Grupo Jaragua?s first land purchase initiative saves 100 ha of threatened Caribbean forest

Title

Grupo Jaragua (BirdLife in the Dominican Republic) has successfully purchased a 100 ha corridor of transitional, previously unprotected and highly threatened forest within the Jaragua-Bahoruco-Enriquillo Biosphere Reserve. The initiative, a first in terms of land purchase for Grupo Jaragua, is an important step towards halting the conversion of Caribbean forest with high conservation value to low yield cattle or crop farming. This purchase has been made possible by the generous support of Mr. Hans Swegen, the Lekholm Family, BirdLife International , IUCN National Committee of the Netherlands, USFWS-Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act and the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation.

The Jaragua-Bahoruco-Enriquillo Biosphere Reserve is located in the south-west of the Dominican Republic, connecting lowland dry forest at sea level in the Barahona Peninsula (Jaragua National Park IBA) to tropical montane forest in the highlands of Sierra de Bahoruco IBA. These forests are located outside the country's current protected area network and are vital for the maintenance of habitat connectivity to ensure the survival of ecologically-isolated species populations. They also provide an important buffer against the additional stress that climate change is likely to place on the protected areas.

This region holds more than 40 globally threatened species including birds such as Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata*, Bay-breasted Cuckoo *Coccyzus rufigularis*, La Selle Thrush *Turdus swalesi*, Hispaniolan Crossbill *Loxia megaplaga*, Hispaniolan Amazon *Amazona ventralis* and Parakeet *Aratinga chloroptera*. Moreover, the area is home to six Critically Endangered frogs, Hispaniola's only extant endemic land mammals – the Endangered Hispaniolan Solenodon *Solenodon paradoxus* and Hutia *Plagiodontia aedium,* and the Vulnerable Rhinoceros Rock Iguana *Cyclura cornuta*.

Since 2010, as part of BirdLife's global Forests of Hope programme, Grupo Jaragua has been working to protect forest corridors and create private reserves. Grupo Jaragua's local knowledge, experience and emphasis on the involvement of local communities in protected area management have made their first land purchase initiative a great success. "Land acquisition is the most direct way to protect habitats and threatened species in the Reserve. If land purchase is undertaken whilst ensuring that local community land use and ownership rights are respected, these conservation initiatives will gain community support and participation, and conflicts will consequently be reduced" explained Sixto J. Incháustegui, biologist and founder of Grupo Jaragua.

Grupo Jaragua has been able to acquire 100 ha and have already established camera traps in the area to monitor the presence of threatened mammals, define their distribution, threats and to use in the development of pilot ecotourism activities. Grupo Jaragua's objective is to continue purchasing privately-owned lands in the Biosphere Reserve so that habitat is protected between the two Important Bird Areas and provides continuous forest corridor linking over 2,000 km2 (200,000 ha) of natural forests. The complete Sierra de Bahoruco Forest of

Hope profile can be read here.