

DESCRIPTION OF RESIDENCE FOR ROSEATE TERN (*Sterna dougallii*) IN CANADA

Section 33 of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) prohibits damaging or destroying the residence of a listed threatened, endangered, or extirpated species. SARA defines residence as: “a dwelling-place, such as a den, nest or other similar area or place, that is occupied or habitually occupied by one or more individuals during all or part of their life cycles, including breeding, rearing, staging, wintering, feeding or hibernating” [s.2(1)].

The prohibition comes into effect immediately upon listing for all threatened, endangered, and extirpated species on federal lands, and for species under pre-existing federal jurisdiction on all lands. Species under pre-existing federal jurisdiction are aquatic species (a wildlife species that is a fish, as defined in section 2 of the *Fisheries Act*, or a marine plant, as defined in section 47 of that Act) or migratory birds protected under the *Migratory Birds Convention Act*. SARA also contains a provision to prohibit the destruction of non-federal species’ residences on provincial, territorial, and private lands by way of an Order by the Governor in Council (GIC), if the Minister of the Environment recommends it necessary to do so [s.34(2), 35(2)].

The following is a description of residence for the Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*), created for the purposes of increasing public awareness and aiding enforcement of the above prohibition. As a migratory bird protected under the MBCA, the Roseate Tern is under federal jurisdiction and thus the residence prohibition is in effect on all lands where the species occurs. They are known to have one type of residence – the nest.

Species Information:

Common Name - Roseate Tern

Scientific Name - *Sterna dougallii*

Current COSEWIC Status & Year of Designation – Endangered (1999)

Occurrence in Canada – Nova Scotia, Québec, New Brunswick (Fig. 1)

Rationale for Designation – Predation, competition, human disturbance.

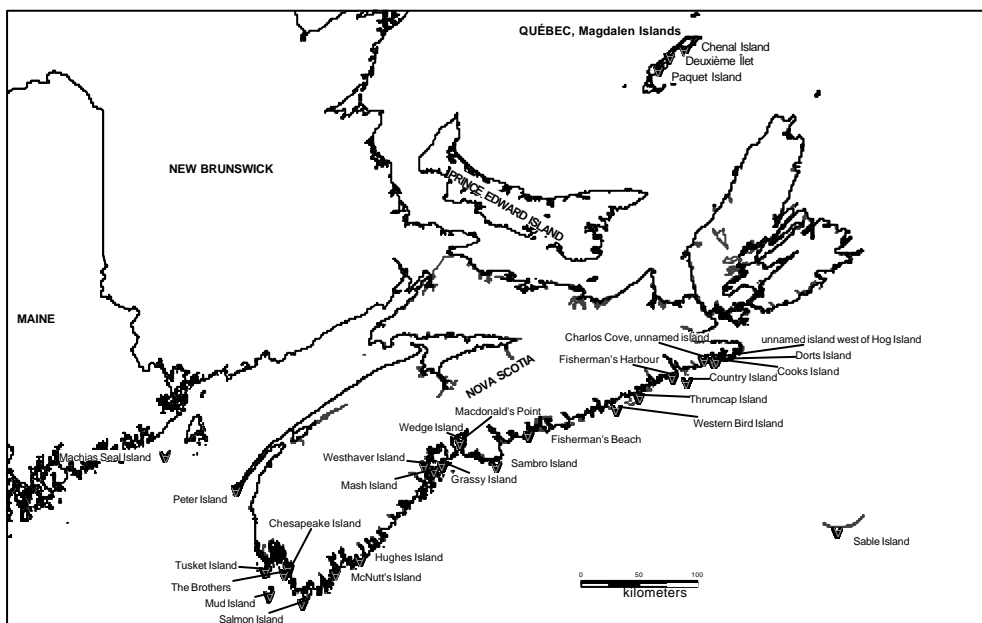


Figure 1. Known breeding distribution of the Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*) in Canada. Triangles indicate sites where terns have nested since 1982.

1) The Nest

Physical Appearance and Context

The residence of a Roseate Tern is the nest. Terns usually breed on coastal islands². The nest is built on the ground, often hidden in a tuft of vegetation, under a rock pile or beach debris, or in the case of managed colonies, in specially provided nest shelters. When used, these structures would be considered part of a residence. It breeds in mixed colonies with Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) and Arctic Terns (*Sterna paradisaea*).²

Function

The nest residence is essential to the sheltering, incubation, and hatching of eggs, and the rearing and feeding of young. The clutch usually consists of one or two eggs². The eggs, approximately 43 mm x 29 mm, are various shades of brown, with blackish-brown spots and streaks². The incubation period is roughly 23 days³, with both male and female lending a hand.² At hatching, the chicks are covered with down and are capable of walking. If left undisturbed, they may remain in or near the nest (within 10 cm) throughout the brood-rearing period. If they are forced to leave, they will hide nearby in vegetation or under a pile of debris, may move up to 60 m to denser cover². Age at first flight is 22–27 days².

Damage and Destruction of the Residence

Any activity that destroys the function of nest would constitute damage or destruction of the residence. This includes, but is not limited to, moving or otherwise disturbing the eggs; changing the microclimate of the nest (such as the amount of light or internal temperature); blocking access to the nest; or, in the case of colonies where nest shelters are used, affecting the functionality of nest shelters. Roseate Terns rely on large colonies of Arctic and Common Terns because the additional number of terns provides protection from predators. Therefore any actions or activities that have an impact on the colony could impair the functionality of a Roseate Tern residence though decreasing nest success.

Period and Frequency of Occupancy

The species is present at breeding colonies from mid-May to late August.³ Since the nest may be used by the young for a prolonged period, it must be protected not only during nest building, laying, incubation and hatching, but also during brood rearing, or roughly during at least 60 days following nest construction

References

- ¹ Nisbet, I.C.T. 1981. Biological characteristics of the Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*). U.S. Fish Wildlife Service, Report 50181-084-9, Newton Corner, MA
- ² J. Burger and I.C.T Nisbet. 1998. Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*) In The Birds of North America, No 370 (A. Poole and F.Gills, Eds). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.
- ³ Kirkham, I.R. and D.N. Nettleship. 1986. Status of the Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* in Canada. Committee on the status of endangered wildlife in Canada, Ottawa, Ont.