

Native Range Map



Roseate Spoonbill

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Subphylum: Vertebrata
Class: Aves
Order: Ciconiiformes
Family: Threskiornithidae
Genus: *Ajaia*
Species: *ajaja*

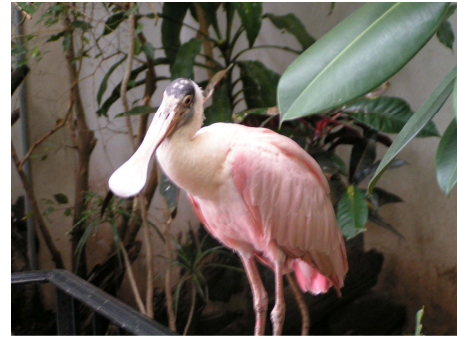


Photo courtesy of Lynne Panebianco

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The roseate spoonbill can be found along the southern coastal waters of the United States, extending southward through Central and South America. They inhabit both fresh and saltwater wetlands – tidal pools, ponds, marshes, lagoons, swamps and rivers as well as coastal islands, wherever shallow, open, still or slow-flowing water occurs.
- **Exhibit Location:** Diversity of Birds

Characteristics

- Length: 28-32 inches; Weight: 2.6 - 4 pounds; Wingspan: 50 inches
- The roseate spoonbill is a large, wading bird with long legs and neck. It is named for its pink plumage (feathers) and paddle-shaped bill.
- The bare skin of the adult's head has a greenish tinge with a darker black band around the base of the skull. The eyes and legs are red. The feathers of the neck, chest and upper back are white. The upper wing coverts (coverings) are red, the tail feathers are orange-pink, and the rest of the body and wing feathers are pale pink. The unique, pale grey bill is long, flattened and spoon-like in appearance.
- Immature birds are paler in color and have feathered heads.
- Males are slightly larger than females with a little longer bill.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** Up to 10 years; **In Captivity** 12-15 years

Behaviors

- *Ajaia ajaja* feed alone or in small groups in the early morning and evening hours and are frequently seen in the company of other water and wading birds including ibises, storks, cormorants, herons and egrets. Group feeding enables one or more birds to search for and warn of danger while the rest feed with heads down. They are a shy, easily disturbed bird.
- They hunt for food by touch instead of sight, a crucial adaptation for a bird that feeds in muddy or vegetation-clogged water.
- A roseate spoonbill will feed by sweeping its open bill from side to side in the water (known as “head-swinging”) creating mini-whirlpools that pull up small prey from the muddy bottom. Sensitive touch receptors along the bill's length detect vibrations and signal the bill to close quickly on prey swept inside the spoon.
- They fly with their necks and legs outstretched using long, slow wing beats.
- Usually silent, the roseate spoonbill makes a low grunting sound when feeding.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** insects, whole fish

Reproduction

- Most roseate spoonbills don't mate until their 4th year.
- They are serially monogamous, keeping the same mate for an entire breeding season, but not for life. Courtship displays include ritualized exchanges of nest material, dancing, and bill clapping. Their mating season lasts from March through June.
- They nest in colonies alongside other water birds. Using materials brought to her by her mate, the female builds a strong, deep cup nest of sticks and twigs in the lower branches of a tree close to water. She lays

2-4 cream colored eggs marked with darker brown spots. Incubation takes 22-24 days and is done by both parents.

- The chicks have white feathers with a slight pink tinge on the wings. They fledge at about 6 weeks, but continue to be fed by both parents until they are about 8 weeks old.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** small fish, amphibians, aquatic invertebrates, insects and some plant material
- **At the Zoo:** Bird of Prey diet (meat), dry dog chow, trout chow, Flamingo Fare (semi-moist food with carotenes), chopped smelt, Avi pellets

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** LC (Least Concern); **CITES Appendix:** not listed
- The global population is estimated to be 100,000 – 250,000 individuals.
- The roseate spoonbill was nearly driven to extinction by hunters supplying feathers for the hat and fan markets. Only a few dozen breeding pairs remained in North America in the early 1900's.
- They have expanded their range since the 1940's when legal protections were established, but drainage for mosquito control and real estate development continue to threaten their foraging habitat.
- Predators: raccoons, coyotes (eggs and the young); humans (environment)

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- Scientists believe that, like flamingos, the roseate spoonbill's pink coloration is due to their diet of organisms containing carotene (an orange-yellow to red pigment) like shrimp.
- The roseate spoonbill is the only member in the genus *Ajaia*. The AOU (2002) (American Ornithologists' Union) has recommended merging *Ajaia* into *Platalea*, the genus for the five other species of spoonbills, and several classification systems show it that way.
- The roseate spoonbill is the only spoonbill species that lives in the Western Hemisphere.

Sources:

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- Smithsonian National Zoological Park, Fact sheets roseate spoonbill. Retrieved Nov 5, 2005, from Smithsonian National Zoological Park/Friends of the National Zoo Web site: <http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/Birds/Facts/FactSheets/fact-rosespoonbill.cfm>
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- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, (2005, Oct 5). Roseate spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*). Retrieved Nov 5, 2005, from Texas Parks and Wildlife Web site: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/species/spoonbill/>