

Nomination

Sterna dougallii Roseate Tern



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Geographical extent

OSPAR Regions: II,II,IV, V

Biogeographic zones: 1,2,5-9,11

Region & Biogeographic zones specified for decline and/or threat: as above

The Roseate Tern is a pantropical species with an estimated world population of between 25,000-50,000 birds. Within Europe, the Atlantic race *S.d.dougallii* nests in Ireland, UK, France, the Azores and possibly the Canaries (Cramp, 1985). Between 3-6% breed in the OSPAR region on the Azores and on islets off the east and west coasts of Britain and Ireland, and the north coast of Brittany in France (Tucker & Heath, 1994). They spend only a few months of the year in their European breeding grounds and the winter months in West Africa. The nest sites tend to be concealed amongst rocks, vegetation or artificial cover on isolated marine islands. The birds forage in small groups generally further offshore than other terns, but over shallow water, hydrographic features, or in association with large predatory fish such as tuna.

Application of the Texel-Faial criteria

There were three nominations for the Roseate Tern including a joint submission by three Contracting Parties. The criteria common to all nominations were regional importance, rarity, sensitivity and decline, with information also provided on threat.

Regional importance

In the OSPAR Maritime Area, the Roseate Tern breeds in the Azores, France, Ireland, and the UK. There are currently estimated to be about 70 pairs in France, 618 pairs in Ireland, and 50 pairs in the

United Kingdom (Mavor *et al.*, 2001). In 1989 a complete survey of the Azores coastline estimated a population of 992 pairs representing about 65% of the Western Palearctic population (del Nevo *et al.*, 1990; Monteiro *et al.*, 1996). About 379–1,051 pairs of have nested in the Azores between 1985 and 2000, and these represent the largest part of the population of this species. The Azores population has consistently been by far the largest in the OSPAR area in recent years, but may have been overtaken by the colony at Rockabill, Ireland, in the past two or three years (Upton *et al.*, 2000; ICES, 2002).

Decline

Roseate terns have declined in number in North America and Europe since the 1960's. Within the OSPAR area, long-term declines of Roseate Tern have been well documented in Britain, Ireland, and France (Lloyd *et al.*, 1991) The numbers in Britain and Ireland fell by 70–75 % between 1969 and 1985, for example, and between 1990-1994 the annual counts of 1,051, 853, 750, 379 and 547 breeding pairs, revealed a downward trend in the Azores (Monteiro *et al.*, 1996). Conservation efforts at Rockabill in Ireland have led to an increase in numbers in the last few years. Counts of breeding pairs of roseate terns in the Azores in the period 1995–2001 have been only about 50% of those in 1985–1995 (ICES, 2002).

Counts vary considerably from year to year and it is not clear how much of the variation is due to counting difficulties, and how much to birds choosing not to breed in some years, perhaps in response to changes in food availability. Certainly, the distribution of pairs around the Azores can change considerably from year to year, suggesting that birds are responding by moving site according to conditions. This may also be influenced by predation impacts at particular colonies.

Rarity

The total breeding population of Roseate Tern in the OSPAR Maritime Area is probably no more than 1,600 pairs.

Sensitivity

Roseate terns are considered sensitive due to the small numbers that breed predominantly at a small number of sites, mostly concentrated within one biogeographic region. Threats on land include introduced predators such as cats, dogs, rats and mustelids. At sea, the species is sensitive during breeding season due to its highly concentrated

distribution around breeding colonies. Like all seabirds they are sensitive to oil pollution.

Threat

A major threat to the Roseate Tern is the trapping of the birds which takes place at their wintering grounds in West Africa. This activity takes place outside the OSPAR Maritime but there is strong evidence to implicate it as the primary cause of population decline (Lloyd *et al.*, 1991). Other threats include predators at colonies, including foxes, rats, gulls, egg collectors, and peregrine falcons in Britain, Ireland, and France (Lloyd *et al.*, 1991). Birds in the Azores are killed at colonies by common buzzards and yellow-legged gulls. European starlings also take eggs. All European colonies have been subject to variable levels of disturbance and/or predation from human activities and avian and ground predators (Tucker & Heath, 1994).

Relevant additional considerations

Sufficiency of data

There are good data on the numbers of breeding birds and their breeding success at some of their nesting sites in Europe. Less is known about the factors that influence their breeding success, the survival of chicks and the mortality rate. There is also a lack of knowledge about where the terns are to be found during the second half of the winter. A better understanding of issues such as these are needed to identify further actions that could be taken to improve the status of this species.

Changes in relation to natural variability

Little is known about the effects of natural variability of the population status of the Roseate Tern.

Expert judgement

There is good evidence of both threat and decline to Roseate Tern in the OSPAR Maritime Area.

ICES evaluation

The ICES evaluation notes that the roseate tern is a very clear case for listing as a priority species due to a well-documented and severe population decline within the OSPAR Maritime Area (ICES, 2002). There is some evidence that birds can move between the OSPAR Area and North American colonies, but since both have adverse conservation status, such movements will do little to mitigate population declines, which are serious in other parts of the world as well.

Threat and link to human activities

Cross-reference to checklist of human activities in OSPAR MPA Guidelines

Relevant human activity: shipping and navigation.;
Category of effect: Biological –introduction of non-indigenous species;

Human disturbance can be a problem at colonies, although most sites have legal protection. This is not very effective in the Azores, where fishermen and tourists may visit nesting islets and cause serious disturbance (ICES, 2002).

Management considerations

Within the OSPAR Maritime Area, protection of breeding sites is important for the conservation of this species and many of these locations have been protected for many years. Complementary actions to improve breeding success have included the provision of nest boxes to give some protection to adults and chicks from predators, predator control and wardening to prevent disturbance by visitors (Avery & del Nevo, 1991). Measures such as these are relevant to the birds at their breeding grounds but there is also a need for conservation measures at their wintering grounds outside the OSPAR Maritime Area.

The Roseate Tern is listed under Annex I of the EU Birds Directive, Annex II of the Bern Convention and Annex II of the Bonn Convention.

Further information

Nominated by:

Joint submission from Iceland, Portugal, UK; and individual submissions from UK, & BirdLife International

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Useful References:

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