

# Small grants, big conservation for mangroves

Title **The Neotropical Mangrove Conservation Alliance** has awarded its first small grant to **Grupo Jaragua** (BirdLife in the Dominican Republic) as part of an initiative to catalyze community-based mangrove conservation in the Insular Caribbean. *The Mangroves of Laguna de Oviedo* site project is up and running, and aims to improve the conservation of mangrove ecosystems in Jaragua National Park **Important Bird Area**.

**Laguna de Oviedo** is the most important lagoon in **Jaragua National Park's** wetlands system. Located on the north-east side of the park, this 27-km<sup>2</sup> saline lagoon supports extensive mangrove forests that provide critical habitat for a number of waterbirds such as Caribbean Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*), Roseate Spoonbills (*Platalea ajaja*), White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*), Brown Pelicans (*Pelicanus occidentalis*), egrets and terns. Mangroves and associated swamp areas are also used as feeding, roosting and stop-over grounds by a series of migratory shorebirds during their winter migration. The Vulnerable **West Indian Whistling-duck** (*Dendrocygna arborea*) and Near Threatened **White-crowned Pigeon** (*Patagioenas leucocephala*) ? two Caribbean restricted-range species ? rely on the mangroves of Laguna de Oviedo during important parts of their life cycle. Surrounding the lagoon is the local community of El Cajuil whose residents have long used this wetland for food, fuel wood and other extractive purposes.



The mangroves of Laguna de Oviedo

?Our site project will improve the conservation status of Laguna Oviedo?s mangroves as a result of reforestation, monitoring, and awareness-raising actions in collaboration with the local communities?, explained Amelia Mateo, Grupo Jaragua project coordinator. An initial mangrove ecosystem health assessment will be followed by reforestation along the banks of the lagoon in the vicinity of El Cajuil. At the same time Grupo Jaragua will implement site and species monitoring, and raise local awareness about the importance of mangroves during environmental celebrations such as the **World Bird Festival** and World Wetlands Day.

?Jaragua National Park **Local Conservation Groups** will be active participants in all project activities?, said Amelia Mateo. ?Being closely involved will improve their knowledge about practical aspects of mangrove conservation and will provide opportunities to share knowledge within their own communities during the

environmental education activities.?

The Mangrove Alliance Small Grants Program (SGP) is part of the *three-year initiative ? Conserving Caribbean mangroves in the face of a changing world?* funded by the MacArthur Foundation. Small grants will support site action in two further countries during 2012. Photos: Ricardo Briones (c)