

30,000 acres of land, now the Paynes Creek National Park in southern Belize was set aside to protect a variety of wetland habitats and the unique physiographic feature of an extensive sequence of storm-built coastal ridges.

The reserve is bordered by the banks of Monkey River to the north, miles of beach ridge to the east, inland savannah to the west, and the Port Honduras Marine Reserve to the south. Paynes Creek National Park was declared a nature reserve in May 1994 and a national park in 1999.

Notable Features

- Paynes Creek National Park is unique in that it protects so many different habitats in a small area.
- Remnants of a gallery forest and old second growth forest flourish on the northern border of the park, alongside the Monkey River.
- Herbaceous marshland borders the second growth forest.
- Payne's Creek itself is surrounded by a mix of broadleaf and marshland vegetation.
- Further south and to the west are pine ridge savannahs consisting mostly of grassland with clumps of palmetto and southern pine.
- The most southern border habitat is brackish mangrove swamp associated with the Punta Ycacos lagoon system.
- The Caribbean shore vegetation is dominated by littoral thicket species such as Cocoplum and Sea-grape. Cashew Trees are found in some areas, and Coconut Palms are scattered about.
- This is the most extensive stretch of coastline in Belize not lined with mangrove.
- Over 300 known species of birds have been identified at Paynes Creek. Herds of white-tail deer forage on the savanna, many of their tracks are evident on the parks trails. The roars of howler monkeys are often heard nearby. They feed and live in the trees above, and are sometimes difficult to spot but their smell is distinct. The area is also home to other wild animals including fox, peccary, gibnut, armadillo, crocodile and the jaguar.
- The area is an important manatee breeding ground and supports an Ibis nesting site, a hawksbill turtle nesting site, and a large wading bird population.

Visitor Experience

The best way to explore this wetland habitat is by boat through the Punta Ycacos Lagoon. The Punta Ycacos Lagoon is increasingly used for sport fishing.