

# First Record of Roseate Spoonbills (*Platalea ajaja*) Nesting in South Carolina

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Historically, the breeding range of the Roseate Spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*) in North America spanned coastal areas of Texas, Louisiana, and Florida (Dumas 2020), however the species was documented nesting as far north as Camden County, Georgia beginning in 2011 (Keyes et al. 2011). In South Carolina, the Roseate Spoonbill once was considered to be a very rare visitor, with a maximum count of four individuals prior to 1989 (Post and Gautreaux 1989), but has become increasingly common. In a summary of sightings during the summer of 2016, Southern (2016) reported high counts of between 12 and 37 Roseate Spoonbills in four coastal counties in South Carolina. During the spring and summer of 2018, an irruption of Roseate Spoonbills was observed in South Carolina and North Carolina beginning in May and continuing into August (Southern 2018a, 2018b, 2019). Although immature individuals account for the majority of sightings, immature and adult Roseate Spoonbills have been observed in established wading bird rookeries on a few occasions between 2011 and 2020 (Hand pers. obs., Sanders pers. comm.)

On 11 June 2020, Rachel Bonafilia, seasonal employee of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, first observed an adult Roseate Spoonbill on a nest in incubation posture while completing a survey of wading birds. The nest was located in a mixed-species wading bird rookery on a privately-owned property in Charleston County, South Carolina. The rookery habitat consisted of a large pond containing wooded islands and shorelines dominated by red maple (*Acer rubrum*), wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*), loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*), live oak (*Quercus virginiana*), and buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*). The Roseate Spoonbill nest was approximately five meters above the ground in a red maple tree.

The nest was observed from a distance on 19, 26, and 30 June and on 8, 15, and 23 July 2020 (Figure 1). Chicks were first seen on 19 June 2020 when an adult Roseate Spoonbill sitting in the nest interacted with a downy chick. Two chicks were observed in the nest during each subsequent visit until 23 July 2020, when both chicks were seen climbing and making short flights between branches in trees within five meters of the nest.

In addition to providing the first documentation of Roseate Spoonbills hatching and fledging young in South Carolina, our observations provide a new northern-most nesting record by the species along the Atlantic Coast. The northward expansion of the breeding and post-breeding dispersal ranges of the Roseate Spoonbill along the Atlantic Coast has been well-documented and is likely to continue if factors described by Keyes et al. (2011) including increasingly high productivity coupled with habitat degradation in Florida persist.



Figure 1. Roseate Spoonbill nest in Charleston County, South Carolina containing an adult with two chicks on 26 June 2020 (left) and two unattended chicks on 8 July 2020 (right).

### Literature Cited

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