

## JATIBONUCO TAINO OF NEW JERSEY



While the histories of most tribes in the United States today involve forced migration, voluntary migration has added a new tribe to the colorful palette of native peoples of the United States: the Taino people, descendants of the Arawak Indians of Central and South America.

Centuries before Columbus met the Taino people, their ancestors the Arawak had colonized the islands of the Caribbean (ENAT, 20-22). The Taino became the first to trade glass beads with the Europeans, who would use them as a trade item for hundreds of years.

The fierce Caribs, who gave their name to the Caribbean Sea, followed the Arawak from South America and forced the peaceful Arawak from Lesser Antilles northward to the Greater Antilles, the Bahamas, and southern Florida. These isolated Arawak intermixed with native populations in these locales and evolved on the islands of Puerto Rico, Cuba, Hispaniola, and coastal regions of Florida into a distinct culture of their own; they became the Taino. The modern Taino continue to speak a dialect of the Taino language.



The islands of the Caribbean became a major source of immigration in the second half of the 20th century, part of the Taino population settled in South Florida and the mid-Atlantic states. With sufficient density the Taino have now started to coalesce and form "outposts" of their culture and heritage in their new homes. In November 1993, the first Taino

Tribal Council came to order in New Jersey under the leadership of Chief Peter Guanikuyu Torres, some sixty years after the Taino first came to the area.

The Taino of New Jersey, officially the “Southern Jersey Taino Tribe of Jatibonuco”, are originally from the *yucayeke* (village) of Jatibonuco (its Taino name) which in current Puerto Rican geography covers the cities of Orocovi, Barranquitas, and Aibonito (Jatibonuco History, <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/taino/docs/jersey.html>).

The New Jersey Tribe united with its brethren in southern Florida, the Timucua Taino, to form the Inter-Tribal Council of the Taino Nation, based in southern New Jersey. Both the Jatibonuco and the Inter-Tribal Council use the same flag.

That flag is buff or off-white, the color of natural, unbleached cotton that predominates in the native “Jíbaro” mountain dress of the tribe (and the background color of the New Jersey state flag). The flag bears the seal of the Taino, which features a hummingbird in blue, black, white, and red seeking nectar from a red hibiscus-like flower known to the Taino as the *maga*. Circling the hummingbird is the title “The Taino Indigenous Nation of the Caribbean” across the top and “*La Nación Indígena Taino del Caribe*” in Spanish across the bottom.

The hummingbird, or colibrí, is a sacred symbol for the Taino people (<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/taino/docs/bird.html>) because it pollinates plants, bringing new life into the world. It symbolizes the rebirth of the Taino people. The most sacred species of the colibrí is the guani, once found throughout the Caribbean islands but now only in Cuba. The bird is greenish-blue—ancient legends say it was once a fly, converted into a bird by the Sun Father. Whatever its origins, the colibrí serves the Taino people as a striking emblem connecting them with their heritage and their Caribbean homeland.

The Jatibonuco Taino have recently altered their name, their flag, and their self-view. They have requested that they simply be referred to as a people (e-mail from Secretary Beverly Carey Torres of the Jatibonuco Taino People, 3 June 1997). The new tribal name on the

flag is “THE NEW JERSEY TAINO JATIBONUCO TRIBE”, appearing in a half-circle above the colibrí logo. The text remains in English on the outer edge, in Spanish (and smaller) on the inner portion. All text now is in royal blue. The colibrí and flower have now been enlarged to reach from nearly the bottom edge to the top. The entire new device occupies about 75% of the length of the new flag. 🌺

[Thanks to Chief Torres for information on the Jatibonuco and their symbols.]