

Title

Sociedad Ornitológica Puertorriqueña Inc. (SOPI, BirdLife in Puerto Rico) has been awarded funds by the Mangrove Alliance Small Grants Program (SGP) to perform the first comprehensive study of the mangrove community at Caño Tiburones. SOPI will document past and present distribution of mangroves from both scientific research (including the use of aerial photographs) and local knowledge, and will be involving the local community, groups, students, and the general public in their actions.

Caño Tiburones Important Bird Area (IBA) is located on the north coast of Puerto Rico. It is the largest estuarine wetland on the island and supports a variety of habitats from mangroves to freshwater springs to small offshore cays; home to large numbers of ducks, herons, egrets and shorebirds. This IBA is a globally significant waterbird and seabird site, supporting important populations of the Vulnerable West Indian Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna arborea*, Masked Duck *Nomonyx dominicus* and Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*. It is also significant to both the adjacent local communities (c. 6,000 people) and visitors, who benefit from the multiple services generated by the natural wetland systems.

Image not found

Red mangroves in Caño Tiburones have suffered degradation © SOPI

Despite its importance to biodiversity and people, Caño Tiburones's natural habitats - including its mangroves - are being lost to give way to housing, industrial or agricultural development, and other human-related activities. "Little to no knowledge about the past and present distribution of mangroves in Caño Tiburones has been documented", commented Alcides Morales, SOPI's President. "However, once the scientific information has been collated by this project, it will serve as the basis to determine the negative effects that past human activities have had on the mangrove communities and help predict the future impact of planned development projects." Furthermore, even though there are organizations and environmental groups within the local community promoting the conservation of Caño Tiburones, SOPI recognizes the need for stronger linkages between, and a greater consensus among these interested stakeholders.

SOPI will work to combine science and community involvement through activities such as:

- Compilation of aerial photographs and maps
- Revision of data on bird censuses from the area
- Recording the oral history of the surrounding local communities
- Identification of flora in the mangrove community
- Bird monitoring in the mangrove habitat
- Community education and outreach
- Production of awareness materials

Results from this study will be used to inform planning and management decisions relating to Caño Tiburones's mangrove habitat, and improve its protection.

The site project *Historical distribution and current status of the mangroves in the Caño Tiburones IBA* is supported by the [Mangrove Alliance](#) SGP with funds from the [MacArthur Foundation](#) which are helping to catalyze community-based mangrove conservation in the Insular Caribbean. The Mangrove Alliance also supports small grants funded-projects in the [Dominican Republic](#) and [Jamaica](#).