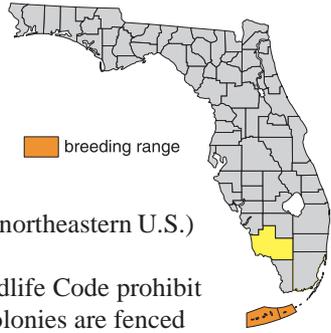


## ROSEATE TERN

### *Sterna dougallii*

<b>Order:</b>	Charadriiformes
<b>Family:</b>	Laridae
<b>FNAI Ranks:</b>	G4/S1
<b>U.S. Status:</b>	Threatened (Endangered in northeastern U.S.)
<b>FL Status:</b>	Threatened

U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and state Wildlife Code prohibit take of birds, nests, or eggs. Many seabird colonies are fenced and posted during breeding season; some of most important are state-designated as Critical Wildlife Areas.



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**Description:** Slender, medium-sized tern. Breeding adult has pale gray upperparts, a black cap and nape, and white underparts (may have slight pinkish cast visible in good light). Bill is thin and black and becomes mostly red as breeding season progresses. Tail is white, deeply forked, and extends well beyond wings when bird stands with wings folded; legs and feet are bright red-orange. Juvenile has brownish cap that extends over the forehead; coarse, scaly pattern on back; and black legs and bill.

**Similar Species:** Paler overall than common tern (*Sterna hirundo*) or Forster's tern (*S. forsteri*). Wings are shorter and tail longer than in common tern. All-white underwing, including translucent trailing edge to primary feathers, also help distinguish the roseate.

**Habitat:** Nest sites include bare limestone, shell-sand beaches, newly deposited rock and marl fill, dredge material, and heaps of broken coral

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deposited by storms. Also nests on rooftops. Forages for small, schooling fish in open water over sandbars, reefs, and tidal channels.

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Localized breeder; rare transient during spring and fall off Atlantic coast (presumably birds from northeastern U.S. and eastern Canada). Has been recorded along Gulf coast and in winter in the Keys and along south Florida coast, although many of these records have been questioned.

**Florida Distribution:** Sporadic nesting on scattered islands and rooftops in the Keys over the past 25 years. Since 1989, majority of nesting has occurred on Pelican Shoal, a tiny, exposed part of reef off Boca Chica Key in the Lower Keys. Formerly concentrated in the Dry Tortugas. Foraging and roosting sites include the Lower Keys and Cape Romano/Ten Thousand Islands.

**Range-wide Distribution:** Cosmopolitan, although patchily distributed. In North America, roseate terns are very local breeders in two disjunct areas: from New York to Nova Scotia; and in the Caribbean, including the Florida Keys. Also from locales in the British Isles and northern Europe, Azores, southern Africa, east coast of Africa to western Australia, and China through Indonesia to northern and eastern Australia.

**Conservation Status:** In 1998, nesting occurred at only two sites. An estimated 95 percent (ca. 317 pairs) of the breeding population occurred on Pelican Shoal. Also at Marathon Government Center rooftop, Vaca Key. Pelican Shoal was designated a Critical Wildlife Area in 1990. Before designation, human disturbance was a major factor in terns abandoning the site. Natural habitat in the Keys has been greatly reduced, and remaining sites are scarce. Along with human intrusion, bird and mammal predators also threaten nesting success. Documented predators at the Dry Tortugas included laughing gulls (*Larus atricilla*), cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), and black rats (*Rattus rattus*).

**Protection and Management:** Pelican Shoal is protected by its designation as a Critical Wildlife Area. Posting and fencing, public education, and predator control will be needed as additional sites are found. Because of low numbers and few nesting areas, close monitoring is warranted. Survey rooftops carefully and implement educational programs to increase security for these sites.

**Selected References:** Poole and Gill (eds.) 1998, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994, Zambrano et al. 2000.