Title Last August, Grupo Jaragua (BirdLife in the Dominican Republic) held its 15th Jaragua Summer Camp and in turn, celebrated 15 years of continuous efforts towards a greater environmental awareness in local communities. The Jaragua Summer Camp is an initiative of the non-governmental organization Grupo Jaragua and the local grassroots organization Voluntarios Comunitarios de Jaragua, who have been providing this educational activity to children from communities surrounding the Jaragua National Park, since the year 1997. It is a free of charge three-day event that takes place during the school holidays; this year it was held from August 9 to August 11 in the community of Oviedo, Pedernales Province (located in the south-west of the country). The name of the Summer Camp makes reference to the Jaragua National Park (JNP) a protected area of great importance for biodiversity in the Dominican Republic and the insular Caribbean region. The JNP is one of three core areas of the unique Jaragua-Bahoruco-Enriquillo Biosphere Reserve, as well as an Important Bird Area (DO007 Jaragua National Park). "The main objective of the Jaragua Summer Camp is to motivate children from communities surrounding Jaragua National Park to learn and preserve the natural and cultural resources of the Jaragua-Bahoruco-Enriquillo Biosphere Reserve, as a contribution to the sustainable human development in their communities," said Yvonne Arias, President of Grupo Jaragua. "To achieve this, we work under the constructivist model and also promote values such as social and gender equality; community self-management; the search for solutions through consensus; tolerance; discipline and the respect for diversity of ideas."
On this occasion, the Jaragua Summer Camp´s program made emphasis on the conservation of the Endangered Hispaniolan Hutia (*Plagiodontia aedium*) a terrestrial mammal, endemic to the island of Hispaniola. This species may be found in JNP, where it is threatened mainly by habitat fragmentation and loss, and by the direct impact of introduced predators (e.g. dogs, cats, mongoose and rats). Other topics included in the program were the International Year of Forests, the International Year of the Bat, the Camp´s 15th anniversary, and the process of establishment of the Jaragua National Park in the year 1983. The program also addressed the rational use of water and working materials during Camp activities, as well as the adequate disposal of generated waste material. Children and youth learned about the use and sustainable management of natural resources through interactive activities such as:

- Demonstrations on the use of solar ovens to illustrate their importance as an alternative to use of propane gas ovens, charcoal and/or wood for cooking
- Visits to the community plant nurseries and agroforestry plots
- Fun activities and games about ecosystem functions and services
- Activities to enhance reading habits (e.g. "Read, Have Fun and Learn" by the Plan Lea of the Listin Diario national newspaper)
- Composition of songs and poems about nature and local traditions

- Traditional singing and dancing
- Attendance in lectures and presentations on various topics of interest

During the closing ceremony, the participants exhibited the artistic materials and creations developed by them during the Summer Camp and 10 children were awarded with gifts and a certificate as "Outstanding Participant". T-shirts from previous editions of the Summer Camp were also exhibited. The event concluded with a toast. "This year we received 107 children from the local communities of Oviedo, Los Tres Charcos, Manuel Goya, El Cajuil and La Colonia and the valuable support of 163 community members for the coordination, implementation and facilitation of the Camp?, explained Yvonne Arias. ?Many children who participate later become Camp facilitators. Furthermore, some of these facilitators presently pursue or are motivated to pursue careers related to the biological sciences?, continued Yvonne Arias on the impact of this annual activity al local youth. In 2011, the Jaragua Summer Camp was supported by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Araucaria XXI project, and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) through Nature Canada (for the training of local facilitators). Others that have supported this initiative throughout the past 15 years are: the parents of participating school children; the Dominican Environmental Consortium; BirdLife International; the Dominican Government; international cooperation agencies (from Switzerland, Spain and Japan); the MacArthur Foundation and private sector companies (such as Font Gamundi, Coca-Cola and E. León Jiménez). More on this story here Photos: Grupo Jaragua