Roseate spoonbill

*Platalea ajaja*

(Photo by FWC)

**Taxonomic Classification**

**Kingdom:** Animalia  
**Phylum:** Chordata  
**Class:** Aves  
**Order:** Ciconiiformes  
**Family:** Threskiornithidae  
**Genus/Species:** *Platalea ajaja*  
**Common Name:** Roseate spoonbill

**Listing Status**

**Federal Status:** Not listed  
**FL Status:** State Species of Special Concern  
**FNAI Ranks:** G5/S2 (Globally: Demonstrably Secure/ State: Imperiled)  
**IUCN Status:** LC (Least Concern)

**Physical Description**

The roseate spoonbill is the only spoonbill endemic (native) to the Western Hemisphere (Bjork and Powell 1996). This species can reach a length of 30-40 inches (76-102 centimeters) with a wingspan of 50-53 inches (127-135 centimeters). It has pink wings and underparts (with some
red on the tops of the wings) with a white neck and back, and pinkish legs and feet. While the species looks almost entirely pink in flight, they actually have no feathers at all on their heads. The pink coloration comes from the organisms on which they feed, which are full of carotenoids (organic pigment) (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, n.d.). As the name implies, the roseate spoonbill also has a large, spoon-shaped bill, which it sweeps back and forth in shallow water to capture prey.

**Life History**

The specialized bill has sensitive nerve endings which help the birds search for food in shallow water. The diet of the roseate spoonbill primarily consists of crayfish, shrimp, crabs, and small fish.

There is no sexual dimorphism (difference in form between individuals of different genders in the same species) in roseate spoonbills. They nest in mixed colonies (near other wading bird species) in mangroves or trees and though most breed on the coast, some nest inland. Nesting habitats include coastal mangroves and dredged-made islands. (Florida Natural Areas Inventory 2001). The female builds the nest while the male retrieves the nesting materials. The female lays up to three whitish-colored eggs and both adults incubate the eggs for up to 24 days (Smithsonian National Zoological Park, n.d.). The young remain in the nest for approximately 35-42 days and are fed by both adults.

**Habitat & Distribution**

The roseate spoonbill is a resident breeder in South America, generally east of the Andes, and coastal areas of Central America, the Caribbean, and the Gulf of Mexico (Dumas 2000). Mangrove islands and occasionally dredge-spoil islands are the preferred nesting habitat for the species. In Florida, the species is found in Florida Bay, Tampa Bay, and Brevard County.

**Threats**

One historical threat to the roseate spoonbill was hunting for their feathers, though this practice is now illegal which has allowed the population to rebound. Another threat to the spoonbill is the availability of adequate food sources and habitat degradation. In the Florida Bay, the increased fresh water flow from the Everglades may affect prey availability for the spoonbill. Other threats include habitat loss and disturbance, pesticides, and illegal shootings (Dumas 2000).
Conservation & Management

The roseate spoonbill is protected by the U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and as a State Species of Special Concern by Florida’s Endangered and Threatened Species Rule.

-Biological Status Review (BSR)
-Supplemental Information for the BSR

Other Informative Links

Birds of North America
Florida Natural Areas Inventory
FWC Breeding Birds Atlas
FWC Species Profile
Encyclopedia of Life
Honolulu Zoo
International Union for Conservation of Nature
Smithsonian National Zoological Park
The Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Reference


