income and contribute to diminishing the social pressures around the protected areas. Twenty four eco-guides (also LCG members) have been trained in ecotourism providing ecotourism services or products, and receiving direct benefits including training, materials and equipment, experience exchanges, and improvement of education within their communities. They are implementing evaluation tools such as questionnaires as well as producing information materials like brochures, factsheets and bird ID cards. Further activities include assisting researchers, establishment of plant nurseries and bee-keeping. This project would not have been possible without the continuous and generous support from a variety of donors, including Aage V Jensen Charity Foundation, Japanese International Cooperation Agency, MacArthur Foundation, Canadian International Development Agency, AECID, Finland Embassy in Venezuela, Proyecto Araucaria Project XXI Century, International Iguana Foundation, and Jaragua Rotary's funds for Local Microenterprises.