



Roseate Tern

(Sterna dougalii)



Description: The roseate tern is a graceful bird, 14 to 17 inches long with a wingspan of about 30 inches. It resembles the common and arctic tern, with which it nests in mixed species colonies in Maine. Its beak is predominantly black (in contrast with common tern with orange beak with black tip and arctic tern with all orange beak). Its back and upper wings are pearly gray and underparts are white with a pink tinge, hence its common name. The tip of the white tail extends well beyond its wing tips when perched.

During the nesting season, Maine roseate terns feed primarily in near-shore habitats (shallow sand shoals, tide rips) on sand lance, and larval forms of herring, hake, and other small fish. Roseate tern foraging areas are not well known, but can be 10 to 15 miles or greater from nesting islands.

About 200 to 250 pairs of roseate terns nest on Maine coastal islands. Roseate terns return to Maine nesting islands in mid-May. After courtship a clutch of One to five eggs are laid in mid-May to mid-June. The nest is a simple scrape on the ground in dense vegetation or under rocks or driftwood. Both parents incubate the eggs, which hatch in about 23 days. The chicks fledge 22 to 30 days after hatching.



Habitat: The roseate tern nests on eight Maine islands. They often nest in dense vegetation or under debris and often around the perimeter of the island. They nest in

close association with common and arctic terns. Roseate terns most often forage up to 15 miles from nesting islands wherever forage fish (especially sand lance) are abundant. They often feed near the mainland shore where there are shallow sand bars, mouths of rivers and streams, and in large salt marshes. After nesting season, roseate terns aggregate at high tide on traditional staging areas on sand spits and beaches and feed in nearby waters before migrating to the Caribbean and South America for winter.

Occurrence in Maine: Currently nests on Stratton, Outer Green, Jenny, Pond, Eastern Egg, Seal, Metinic, and Petit Manan Islands. Staging areas are known on Wells and Laudholm beaches.