

THE HEAT IS ON

Species feeling the effects of climate change



Puerto Rican Parrot

Amazona vittata

Region:

Caribbean

Area affected:

Puerto Rico

Climatic change:

Severe weather

Impact:

Mortality, habitat loss

ABOUT THIS SPECIES

The Puerto Rican parrot is one of the most imperiled birds in the world and one of the first to be federally protected, on the original list of U.S. endangered species in 1967. Development, agriculture and logging have claimed most of the large trees these cavity-nesting parrots need for food and shelter. Nearly a million of the parrots probably once occurred on Puerto Rico and surrounding islands, but their numbers declined in response to the clearing of native vegetation in the region that started in the 1600s and accelerated rapidly through the 19th and 20th centuries. Captive breeding efforts saved the parrot from vanishing, but reproduction in the wild has been limited to just a few pairs each year. Today, fewer than 60 birds survive outside of captivity, divided between the species' last stronghold in El Yunque National Forest in northeastern Puerto Rico and a reintroduced population in Río Abajo Commonwealth Forest in the north central region.

DESCRIPTION OF IMPACT

In 1989, Hurricane Hugo killed nearly half of the Puerto Rican parrots in the wild at that time, reducing the population from 47 to 23. The status review for the species completed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in August 2017 contained an eerily prescient warning: "Given the small size of the wild population, a single, strong hurricane could potentially wipe out the entire current wild population." The following month, the island suffered a devastating double blow delivered by two Category 4 storms: Hurricane Irma in early September, followed by Hurricane Maria just two weeks later. **Since the hurricanes, some parrots have been spotted foraging, though several radio-tracked birds were also found dead.** The immense hurricanes, their size and power likely augmented by higher air and water temperatures due to climate change, also uprooted many of the large trees the species nests in and stripped fruits and vegetation from many others, making it difficult for the birds to find food. Thankfully, all the Puerto Rican parrots in the captive breeding facilities survived the storms.

References

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2017. Puerto Rican Parrot 5-Year Review. https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/five_year_review/doc5215.pdf



DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE

1130 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-4604

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