

A6.89 Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*

1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status		Conservation status	
Breeding	✓	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	General Protection Schedule 1(1)	Species of European Conservation Concern	SPEC 3 Unfavourable conservation status (endangered) but not concentrated in Europe
Migratory	✓	Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985	General Protection Schedule 1(1)	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance	Table 2
Wintering		EC Birds Directive 1979	Annex I Migratory	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	Endangered

2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	64	1	50 (88% of GB population)
Ireland	400	4	6 (1% of all-Ireland population)
Biogeographic population	1,770	18	56 (3% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Stone et al. 1997

All-Ireland population source: Gibbons et al. 1993

Biogeographic population source: Lloyd et al. 1991

3. Distribution

The global distribution of Roseate Tern comprises a number of discrete ranges, with breeding occurring around the edges of the North Atlantic, Indian and south-west Pacific Oceans. The species is polytypic with five described races (Rose & Scott 1997). The nominate sub-species *S. d. dougallii* breeds around the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean, from the eastern USA to western European coasts and including a discrete population in South Africa. The other four sub-species occur in the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Cramp 1985; Rose & Scott 1997).

In Europe, the breeding population is confined to Britain, Ireland and France (Brittany), as well as the Azores (del Nevo *et al.* 1993). After nesting these birds move south to winter off the coast of western Africa as far as the Gulf of Guinea (Cramp 1985), an area that has enormous resources of small fish and so attracts large numbers of terns during the northern winter.

Currently, the main British colonies are in eastern Scotland, north-eastern England, and north Wales. The Irish colonies are all now on the east coast, from Northern Ireland to the extreme

south-east of the Irish Republic. Thirty years ago, the species was more widespread, with colonies in Orkney, western Scotland, southern England and south-west and north-west Ireland.

Breeding takes place on the coast, with colonies established on sand-spits and dunes, shingle beaches and low rocky islets. Inshore waters are used for feeding on small fish.

4. Population structure and trends

Eight biogeographical populations of Roseate Terns have been described (Rose & Scott 1997). Those occurring in Britain belong to the European breeding population (which overwinters along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea).

The breeding population in Britain and Ireland was close to elimination at the beginning of the 19th century, but protection, especially against killing for the millinery trade, brought about a recovery to an estimated peak population of *c.* 3,500 pairs in the mid-1960s (Avery & del Nevo 1991). The population then went into decline and by the time of the first census, in 1969–1970, a total of 2,392 pairs was counted: 691 in Great Britain and 1,701 in Ireland (Cramp *et al.* 1974). The second census, in 1985–1987, revealed a total of only 470, with 133 in Great Britain and 337 in Ireland (Lloyd *et al.* 1991). Since then, the decline in Great Britain has continued, but there has been some recovery in Ireland, the latest available total being 661 pairs in 1998 (Thompson *et al.* 1999).

Similar long-term declines have also taken place at French breeding colonies, as well as in the Azores, where numbers have declined from 1,120 pairs to 750 pairs (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). There is evidence from ringing in Britain, Ireland and France that a proportion of Roseate Terns move between colonies, breeding at sites other than those at which they were reared (Avery & del Nevo 1991).

The single largest cause of the sharp decline in numbers in Britain and Ireland was the disappearance, following storms in the 1970s, of a sandy island in Wexford Harbour, south-east Ireland, where up to 2,000 pairs nested. Only some of these birds appeared to relocate, to a new colony in Lady's Island Lake. The underlying reasons for the continued decline, however, have been more widespread problems of predation and disturbance at the colonies, and – probably of even greater importance – the killing of large numbers on the wintering grounds in West Africa (Everett *et al.* 1987).

5. Protection measures for population in the UK

SPA suite

In the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Roseate Terns supports, on average, 56 pairs. This amounts to about 88% of the British breeding population, about 1% of the all-Ireland population, and about 3% of the international population. The SPA suite contains seven sites (Table 6.89.1) where Roseate Tern has been listed as a qualifying species.

Other measures

International action is being taken to conserve the species at breeding colonies in Ireland, France and the Azores and on the wintering grounds in West Africa (Avery & del Nevo 1991). A Biodiversity Action Plan has been published for this species (Biodiversity Steering Group 1998) and is being implemented as part of the UK's national response to the Biodiversity Convention.

6. Classification criteria

All seven sites in the UK that were known to support more than 1% of the national Roseate Tern breeding population were considered under Stage 1.1, and all (Coquet Island; Farne Islands; Firth of Forth Islands; Larne Lough; North Norfolk Coast; Solent and Southampton Water; and Ynys Feurig, Cemlyn Bay and The Skerries) were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements.

The sites within the suite include most regular breeding localities in the UK, including all major sites in Northern Ireland, north Wales, Scotland, and England. All these sites are multi-species SPAs, of importance also for a range of other breeding seabirds. There is a very long recorded history of occupancy at many of these sites with some records dating from the 19th century (Holloway 1996).

As the selection of sites under Stage 1.1 resulted in a suite of SPAs which includes all the main population centres of breeding Roseate Terns in the UK, there was no need to consider additional sites for selection under Stage 1.4.

Distribution map for Roseate Tern SPA suite

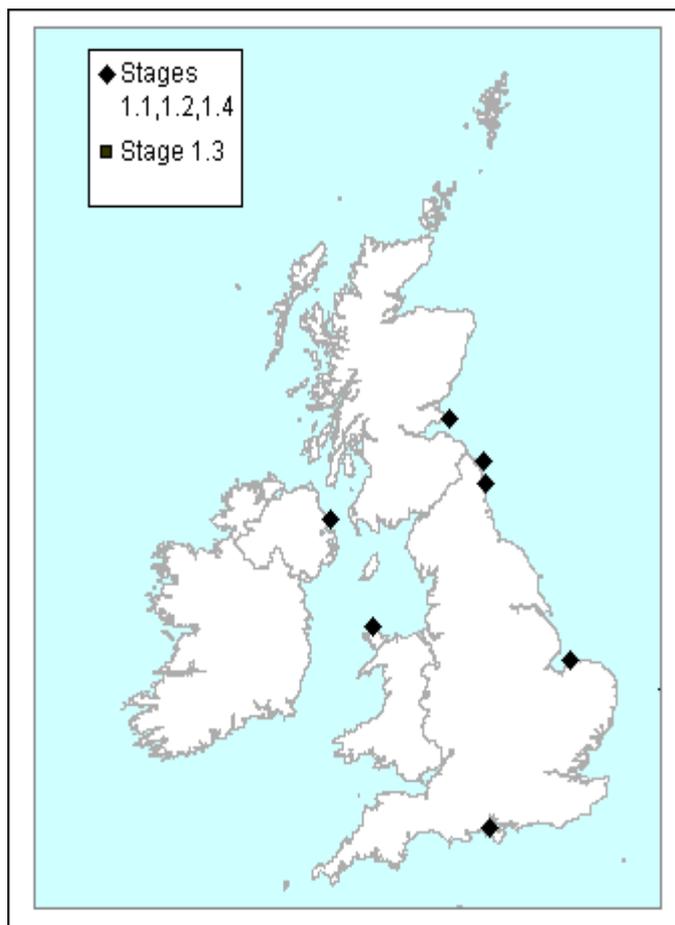


Table 6.89.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Coquet Island	31	1.8	48.4	1.1
Farne Islands	3	0.2	4.7	1.1
Firth of Forth Islands	9	0.5	14.1	1.1
Larne Lough	6	0.3	1.5 (Ire)	1.1
North Norfolk Coast	2	0.1	3.1	1.1
Solent and Southampton Water	2	0.1	3.1	1.1
Ynys Feurig, Cemlyn Bay and The Skerries	3	0.2	4.7	1.1
TOTALS	56	3.2%	88% 1.4% (Ire)	