

# RSPB INFORMATION

ROSEATE TERNS: No. 2  
MARCH 1989

Welcome to Roseate News 2. There is a lot to report; this newsletter may turn into a book in future!!

October 1987:

At the meeting advertised in Roseate News 1 the speakers were; Chris Gomersall (RSPB), The Azores; Ian Hepburn (RSPB), West Africa; Chris Mead (BTO), ringing; Gareth Thomas (RSPB), RSPB reserves; Graham Williams (RSPB), Anglesey; Jim Hurley (IWC), Keeragh Isles Project, and Oscar Merne (Irish Wildlife Service), Ireland. Other participants included Bob Brown (NT), Mike Rands (ICBP), Mark Tasker (NCC), Colin Bibby, James Cadbury, Mike Everett, Richard Porter, Bob Scott, Frances Winder (all RSPB). We heard of the very successful 1984 expedition to the Azores; more than 50% of the European population nests there. West Africa was discussed at length; trapping continues at an unknown intensity with an unknown impact on terns. On Anglesey Roseates are preyed upon by Peregrines. It was decided to provide extra protection by increasing the nesting cover. Nest boxes, (regularly used by Roseates in the USA), were to be provided and vegetation growth encouraged. Jim Hurley described the exciting experiment to attract Roseates back to the Keeragh Islands by a combination of gull management, tern models and tape-recorded tern cries. This IWC project deserves to be successful if only because it is a new approach. Oscar Merne presented a clear review of the Irish situation, stressing the importance of Rockabill. Published proceedings of this meeting will soon be available; sorry for the delay.

Roseates 88:

1988 saw little change in the status of Roseates in Britain and Ireland. Good news from the largest European colony, Rockabill in Ireland, where numbers increased from 250 pairs in 1987 to 332 in 1988. Studies by David Cabot (on an RSPB contract) showed that breeding success was high. 504 chicks were ringed by David Cabot and Hugh Brazier. On RSPB reserves there were minor changes in numbers. In Anglesey only 45 pairs nested (40 in 1987 but 200+ formerly) and very few chicks were fledged. Peregrines again took a number of Roseates. One nest box (out of 25) was used for nesting; and others were used for shelter by chicks. This is a moderately encouraging response and the experiment will be continued in future years.

France:

News from the Société pour la Protection de la Nature en Bretagne (SEPNB). Alain Thomas writes that numbers have remained stable at around 80 pairs; all on SEPNB reserves. A worrying development is that an immature Peregrine summered in the area, disturbing the terns. The Anglesey experience has shown that this can turn into a very big problem but what can one do...?



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#### Azores:

I visited the Azores to take part in a scientific expedition to Graciosa organised by the Division of Ecology of the Universidade dos Acores. An exciting discovery was that a site which held no terns in 1984 had 120 pairs of Roseates. In the first week of June the first eggs were hatching. The difference in numbers between 1984 and 1988 does not mean that the population is expanding rapidly; it is much more likely that the birds move around a lot. At another colony, visited in 1987 and 1988 the numbers of terns had dropped considerably.

#### USA:

On 2 December 1987 the northeastern USA population of Roseate Tern was listed as officially Endangered and the Caribbean population as Threatened. Recovery Teams have been formed and the northeastern team has produced a Roseate Tern Recovery Plan. This impressive document sets out the problems faced by Roseates in the northeast USA, identifies aims of a recovery programme which will lead to the species being taken off the Endangered list and prescribes a detailed implementation schedule to accomplish this. RSPB aims to produce a similar document for the European population in due course.

#### Colour-rings:

In 1988 the British and Irish colour was red on the right leg. These rings were used on Coquet Island, Anglesey, Inchmickery and Rockabill. This autumn 10 red-ringed birds were seen by Adrian del Nevo in Ghana; most at Tema harbour but also at Panbros salt-pans and Sekondi harbour. Even more exciting were seven yellow-ringed birds. Yellow rings were used by the 1984 Azores expedition. These observations confirm that at least some Azores birds winter in (or pass through) Ghana and are therefore subject to the same threats of trapping as the birds from northwest Europe. An Anglesey bird from 1985/6 was seen at Seaforth Nature reserve in 1987, and another was in Kent in June 1988. Alain Thomas reports two colour-ring sightings from Brittany. On 31 July at the largest French colony, Ile aux Dames, a blue-ringed bird was seen; this was a pullus on Anglesey in 1985 or 1986. A bird with a light-green ring was also seen; a British or Irish bird from 1987. The colour-ringing programme is beginning to provide useful information. Sightings of British- and Irish-ringed birds in France and West Africa help to emphasise the fact that the future of Roseates is dependent on an international conservation effort.

#### Talks:

At the joint IWC/RSPB conference in Dublin in February 1988 David Cabot and I spoke about Roseate Terns. David described his Irish studies and I put this into an international context. I also talked about Roseates at the BTO conference at Swanwick in December 1988. Insomniacs with British television might have seen the RSPB film 'Taking Terns' on TV-am on 27 August 1988 at 0600 or 4 December at 0630.

#### British Red Data Book for birds:

The British Red Data Book, prepared jointly by NCC and RSPB, will be published by Poysers in late 1989/early 1990. Breeding species are included if they meet any of four criteria (international importance, rare British breeder, localised, declining) and the Roseate Tern is the only species to

qualify on all counts. Obviously this emphasises that Roseates are in serious trouble.

RSPB research project;

In October 1988 RSPB embarked on a 3-year research programme on Roseate Terns which will study breeding success in the Azores and the problems faced by the birds in their winter quarters. Adrian del Nevo began his study with a visit to Ghana in autumn 1988 and writes:

*Thanks to an enormous amount of help from the staff of the Save the Seashore Birds Project and Government officials my first field season in Ghana was very successful. Roseates were found all along the coast with some big flocks of up to 290 birds. They move around quite a bit so some may have been counted twice but a count of the whole coast in November found 1300+ Roseates which represent c.60% of the European population. Attendance patterns at roosts vary with age. Adults leave soon after dawn and return after 1600, and young birds tend to feed close to the coast at lagoons, river outflows and net hauls. Might these differences partly account for the high proportion of juvenile birds in the ringing recoveries? Only adults were seen at sea and these were concentrated along the continental shelf (15-30 km off-shore). Tern numbers (all species) generally increased through October and November with the highest proportion of juvenile Roseates present in mid-November. From mid-November, all tern species gradually moved further east, where some sites contained up to 50,000+ terns of 14 species. The terns probably follow an eastward movement of Sardinella, though more information is needed on this. Few terns (except Royals) seen after the first week of December; they may move even further east into Togo, Benin and Nigeria. It will be important to discover where the Roseates are between December and the breeding season as this may be a critical period. Tern hunting is widespread and in places very intensive. Trapping usually takes place between 0900 and 1300 with a lesser peak between 1600 and 1700. At some sites terns were caught at an alarming 0.07 terns/person/ten minutes (all species).*

Adrian is assisted by a Ghanaian worker, Ernest Asante, who is collecting data on trapping and bird numbers at study sites along the whole coast. More news from Ernest in future newsletters.

Literature review:

The following are recent publications on Roseates. If you know of others that would be of general interest please let me know and I can list them in future issues of Roseate News.

Andrews R., Atwell, G., Blodget, B., Nisbet, I. and Scheibel, M. 1988. Roseate Tern Recovery Plan Northeastern Population. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service region 5. pp 78.  
(This is an excellent draft recovery plan with information on: Life History, Population status, Reasons for Decline, Conservation measures, and a well defined list of recovery objectives with recommendations of how these may be achieved.)

Burger J., and Gochfeld, M. 1988. Nest-site selection and temporal patterns in habitat use of Roseate and Common Terns. *Auk* 105:433-438.

(RT and CT nested together but RT occupied areas of dense vegetation. Site characteristics of early and late RT differed but late breeders were still able to find sites amongst dense vegetation. Inter-specific competition for sites may not be limiting and abundant sites remained available.)

Duffy D.C. 1986. Foraging at patches: interactions between Common and Roseate Terns. *Ornis Scandinavica* 17:47-52.

(RT more successful per dive and were in smaller more peripheral groups than CT. RT were more successful in smaller groups with more dispersed prey than were CT.)

Kirkham I.R. and Nettleship, D.N. 1987. Status of the Roseate Tern in Canada. *Journal of Field Ornithology* Vol.58, No.4, 505-515.

(ca.103-127 prs, largely in Nova Scotia. Recent decline, threatened by gulls. Human predation in winter quarters. *Threatened status in Canada.*)

Ntiamoa-Baidu Y. 1988. Les Oiseaux du Littoral au Ghana. *Nature et Faune* Vol.4: No.1. 4-9 (A resume of the birds found along the coast and the seasonal pattern of attendance).

Ntiamoa-Baidu Y. 1988. Problemes et conservation des Oiseaux migrants en Afrique de L'Ouest. *Nature et Faune* Vol. 4. 18-24. (Identifies conservation problems (including for terns) in West Africa and suggests the action required).

Dutch Birding has a collection of identification papers in Vol 10. 1988

Millarney K. Identification of Roseate Tern in juvenile plumage. pp 109-120, and Roseate x Common hybrids pp133-135

Bijersbergen R. Dougalls Stern hybridiserend met Visdief op Hooge Platen in 1982-85. pp 121-123

Walhout J. Dougalls Stern met hybride juveniel te Vlissingen in Sept-Oct 1984. pp 124-127

International department personnel change:

Ian Hepburn, who dealt with the RSPB end of the Save the Seashore Birds Project - Ghana has moved to ICBP where he will maintain an interest in the project. At RSPB the post of Assistant International Affairs Officer (Africa) has been filled by Dr Nonie Coulthard.

What next?

Roseate News 3 will follow hard on the heels of this newsletter. I hope to produce it during April. It will contain; details of the 1989 colour-ring programme, news from the Indian Ocean, more news from Ghana and ... why not something from you? Please send any contributions, which should not exceed about half a page in length, to me by April 15.

Mark Avery