



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Caribbean Field Office

Oficina de Servicios Ecológicos del Caribe



Roseate Tern
Palometa
2010



The roseate tern is a migratory coastal seabird that owes its name to the rose color of its chest and belly early in the breeding season. It is a medium-sized tern, primarily white, slender-winged, with a long forked tail, black crown, pale grey upper surface, and immaculate white underparts. The three or four outer primaries (wing feathers) of roseate terns are frosted with silver-grey and edged with black. Three-quarters of the bill in Caribbean roseate terns gradually becomes reddish-orange during the breeding season.



In the Caribbean, roseate terns nest primarily on small offshore islands, rocks, cays, and islets. Their nesting habitat includes coral rubble, jagged rocks, narrow ledges of emerging rocks, or sandy beaches; sometimes very close to the water line or near vegetation. This photo was taken at Cayo El Palo, Puerto Rico.



Adult roseate terns generally incubate 2-3 eggs for about 28 days before the chicks hatch.



Roseate tern eggs in the same nest usually hatch just a few days apart.



Within a few days of hatching, newborn roseate tern chicks seek the shelter of nearby coral, rocks, or vegetation.



The speckled plumage of the chick helps it blend with its surroundings; and after about 4-5 weeks, they leave the nest area and accompany the adults on foraging trips.



Roseate terns feed by plunge diving for small fish driven near the surface by larger fish. These are some of the prey species that are part of the roseate tern diet in the Caribbean: sardines, flying fish , anchovies, and other juvenile fish.



Hermit crabs often prey upon roseate tern eggs and young chicks.



©2007 Rafy Rodriguez

Ruddy turnstones are also predators of Caribbean roseate tern eggs.



Ruddy turnstones puncture roseate tern eggs to feed on their yolk, and discard eggs that have developing embryos.



Oystercatchers are major predators of roseate tern eggs. The effect of their predation is difficult to assess because oystercatchers carry the eggs outside the nesting colony and away from the defending parent roseate terns.



Adult roseate terns are sometimes found dead for unknown reasons; often related to predation, diseases, or malnourishment.

Religious items found at roseate tern colony:

Human activities in proximity
to roseate tern colonies, and
visitation to breeding colonies,
are a significant source of
disturbance to breeding terns.





Service biologists, assisted by volunteers and personnel from the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources, have conducted population assessments of the Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands roseate tern populations since 1990.



Eggs and chicks are hard to find as they blend with their surroundings. The team walks in line formation to maximize coverage of nests surveyed.



Volunteers hold and transport roseate tern fledglings in boxes before weighing and banding the birds.



Survey teams carefully set traps on top of nests to trap adult roseate terns as they return to incubate the eggs. The team quickly retrieve, measure, and band the birds before releasing them.



A metal band with a unique number, placed on the leg of roseate terns, allows scientists to identify individual roseate terns.



Color bands are placed on the leg of adult roseate terns using a modified metal spoon.



Adult roseate terns are banded to track survivorship and migration.



Roseate Tern census team 2007

Be a friend of the roseate tern

- Avoid visiting areas where roseate terns are nesting; usually between May to late July.
- Do not step on eggs.
- Do not accept or buy roseate tern eggs, or items made of roseate tern parts.
- Call 787-851-7297 to report sightings of dead or live roseate terns and colony locations. Note if the birds have metal or colored bands on the legs, which identify locations where the birds were banded.



Photos

- Dr. Jorge E. Saliva, USFWS
 - Rafy Rodríguez
 - Mike Morel



- Produced by Lilibeth Serrano, USFWS