

Cajual Island Wildlife Research and Conservation Station, Gulf of Maranhão, Brazil

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Cajual Island, (2° 26' S, 44° 3' W) is located in the interior of Maranhão Gulf, on the north coast of Brazil (Figure 1). The island is part of the APA - Environmental Protection Area of Maranhão State. The area has also been integrated within the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN), a program of Wetlands for the Americas and is listed as a Ramsar site. The Cajual Island Wildlife Research and Conservation Station is administered by AMAVIDA - Associação Maranhense Para a Conservação da Natureza (a local association for nature conservation) and sponsored by ALUMAR - Consorcio de Alumínio do Maranhão (a joint-venture of Alcoa, Shell/Billiton and Alcan).

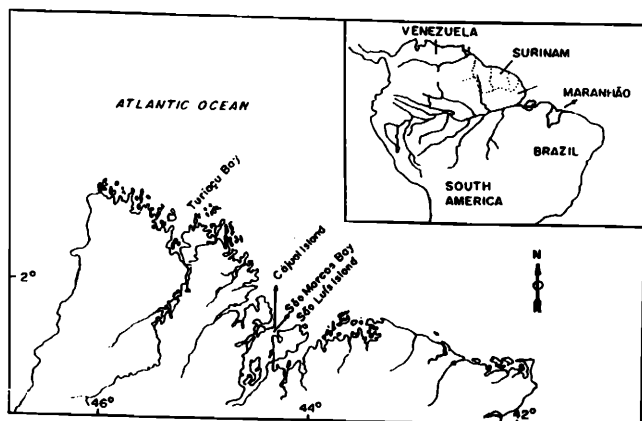


Figure 1. Map of the coastal area of Maranhão showing the location of Cajual Island.

Every year, many thousands of migratory shorebirds reach the Gulf of Maranhão from their breeding areas in the northern hemisphere. Approximately 150 000 migratory shorebirds, of 15 species in the families Charadriidae and Scolopacidae, were registered on Cajual and São Luís islands, between April 1991 and April 1992. Flocks comprised Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*, Sanderling *C. alba*, Least Sandpiper *C. minutilla*, Red Knot *C. canutus*, Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos*, Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*, Wilson's Plover *C. wilsonia*, Collared Plover *C. collaris*, Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia*, Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*, Willet *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*, Whimbrel *Numenius*

phaeopus, and Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*, with the greatest density being of Semipalmated Sandpiper (Rodrigues 1993).

An extensive estuarine area surrounding the island is a result of the confluence of the Atlantic Ocean salt water with the continental waters of three rivers and this greatly contributes to the growth of mangroves. Shorebirds exploit a benthic invertebrate fauna dominated by polychaetes (Lopes & Rebelo-Mochel 1993). Two species of neotropical shorebird nest on coastal beaches of Cajual Island - Collared Plover and Wilson's Plover as well as Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*. Others waterbirds nest on the mangrove vegetation such as the Scarlet Ibis *Eudocimus ruber* and herons.

The Cajual Island Wildlife Research and Conservation Station provides infrastructure and equipment to support survey biology and ecology studies of shorebirds and others waterbirds, as well as other fauna and flora of the island. The station has a 100 m² area including lodging for up to six researchers, kitchen and restroom. Energy is obtained from photo-voltaic cells, and used to operate water, pumps and other equipment. A catamaran and several small boats provide transportation to the island.

The Cajual Island Wildlife Research and Conservation Station is open to researchers and ecologists interested in visiting the island or carrying out studies. If you are interested please get in contact with the author.

REFERENCES

- Lopes, A.T.L & Rebelo-Mochel, F. 1993. *Distribuição e densidade da macroendofauna bentônica de substratos móveis do mesolitoral da ilha do Cajual, Alcântara, Maranhão, Brasil.* Monografia - Depto. Biologia da UFMA, São Luís, Maranhão, Brasil. 66 pp.
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