

Roseate Spoonbill

Ajaia ajaja



Roseate spoonbills' wide, spoon-shaped beaks are super-sensitive. The birds use them to stir water and find food in saltwater and freshwater marshes along the Gulf Coast.

Coastal Wetlands

Roseate Spoonbill

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APPEARANCE

Height: 32 inches (81 cm)

Wingspan: 50 inches (127 cm)

Distinguishing Characteristics

- Pink body and legs
- White neck and breast
- Pale-green bald head
- Spoon-shaped bill
- Bright red shoulder patch

LIFE HISTORY

Range: Entire Gulf of Mexico coastline, south to Central America, South America and West Indies

Diet: Primarily small fish and crustaceans

Predators: Raccoons and coyotes eat eggs and young.

Sexual maturity: At approximately 16 weeks

Mating season: March through June in Texas

Nests: Built in thick vegetation above water; are well-built and deeply cupped

Eggs: Two to five; brown-speckled white

Incubation: About 24 days

Young: In about eight weeks, the young roseate spoonbills are ready to fly.

Life span: Ten years

HABITAT

From March through October, roseate spoonbills prefer the bays, marshes and estuaries along the Gulf Coast. Occasionally they will travel inland through the eastern third of Texas. In winter, most roseate spoonbills migrate to Central and South America.

BEHAVIOR

Unlike most birds, roseate spoonbills are silent and often solitary when they feed. They swish their spoon-shaped bills back and forth in the water to find small invertebrates, fish and crustaceans. During breeding season, the male uses gifts of nesting material to attract the female. Once mated, the pair remains monogamous. Both male and female take turns sitting on the eggs and feeding the young.

NOW YOU KNOW!

- Spoonbills eat shrimp, shrimp eat algae, and the algae make their own red and yellow pigments, called *carotenoids*. Some scientists believe that the pink coloration that roseate spoonbills acquire as they mature is due to their diet of carotenoid-rich organisms like shrimp. The more they eat, the pinker they get.
- Flamingos are close relatives of the roseate spoonbill. They both have pink feathers, but the flamingos are much larger with a longer neck.

ROSEATE SPOONBILLS AND PEOPLE

Like many other bird species with beautiful plumage, roseate spoonbills were nearly hunted to extinction during the 1800s. Their striking pink feathers were popular on women's hats and hunters from all over the United States competed for spoonbill plumes. In the early 1900s, roseate spoonbills began to recolonize areas along the Gulf Coast and slowly increase in number. Today, threats to roseate spoonbill populations come as a result of habitat loss.