

Puerto Rican Parrot Update

Ecologists and activists are trying to determine the effect of climate change on the Puerto Rican parrot.

By Anastasia Thrift

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Photo courtesy Mark Stafford

The Puerto Rican parrot (*Amazona vitatta*) is losing habitat to severe weather conditions. Whether it is a matter of climate change is being debated.

Ecologists and activists are trying to determine the effect of climate change on bird species. In its report "State of the Bird 2010," the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service reported that climate change is adversely affecting the habitat of the only parrot species native to the United States, the Puerto Rican parrot (*Amazona vitatta*).

"We have not as yet seen a measurable decrease in habitat for the parrot due to climatic variations," said Thomas White Ph.D. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Puerto Rican Parrot Recovery Program. He acknowledges, however, that drastic weather conditions will harm these birds.

"Hurricanes, yes, they can have immediate and drastic impacts on the parrots, mainly through temporary reductions in food available, through defoliation of trees, and also destruction of nesting trees."

State Of The Bird 2010 reports that birds of the Pacific face threats and challenges by mosquito-borne diseases and invasive species, "as climate change alters their native habitats." In the same paragraph, the report discusses the Puerto Rican parrot.

"Protection and restoration of natural systems is essential to endangered species such as ... the Puerto Rican Parrot. Decreased rainfall will reduce habitat for high-elevation forest birds and may result in breeding failures among resident birds and reduced overwinter survival of migrants in the Caribbean."

White agrees that the parrot population needs habitat restoration and his group continues to support the parrot population in El Yunque through active nest management and periodic release of additional parrots into the wild.

"In conjunction with the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, we have recently reestablished a second wild population in the karst forest region of northwestern Puerto Rico, and are in the process of selecting yet a third site for the reestablishment of another population," White said. "Together, these distinct populations in different parts of the island will help ensure that any adverse habitat-related changes due to climatic variations or major hurricanes will be minimized."

According to a USFWS press release on the parrots, 25 to 28 Puerto Rican parrots survive in the wild in the El Yunque National Forest in eastern Puerto Rico and 22 to 28 in the Río Abajo Forest in north-central Puerto Rico.

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