

# RSPB INFORMATION

ROSEATE TERN NEWS: NO 6.  
SEPTEMBER 1991

## Introduction

1991 was a year of mixed fortunes for roseate terns in Europe, good news came from the Republic of Ireland and the Azores but less encouraging stories emerged from France and the United Kingdom. The breeding colony on Rockabill off the East Coast of Ireland continued to increase in size and 365 pairs reared over 560 young, however, the United Kingdom recorded very low numbers of breeding roseates due mainly to the collapse of the Anglesey colonies. Further bad news came from Brittany where over 50 adult roseates were found dead in the main breeding colony, perhaps a warning of the dangers of having too many birds concentrated in too few colonies. Despite these worrying events the total number of breeding pairs has shown an overall increase from c.1638 pairs in 1990 to c.1810 pairs in 1991.

## STOP PRESS

Adrian del Nevo has just sent a telex from Ghana reporting the sighting of 211 roseates, probably more, roosting at Panbros close to Accra on 17th October. Of 145 checked for rings four were marked with BTO rings only, five with BTO rings and dark blue colour rings, one with a BTO ring and a brown colour ring and in addition four Azorean adults, three of which were individually colour ringed from Santa Maria this June. The fourth adult was marked with yellow and metal rings.

## ROSEATE TERN ADDED TO APPENDIX II OF BONN CONVENTION

Thanks to a proposal tabled by the Irish Government the roseate tern has been added to Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, otherwise known as the Bonn Convention.

One of the objectives of this convention is to persuade Range States to conclude "Agreements" for the conservation and management of species listed on Appendix II. Migratory species are eligible for Appendix II either if they have an unfavourable conservation status and require international agreements for their conservation, or if they have a conservation status which would significantly benefit from international cooperation.

The object of an "Agreement" shall be to restore the migratory species concerned to a favourable conservation status or to maintain it in such a status.



THE ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE  
PROTECTION OF BIRDS

Now that the roseate tern is listed on Appendix II, discussions will begin with a view to concluding an "Agreement" for the roseate tern which will include the production of an action plan.

#### ROSEATE TERN CONFERENCE

Following the success of the Dublin roseate tern conference in April 1991 the next roseate tern conference is planned for Carantec in the Baie de Morlaix, c.10 km from Roscoff, Brittany, France. The conference will be based at the hotel L'aveil (awake) and will run from the evening of Friday 24 April until mid-afternoon on Sunday 26 April 1991. The conference organiser is Guillemette Rolland of Société Pour L'Etude Et La Protection De La Nature En Bretagne (SEPNE) to whom all enquiries should be addressed.

It is envisaged that the conference will be divided into three main sections, (1) a reporting session where representatives from each colony/project area will outline the findings of the 1991 field season (and relate these findings to the two - or more - years of study, (2) a session with talks outlining more detailed findings of some aspects of breeding biology/feeding ecology and (3) the future: a discussion session to develop and discuss future scientific and conservation strategies and actions. But it won't all be hard work.....Allain Thomas will bring his traditional band to play some Breton music on the Saturday evening and there may be a chance to have a field outing after the conference on the Sunday afternoon.

To ensure that we can confirm our provisional booking with the hotel we need to know the number of participants AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Please do not delay, write immediately to indicate your wish to attend giving an outline of your talk (to be given in French!). When we know the number of participants and general topics for talks we will send out a conference programme and further details in November/December 1991.

Please complete and return the attached preliminary booking form to:

Guillemette Rolland  
S.E.P.N.B.  
186, rue Anatole-France  
B.P. 32 - 29276 BREST Cedex  
BRITTANY  
FRANCE

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1991 BREEDING SEASON

EUROPE

Numbers of roseate terns nesting at important colonies during 1988-91

	1988	1989	1990	1991
Republic of Ireland				
Rockabill, Co. Dublin	332	194	321	365
Lady's Island Lake, Co. Wexford	0	76	60	57
TOTALS	332	270	381	422
United Kingdom				
Swan Island, Co. Antrim	23	37	19	4
Green Island, Co. Down	7	25	3	0
Sandy Island, Co. Down	0	0	2	0
Strangford Lough, Co. Down	0	0	1	0
Forth Islands, Lothian	21	5	13	?
Farne Islands, Northum	21	12	2	2
Coquet Island, Northum	21	25	23	20
Isles of Scilly, Cornwall	1	3	?	6
Ynys Feurig, Anglesey	45	70	35	1
Skerries, Anglesey	0	19	7	0
Gemlyn Bay, Anglesey	0	2	6	3
TOTALS	141	198	111	36
Brittany				
Ile aux Dames			95	c100
Ile de la Colombiere				2
Ile aux Moimes				1
TOTALS			95	c103
Azores (Island totals, not colonies)				
Santa Maria	116	220	78	
San Miguel	0	0	0	
Graciosa	275	150	130	
Faial	0	60	186	
Sao Jorge	5	2	135	
Pico	23	50	21	
Terceira	93	95	5	
Corvo	0	19	?	
Flores	480	455	694	
TOTALS	992	1051	1249	
GRAND TOTALS			1638	1810

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## ROCKABILL 1991

The summer of 1991 was by far the best breeding season for the roseates nesting on Rockabill. A total of 366 breeding pairs was recorded representing an increase of 45 pairs on last years total. A mean clutch size of 1.82 was recorded from the nest census and a total of 568 pulli were ringed indicating productivity at 1.5 per pair. Observations of 4% unringed fledglings suggest breeding output was higher.

IWC wardens Lorcan O'Toole and Liam Ryan continued the management activities that were initiated in 1989. A much reduced number of breeding gulls were culled prior to the arrival of the terns. A series of rides one metre wide were cut through the dense mallow stands to allow the roseates and wardens easier access to the nests. A number of 'tern-tables' were also constructed in dense mallow so that ring-numbers could be read by telescope prior to the terns dropping down into the mallow. These proved very successful and will be increased next year.

A total of 286 BTO metal rings were read by telescope. Of the total, only 86 were read in 1990. This gives us a total of 442 adult roseates aged successfully using this method. Two roseates ringed as pulli in 1990 were recorded with their brown colour ring whilst two more bore a metal ring only. Twelve roseates ringed in 1989 were present and retained a full black bill for most of the season. A roseate ringed in Anglesey on 07.07.81 was seen feeding two chicks in a nest box on Rockabill on 07.07.91.

This season also saw the introduction of computer balances to record the weights of adult roseates. The method was used fairly successfully although adult terns were rather reluctant at first to land on them. Although some of the balances gave up working within days, a useful set of weights for adult roseates were recorded.

Next boxes were again used successfully. Of 70 boxes provided 55 were occupied by nesting roseates. As the inclement weather in June looked set to continue into July, a further 90 nest boxes cum chick shelters were constructed on the island and placed beside the nests with little or no shelter. These shelters proved invaluable and only 12 young roseates were found dead in the season.

Predation by large gulls was nil as scaring by rifle continued throughout the season. However, three visits by a kestrel resulted in a common tern chick and one adult roseate (from Anglesey) being killed. A peregrine was chased away by terns in August.

The exciting feature of this years season was the colonisation of the nearby rock, the Bill, by nine pairs of common and one pair of roseate tern. Although the roseate constructed an impressive nest with fish bones, its location resulted in its predation by gulls. However, the common terns successfully fledged. This clearly shows that space is not a limiting factor at this colony.

Increased local awareness, helped greatly by the Fingal Branch of the IWC, and the poor weather during the breeding season resulted in few attempts by unofficial visitors to land. However, the continued wardening of this thriving colony is essential.

Liam J. Ryan  
Senior Warden, Rockabill

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#### BRITTANY, FRANCE 1991

The current population of roseate terns in France is much fewer than in the past. A mysterious event at the one major colony may result in a further and dramatic population decrease. Approximately 100 pairs bred at Ile aux Dames from which roughly 30 chicks fledged, but a routine check of the colony by the Conservateur, Ewenn de Kergariou, in early June led to the discovery of 52 dead adult roseate terns. Many of these birds were found on their eggs or very close to the nest. The islet also contains c1000 pairs of Sandwich terns and c. 200 pairs of common terns and from these six commons and 20 Sandwich were found dead in similar circumstances. There was no evidence of a Red Tide, or poison in the area and we are completely confused and concerned by this event. We are currently trying to establish whether there were any changes within the marine environment, but clearly whatever it was occurred very quickly and affected roseate terns more severely than other species. We are investigating the possibility of the food being poisoned in some way. The overlap in the feeding ecology between the three species would account for some loss of the Sandwich and common terns even though these species tend to feed closer to the shore and on different fish to the roseates.

We are collaborating with our colleagues at the RSPB to have some birds analysed and hopefully this may identify or at least exclude various possibilities. Most worryingly if the birds suffered from some form of virus this may spread to other populations when birds from different areas spend some time together during the winter period. In such circumstances the implications for other populations or indeed the whole of Europe's roseate terns may be enormous. We hope to be able to report more fully on this event at the forthcoming conference.

On a happier note we had two pairs of roseates at Ile de la Colombiere and one additional pair at Ile aux Moimes and all of these adults survived. The considerable effort to protect these three colonies and other potential or previously used colonies was continued during 1991. In some cases this involved the permanent removal of gulls or the positioning of marine wardens or guards to prevent the many and varied tourist craft from landing or going too near the islets. The future for the French roseate tern population is of great concern to us and we hope that the cause of the adult loss during 1991 will not be repeated.

Guillemette Rolland

## AZORES

The first eggs were laid on 20 April on Flores with the majority of eggs being laid on or near 5 May. Egg laying on other (more easterly) islands did not commence until the middle of May. No eggs were laid on the most easterly island until the 10 June.

The overall number of pairs was approximately 1200 which represents a slight increase on previous years. The tendency was for birds to concentrate in fewer colonies and this was especially true on Graciosa. The close proximity of Faial, Sao Jorge and Graciosa may mean that some of the birds from Graciosa have moved to the other islands. However, the increase within the central group of islands (Faial, Sao Jorge, Terceira, Pico and Graciosa) may also involve birds from Santa Maria. In short, we don't really know, but there is some evidence from a few colour ringed birds that these movements involve inter-island shifts. In some cases there is no apparent reason why a colony shift has occurred. Colonies experiencing high breeding success (with little or no disturbance or predation) in one year have moved. Some of these movements may be over 40 or more kilometres.

Reports from fishermen and observations of attendance patterns, incubation shifts and feeding rates etc all suggested terns were having difficulty finding food during April and most of May. Late arrivals appeared to fare better

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Adrian del Nevo

### A tern up for the Dutch

Two roseates ringed as pulli on Rockabill during 1989 have had their rings read in Holland on 14 June 1991. As yet we have few details except that the place was Harvingv Leitsluizen (51 50N 04 03E), but we don't know if these sightings were in a colony.

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## USA 1991

Preliminary reports indicate a total of about 3600 breeding pairs in 1991. This represents an increase of about 300 pairs from the numbers counted in 1989-90. At least part of the increase, however, appears to have resulted from a more compressed breeding season in 1991. Trapping showed that many young birds (2-4 years old) nested in the first half of June 1991 and hence were included in the censuses. In other years these young birds usually nest after the main peak and are excluded from the censuses.

Breeding success was again high in most colonies. The cooperative study at the four largest colonies was continued for a fifth year and many birds ringed and colour-ringed as chicks in 1988-89 were found breeding for the first time in 1991. At least 10% of these birds had settled in colonies other than those where they were raised.

Ian Nisbet

#### ROSEATE TERNS IN AFRICA

Monitoring work in Ghana is continuing with the Save the Seashore Birds - Ghana (SSBPG) survey team counting selected sites on a monthly basis and undertaking three full coastal surveys per year. Tern trapping is also now being addressed with two new team members undertaking an assessment of the size of the problem. Once data on the extent of tern trapping is available, a conservation education programme will be devised which will seek to eradicate trapping, an activity which is now illegal in Ghana.

The conservation education work of the SSBPG goes from strength to strength. A high priority of this programme has been the establishment of wildlife clubs in schools and this has been very successful in raising awareness of a range of wildlife conservation issues, not just the trapping of terns. At the present time 98 clubs are registered and the heightened awareness created by the attendant publicity has led to an awakening of interest amongst adults as well. This will result in the re-launch, in November, of the Ghana Wildlife Society (GWS), during this year's Wildlife Week celebrations. It is expected that the attendant publicity will help the GWS to grow rapidly and in time to become Ghana's leading wildlife conservation NGO.

Ken Smith

#### ROSEATE TERNS IN THE SEYCHELLES, ARIDE ISLAND

The Royal Society for Nature Conservation (RSNC) reserve now appears to support all the breeding roseate terns in the Seychelles. The population was estimated to be 4,300 - 4,800 pairs in 1975 and was probably at least as large in 1978. Estimates in 1986 and subsequently have been considerably lower (see table)

	Estimated pairs	Young fledged
1986	2000-3000	very few
1987	1500-1750	very few if any
1988	900-1000	75-150
1989	1115	558-583*
1990	1275	111-316*
1991	no breeding (max 900 birds)	nil

(\* Estimates from extrapolations from a sample of nests and from counts of dead or dying chicks throughout the three sub-colonies at the end of the breeding season.)

Over the eight years 1984-91 there have been five in which the majority of young failed to fledge, largely due to the adults deserting their chicks en masse when they apparently had problems of obtaining fish. In 1990, many of the chicks were well grown when deserted. In 1991, the adults only tentatively visited the nesting areas for two brief periods and in very small numbers.

In 1990, lesser noddy chicks which are fed on similar food to the roseates, but of a smaller size range, lost weight. They survived, however, whereas the roseate chicks died of starvation. In 1991, there was a massive breeding failure among even the lesser noddies.

Ian Bullock (1987/88), Rob Mileto & Gill Castle (1989/90) and Rob Lidstone-Scott (1991),

Contributed by James Cadbury

Further copies available from:

Graham Elliott

RSPB

The Lodge

Sandy

Beds

SG19 2DL

UNITED KINGDOM



ROSEATE TERN CONFERENCE, CARANTAC, BRITTANY, 24th-26th April 1991

Preliminary booking form.

Name: .....

Address: .....  
.....  
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I wish to attend the meeting on roseate tern conservation on 24th-26th April 1991 at Carantac, Brittany.

I would like to give a talk entitled:

.....  
.....  
.....

The following topics are ones which it would be useful to discuss:

.....  
.....  
.....

Please return completed forms by 30th November to:

Guillemette Rolland  
S.E.P.N.B.  
186, rue Anatole-France  
B.P. 32 - 29276 BREST Cedex  
Brittany  
France

Further details to follow.

