

# RSPB INFORMATION

## Conservation Division Research News

ROSEATE TERNS : No. 1  
AUGUST 1987

### ROSEATE TERNS:

This note aims to inform you about recent developments concerning Roseate Terns. It will be circulated to everyone known to me to have such an interest. A circulation list is attached. A Research News devoted to Roseates will appear regularly in the spring and autumn, and possibly irregularly in between to report on news from the wintering grounds.

RSPB EEC CONTRACT: RSPB has been awarded a contract from the EEC to prepare a report on the conservation of this species in the Community. The report will be produced by 30 November. Anyone wishing to make suggestions for conservation measures is welcome to do so in writing to me before 30 September.

ENGLAND: holds very few Roseates these days. Good news from the Farne Islands where National Trust warden Peter Hawkey reports that numbers are up a little from last year's 9 pairs to about 15 this year. Numbers on Coquet Island RSPB reserve are similar to last year at about 17 pairs. A few other pairs nest in scattered locations.

SCOTLAND: good news from Inchmickery RSPB reserve where the numbers have recovered from a low of 2 pairs in 1981 to about 20 this year; but this is a far cry from the population of 100 pairs in 1976.

WALES: bad news from here. The main Anglesey colony (c.200 pairs in the last few years) has had a disastrous season. Less than 10 chicks fledged. Although wardened by RSPB this site suffered problems from foxes and peregrines! Yes, peregrines are a major predator of the terns here. A tricky conservation problem.

NORTHERN IRELAND: bad news from National Trust warden Bob Brown at Strangford Lough where no Roseates have bred this year. As often, the reasons are unclear since numbers of other tern species are good. At Swan Island and Green Island RSPB reserves Roseates number 25 and 40 pairs respectively; both slightly up on last year.

Dave Allen, RSPB warden, also found two pairs of this species nesting at another site - it pays to keep your eyes open!

IRELAND: in David Cabot's absence, in Greenland, Hugh Brazier organised two trips to Rockabill to ring pulli, and I went along for the rides. Rockabill is fantastic!! As shown in the RSPB film 'Taking Terns', the Roseates nest in dense stands of Tree Mallow in walled gardens around the lighthouse. 293 Roseate pulli were ringed and who knows how many were missed? It was great to see a colony where Roseates were in the majority instead of straining one's eyes and imagination to pick them out of the crowd!

FRANCE: I visited Brittany in August to talk to Alain Thomas of SEPNEB. The Brittany population is stable at 80-100 pairs distributed between several small islets. Most sites are reserves. Artificial nesting sites have been used by both Roseates and Commons.



PORTUGAL: the Azores are part of Portugal and, therefore, of the EEC. An expedition in 1984, organised by Euan Dunn, found 635 pairs of Roseates scattered throughout the archipelago, thus forming approximately 50% of Europe's population. I checked the situation on 3 islands, and little has changed in the past three years. The largest colony is of c.100 pairs. In early July several young terns had already fledged. Some sites have been made reserves in this European Year of the Environment.

WEST AFRICA: the ICBP/RSPB 'Save the Seashore Birds Project-Ghana' focusses on Roseates and gathers information on the numbers and distribution of birds along Ghana's coast. Its education programme aims to curb the trapping of terns.

The largest known Roseate roost in Ghana is at Tema harbour, near Accra, and has held up to 1000 birds. Chris Gomersall (RSPB stills photographer) photographed a flock of 150 there in October 1986 and estimated only 300 birds present. Perhaps Roseates spend much time offshore and only come inshore in particular weather conditions.

Ghana Game and Wildlife Department staff, supported by the Seashore Birds Project, plan whole-coastline surveys in October 1987 and March 1988 - watch this space.

RECOMMENDED READING: an article on Roseate Terns will appear in the first issue of the RSPB Conservation Review - due out on 24 August.

RINGING: as many of you know the colour-ringing programme has been modified and expanded. I am co-ordinating this project. Each year the same colour ring will be used at all British and Irish colonies. The colour will be changed each year. This means that colour-ringed Roseates, whether in Ghana or northern Europe, will be identifiable to their year class and that the recruitment of young birds to the breeding population will be measured for the first time. This may provide information on the effects of trapping in West Africa and whether lack of recruitment is a critical factor in the population decline.

Some of you had problems with the colour rings this year. They came from two suppliers, and although each was given the same specification, one batch was larger than the other! The bigger rings can be applied successfully with ringing pliers but my apologies to those of you who had a frustrating time - we know where to get rings in future.

On Rockabill one bird had an Orange colour ring. This bird was ringed in Northern Ireland two years ago (or just possibly one year ago though this is unlikely). Please send any colour ring sightings to me and I will pass on the information through this news letter.

US VISIT: I will visit the USA in September to talk to conservationists about Roseates. Their situation is similar to ours in that numbers peaked in the early 1960s and then nose-dived. Reports suggest that research into conservation measures is more advanced on the other side of the Atlantic - we will see.

ANNE SOUTHWORTH: is an American who, last winter, studied Roseates in South America and has recently visited British and Irish sites to learn about the European situation. She is now visiting the Kiunga Islands where the Indian Ocean subspecies *S. d. korustes* was found in colonies of 7000 pairs in 1951. For more details watch this space.

Mark Avery

ONE DAY MEETING: in order to promote an exchange of views on Roseate Terns I suggest that we hold an informal one-day meeting. The few people I have approached have expressed interest. I suggest that we should have about half a dozen talks on different aspects of the species' status, biology and problems but leave a large part of the time free for more informal group discussion. Suitable subjects for round table discussions include; ringing, habitat manipulation, West Africa. The date set for this meeting is Saturday the 3rd October. Please let me know very quickly (by filling in and posting the form at the bottom of this sheet) if you are interested in attending, and whether you could give a talk (20 mins). The exact timetable will be sent out to people expressing an interest in coming. The probable timing of the event would be from 1000 until 1600. To keep things simple you would be expected to bring your own picnic lunch. It is possible that RSPB may be able to assist in the travel expenses of amateurs who wish to attend. I do not envisage more than about 30 people attending.

Mark Avery

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#### One day meeting

Name:

Address:

I will attend the meeting to discuss the Conservation of Roseate Terns which is to be held at The Lodge on 3 October 1987.

I will/will not be able to give a short (20 mins) talk, entitled:

I suggest that the following subjects are ones which would be suitable for a round table discussion:

Circulation list:

RSPB

Dave Allen  
John Andrews  
Ian Armstrong  
Ian Bainbridge  
Colin Bibby  
Dinah Browne  
James Cadbury  
David Elcome  
Alistair Gammell  
Chris Gomersall  
Frank Hamilton  
Ian Hepburn  
Stuart Housden  
John Hunt  
Art Lance  
Roger Lovegrove

Peter Makepeace  
Chris Murphy  
Richard Porter  
Tony Prater  
Annette Preece  
Ian Prestt  
Bob Scott  
Malcolm Stott  
Gareth Thomas

Graham Williams  
Graham Wynne

Non RSPB

Bill Ashby

Hugh Brazier

Bob Brown

David Cabot

Euan Dunn  
Ian Forsyth  
Joe Furphy  
Duarte Furtado  
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