

Nesting shorebirds protected at the Cabo Rojo Salt Flats, Puerto Rico

Title

During May 2012, [Sociedad Ornitológica Puertorriqueña, Inc. \(SOPI, BirdLife in Puerto Rico\)](#) installed 25 signs in the [Cabo Rojo Salt Flats National Wildlife Refuge](#) to mark important nesting sites for resident shorebirds that were being disturbed by visitors.

The activity was carried out in collaboration with the Local Conservation Group, [Caborrojeños Pro Salud y Ambiente](#), and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Over 20 volunteers helped to install the signage at vulnerable shorebird sites, typically on the dry salt flats. This has been an outstanding piece of collaborative work to help conserve wildlife in the Cabo Rojo Salt Flats National Wildlife Refuge, but more needs to be done, such as controlling invasive species, if the refuge's nesting shorebirds are to be fully protected. - said Alcides L. Morales, President of SOPI.



Volunteers digging holes for the signs.

Photo by Ángel Ruiz.

There was previously no signage to alert visitors or local people which areas were off-limits due to the abundance of nesting shorebirds. Hikers, bikers and horseback riders would wander through important nesting sites in the refuge, resulting in significant levels of disturbance and nest failure for many ground nesting birds. Least Tern *Sternula antillarum* and Snowy Plover *Charadrius nivosus* were used as flagship species on the warning signs, however other birds that will also benefit are Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus*, Wilson's Plover *Charadrius wilsonia*, Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*, Willet *Tringa semipalmata* and Antillean Nighthawk *Chordeiles gundlachi*.

The Cabo Rojo Salt Flats ? part of Puerto Rico?s [Southwest Important Bird Area](#) and the [Caribbean?s first Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site](#) ? also supports significant numbers of migratory shorebirds such as Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus*, Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*, Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* and Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*.



SOPI giving a presentation about the ground-nesting shorebirds at the Cabo Rojo Salt Flats Interpretative Center .
Photo by Ángel Ruiz.

Once the signs had been installed on the refuge, a presentation about ground-nesting shorebirds was given to the volunteers and other visitors at the Cabo Rojo Salt Flats Interpretative Center so people learn how they can help to protect these shorebirds for future generations to come.