

Title [Grupo Jaragua](#) (BirdLife in the Dominican Republic) and Sociedad Ornitológica Puertorriqueña, Inc. ([SOP](#) - BirdLife in Puerto Rico) marked [World Wetlands Day](#) with programmes aimed at raising awareness of the value and benefits delivered by the Caribbean's shrinking coastal mangroves. Amid prevailing messages of loss, these Caribbean Partners got their *mangroove* on and celebrated! The programmes combined art and information with practical conservation work like mangrove planting, and trips to experience the birds and biodiversity of the mangroves at first hand. Mangroves are among the most biologically diverse and productive ecosystems in the Caribbean. Located between land and sea, they provide nursery grounds for fish and shellfish, and forest products such as wood and flowers (from which bees produce high quality honey). By binding sediments, they also minimize impacts on fragile marine environments - such as coral reefs and seagrass beds - from land-based contaminants. Mangroves act as natural coastal barriers against hurricanes, and hold large stocks of carbon, playing a key role in climate change mitigation and adaptation.



Mangroves are important for birds and people.

Photo: Ricardo Briones

The value of the services that mangroves provide -entirely free- has been estimated at 215,349 Int\$/ha/year, making a huge contribution to the national economies and overall well-being of Caribbean states and their people. But mangroves are disappearing fast. *“Mangrove extent in the insular Caribbean has been reduced by almost 25% over the past 25 years, the second highest rate of mangrove loss of any global region,”* said Laura Perdomo, Mangrove Alliance Coordinator. *“Mangrove conservation approaches often lose out to established economic development models like traditional mass tourism, even though any benefits for Caribbean people are short-lived.”* Grupo Jaragua organised a month-long programme of fun-filled activities including field trips, buton mangrove-planting, presentations at community education centres and schools, and mural painting. Most of Grupo Jaragua's activities were directed at youth (ages 7-18) from five local communities (Juancho, La Colonia, El Cajuil, Tres Charcos and Manuel Goya). Once again [Laguna de Oviedo \(Oviedo Lagoon\)](#) was chosen as the *“living classroom”* of preference. This brackish lagoon within [Jaragua National Park](#) Important Bird Area is also the focal site of Grupo Jaragua's small grant-funded project, *The Mangroves of Laguna de Oviedo*.



Never too young (or too small) to watch birds at mangroves! Photo:

Ela Cruz

While Grupo Jaragua has actively participated in WWD since 2004, this was SOPI's first time. To inaugurate what will hopefully become a yearly occasion, they developed a whole-day programme open to the general public. Their Important Bird Area (IBA) of choice was [Caño Tiburones](#), where SOPI is currently implementing a [project combining scientific research and local knowledge](#) to improve the conservation of mangroves. SOPI's WWD agenda included kayaking through the mangroves, waterbird counts in collaboration with the Local Conservation Group ([Liga Ecológica Quebradillana](#)), bird watching along three designated bird trails, and a trolley ride to visit the ponds of Camuy municipality. To enrich their WWD activities SOPI used promotional materials sent directly by the Ramsar Convention as well as [brochures](#) and [flyers](#) provided by BirdLife International's [Mangrove Alliance](#). Grupo Jaragua's and SOPI's WWD activities were supported by the Mangrove Alliance through the [MacArthur Foundation](#)-funded project [Conserving Caribbean mangroves in the face of a changing world](#).