

## NOTES

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**OBSERVATIONS OF ROSEATE SPOONBILLS AND EVIDENCE OF BREEDING ON NORTH ANDROS ISLAND, BAHAMAS**

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The Roseate Spoonbill (*Ajaia ajaja*) breeds from the coastal southern United States and Mexico to Argentina and Chile in South America (Palmer 1962). In the West Indies the species is known to breed in Cuba (Garrido and Garcia 1975), the Dominican Republic (de Dod 1978), and Great Inagua in The Bahamas (Brudenell-Bruce 1975). Roseate Spoonbills, recorded on several other islands in the West Indies, including Andros Island, Bahamas (Bond 1968, Norton 1991), Anegada, B.W.I. (Bond 1984), St. Martin (Bond 1984), Puerto Rico (Raffaele 1989), Turks and Caicos (Buden 1987, Norton 1987), Grand Cayman (Bond 1986), and Jamaica (Palmer 1962), have been considered vagrants. In this note I present details of numerous observations of Roseate Spoonbills on North Andros Island and evidence that the species is an uncommon breeder on this Bahamian island.

During the last several years I and others have observed Roseate Spoonbills in the tidal mud flats on the east coast of North Andros Island, especially in the vicinity of Staniard Creek. Roseate Spoonbills have been documented on a Christmas Bird Count conducted in December between Staniard Creek and Mastic Point (Perkins 1993). On 21 October 1990, I saw two sub-adults in the tidal mud flats north of Staniard Creek (hereafter SCF). All estimates of age are based on descriptions of age-specific plumages in Allen (1942). On July 21 1994, I saw a single individual flying over the settlement of Staniard Creek. On 27 July 1995, I watched and photographed a group of three Roseate Spoonbills at SCF. Two of the birds appeared to be older sub-adults and the third was possibly a one-year-old. The birds foraged together for several hours. On 6 and 8 July 1996, I observed a group of four spoonbills at SCF. The birds were seen foraging and roosting together on both occasions. All four birds appeared to be sub-adults.

On 5 July 1996, I examined and photographed an empty Roseate Spoonbill nest found in SCF by Harrington Frazier, a resident of Staniard Creek. The nest, approximately 3.5 m high in a black mangrove (*Avicennia germinans*), was similar to a nest described by Dunstan (1976) in Tampa Bay, Florida. Mr. Frazier said that the nest had contained two young approximately two weeks before I examined it. He recognized it as a Roseate Spoonbill nest because when he found the nest the adults were present and gave threatening displays. Although I saw spoonbills in the vicinity of the nest on 6 and 8 July 1996, I did not see any juveniles. Because fledged spoonbills remain around the colony for two weeks or more (Bjork and Powell 1996, R. T. Paul pers. obs.), it is possible that this nest failed prior to fledging. Assuming young fledged shortly after Mr. Frazier last saw the nest, eggs would have been laid six weeks earlier in mid-May according to nest chronology in White et al. (1982).

On 25 May, 1997, I observed and photographed a family group of three spoonbills foraging together in SCF. One of these individuals was clearly a juvenile; the bird was almost completely white, the head was feathered, and the primaries were dark tipped. Assuming the juvenile bird had fledged recently, eggs would have been laid six weeks earlier in mid-April. The other two birds were in the sub-adult plumage, specifically the fourth postnatal as described by Allen (1942); pinkish wings and upperparts, bare and greenish head, red iris, pink legs, and black feet. Although these two birds appeared to be sub-adults, spoonbills in sub-adult plumage have been recorded breeding in Tampa Bay, Florida (Dunstan 1976).

It is clear from these observations that Roseate Spoonbills are at least uncommon breeders in the vicinity of Staniard Creek on North Andros. Based on observations of a nest and family group in SCF, nesting was initiated approximately mid-May in 1995 and mid-April in 1997, respectively. Spoonbill nest building and egg laying dates in Texas also varied yearly between mid-to-late April and early-to-mid May (White et al. 1982). Although winter breeding (November in Florida, Palmer 1962) appears to be the norm in most West Indian populations of Roseate Spoonbills (Allen 1942), summer breeding has been recorded in parts of Florida (Dunstan 1976) and may occur in Cuba (O. H. Garrido pers. comm.). The reason for this bimodal breeding pattern is yet to be explained. The fact that spoonbills observed on Andros in May 1997, apparently bred in sub-adult plumage also begs explanation since this has only been recorded previously from Tampa Bay, Florida (Dunstan 1976). Comparisons of relevant ecological variables, especially food type and availability, made at various breeding sites during both summer and winter may shed light on the reasons for both of these observed curiosities in the breeding biology of the Roseate Spoonbill.

The fact that Roseate Spoonbills are local breeders that breed in sub-adult plumage during April and May on North Andros made confirming their breeding status on the island difficult. Birds seen in sub-adult plumage were assumed to be non-breeders and there are few birdwatchers on the island during the spring and summer. This suggests that spoonbill breeding in the West Indies may be more widespread than currently thought. Although documented long-distance movements of Roseate Spoonbills (up to 400 km in Florida, Robertson et al. 1983) could account for the "vagrant" spoonbills recorded from many West Indian islands, these dispersal movements could also be the source of colonists. Efforts should be made to establish the breeding status of Roseate Spoonbills recorded in sub-adult plumage in the West Indies, especially on islands within several hundred kilometers of known breeding colonies.

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