

Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Grants Program

Puerto Rico

Partnership Receives a \$250,000 Conservation Grant.

On May 3, 2004, as authorized under the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (Act), Steve Williams, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, acting on behalf of Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, approved \$250,000 in funding for the Río Encantado Migratory Bird Wintering Habitat Conservation Project in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico's Ciales, Florida, and Manatí Municipalities. The Act is nonregulatory and calls for voluntary partnerships to develop initiatives in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean to conserve neotropical migratory birds and their habitats. Certain activities defined by the Act are eligible for funding, and partnerships must match grant requests 3:1. Contributions from U.S. federal partners do not qualify as matching funds.

This 2-year project will conserve important migratory bird habitats in the northern karst region, an area considered to be the top conservation priority by federal and commonwealth agencies and nongovernmental organizations throughout Puerto Rico. More than 110 migratory bird species have been recorded in the karst forests, with the majority occurring in the project area of Río Encantado. Migrants such as the ovenbird, Louisiana waterthrush, northern parula, American redstart, and numerous warbler species seasonally occupy this habitat along with several endemic forest-bird species. Some 30 threatened and endangered bird species are present in the project area.

The northern karst region, within the Puerto Rican Moist Forest Ecoregion,

contains the most important aquifer recharge area on the island. The region is threatened by increasing demands for urban development, pasture and agricultural lands, and mineral extraction, particularly limestone. Conversion of traditionally managed shaded-coffee plantations to full-sun operations poses an additional, ongoing threat. With the natural canopy layer gone, the land is vulnerable to forces that cause soil erosion and the runoff of pesticides and fertilizers.

The Conservation Trust of Puerto Rico (Trust) is contributing \$1,463,000 to help achieve its project's goal of acquiring 1,000 acres of karst forest habitat, to be designated the Río Encantado Natural Reserve. The Trust will protect and manage the reserve in perpetuity, enriching the 17,000-acre network of conserved lands it already manages islandwide. As needed, partners will carry out restoration, sign-posting, and other management activities on the reserve. They also will continue to educate the public about the importance of the northern karst ecosystem, and will work with landowners through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to promote shade-grown coffee and sustainable agricultural practices.



American Redstart

Steve Maslowski/USFWS

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