

ANIMAL SECTION - BIRDS

ROSEATE TERN

ABOUT

The Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*) is a medium-sized, colonial-nesting, marine water bird. White with a black head cap and a long and deeply forked tail with white streamers, their wings are frosted with silver-grey and edged with black. In the species that breed in the northeast, the bill is black in May and becomes progressively redder from the base toward the tip during the mating season, turning blacker again in August. Also during the mating season their legs turn red and the underside of this bird is creamy-white with a pink blush. They are 13-16 inches (33-41 cm) in length and weigh between 3.18-4.94 ounces (90-140g). The Roseate Tern breeds in scattered locations along the Atlantic Coast from Nova Scotia southward to the Florida Keys. When feeding, the Roseate Tern plunges into water from flight to catch small fish. They like to breed on rocky offshore islands, barrier beaches, and salt marsh islands. The nest is a scrape in the ground and they lay 2 brown eggs with dark speckles and streaks. Both parents incubate, brood, and feed their young. On hatching, the chicks are downy with their eyes open. They are able to walk, but stay in the nest for 22 to 29 days.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Roseate Tern suffered a drastic population decline in the late 19th century due to hunting for the millinery (hat making) trade. However, with the introduction of protection laws and a change in fashion, the species made a rapid comeback. It is now distributed worldwide in a variety of coastal habitats. The North American subspecies is divided into two separate breeding populations, one in the northeastern US and Nova Scotia and one in the southeastern US and the Caribbean. In 1987, the northeastern population was listed as endangered and the southern population listed as threatened. The northeastern US population has been greatly reduced by housing developments and other human activity on or near the coastal barrier islands. The other problem facing the Roseate Tern is being crowded out of its preferred nesting sites (already limited) by gulls, which happens all too frequently.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

What color is a Roseate Tern's egg?

- a) Pale pink with light blue streaks
- b) Pale blue with light brown speckles
- c) Creamy-white with a pink blush
- d) Brown with dark speckles and streaks

Answer is D.

