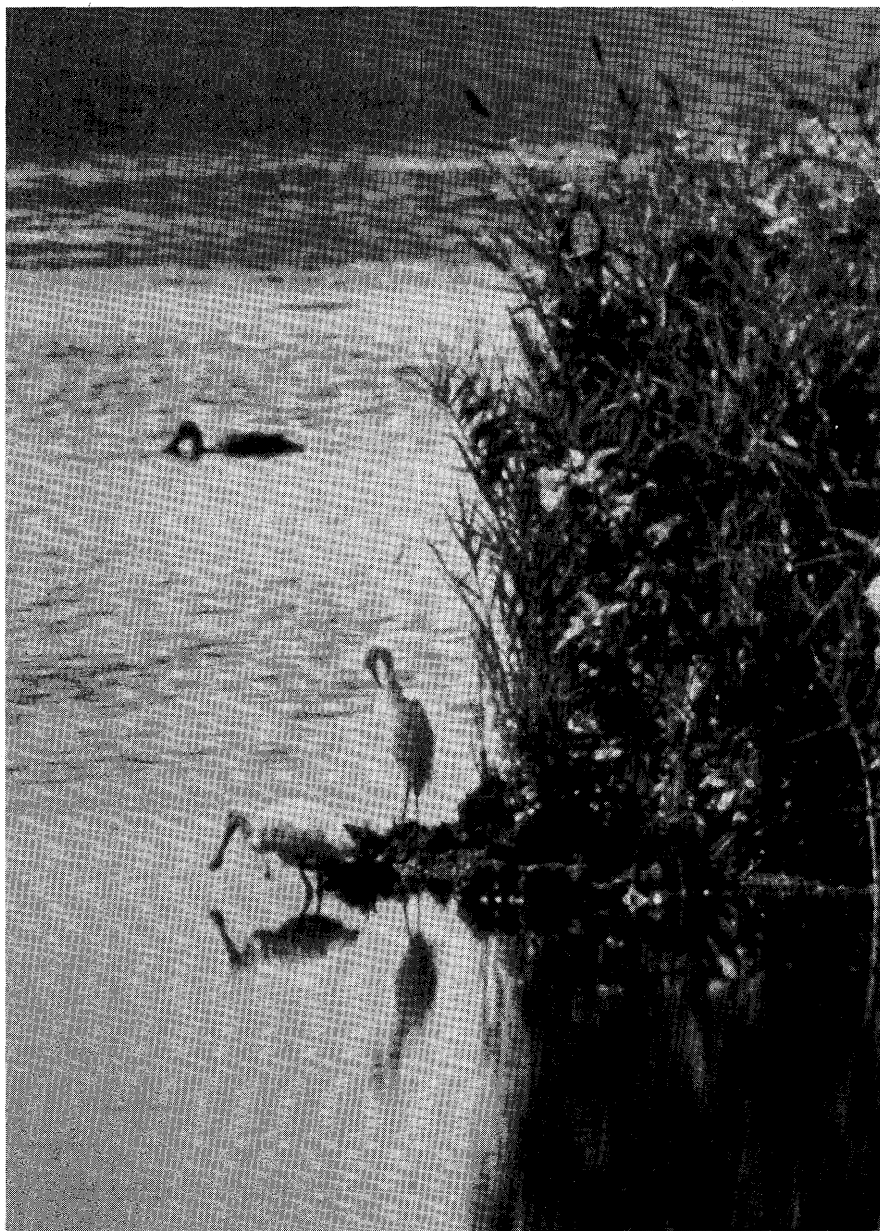




Juvenile Roseate Spoonbill at Goethals Bridge Pond, Staten Island, New York, 20 August 1993. Photograph by Chris Aquila.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK RARITIES 56: ROSEATE SPOONBILL ON STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

LORNA AND ERIC SALZMAN

On 20 August 1992, at approximately 11 AM while conducting a survey of the Harbor Herons sites on Staten Island, Richmond County, New York, Lorna Salzman and Carolyn Summers of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection observed a juvenile Roseate Spoonbill (*Ajaia ajaja*) at Goethals Bridge Pond. The spoonbill was first seen resting on a mud flat. Its head was completely feathered. Its overall coloration was white with pink wings, paler on top, seemingly deeper underneath. Its was comparable in size to a Great Egret and noticeably larger than nearby Snowy Egret. Its bill, at first hidden in the back feathers, eventually was displayed and its characteristic shape seen well; the bill color was a strong yellow, almost orange toward the tip in some lights. The legs were grayish and the bird was unbanded. Although the bird spent much of its time roosting with its bill tucked into its back feathers, it did show a typically "frenzied" feeding activity later in the day. The spoonbill appeared to be in good plumage and a check of local collections produced no indication of lost or escaped spoonbills. The species apparently has not been bred in captivity and it is almost certain this juvenile was a wild bird. Its appearance preceded even the beginnings of hurricane Andrew and does not seem to have been connected with any storm. Salzman and Summers were accompanied by Dana Lee of the Natural Resources Unit and Sheila Metcalf of the Department of City Planning. The bird was photographed extensively roosting and feeding that afternoon by Chris Aquila of the New York City Parks Department.

The spoonbill was rediscovered the following morning on the edge of nearby Prall's Island. At 11:15 it returned to the pond where it perched on a half-submerged supermarket cart 100 feet or less from shore, where it was observed and photographed by a number of birders. It apparently divided most of its time between these two sites. Reports of its appearance on a nearby creek were not confirmed. Local residents, some of whom appeared to be able to distinguish the spoonbill from the many egrets and herons that frequent the area, reported that the bird had been present for some time before 20 August. There also were several reports of a second, adult bird. While there is no evidence for the presence of a

second bird, it is likely that the immature bird was present for an undetermined period before it was documented.

Salzman and Summers originally were alerted to the possible presence of something unusual by a local crabber's account of a "pink swan" that landed on nearby Saw Mill Creek, a description that suggested the bird's size (on the order of a Great, not a Snowy, Egret) as well as the prominent pink underwing coloration and extended-neck profile. The bird was last seen briefly on 5 September, when it was reported to have been scared off by an exploding tire on a vehicle on the nearby bridge approach! Ironically, the New York City area had previously been flooded with false spoonbill alarms due to the dispersal of Snowy Egret that had been dyed pink by a researcher in New Jersey, and whose presence complicated determination of locations and numbers in the summer-long spate of "spoonbill" reports. As of now, only the one bird and two locations have been confirmed.

This is the first New York State record of Roseate Spoonbill, which is rare anywhere north of peninsular Florida and the Gulf Coast. Spoonbills occasionally wander north of their breeding range to western and central North America, but there are extraordinarily few records from the Northeast or, for that matter, anywhere on the Atlantic Coast north of the Carolinas, and many of the handful of older reports can not be confirmed. A juvenile spoonbill spent much of the summer of 1992 in North Carolina and a possible second bird was also reported. There is a single accepted Maryland record from Smith Island, Chesapeake Bay, in the late 1970s, an unconfirmed Delaware report from August 1992, and a Pennsylvania specimen taken in 1843 that is almost entirely innocent of any documentation. There apparently are no accepted records for Virginia, New Jersey, New England or Atlantic Canada. Recent appearances of Reddish Egret on Jamaica Bay in May 1991, and on Martha's Vineyard and Cape Cod during the summer of 1992 (these last reports presumably of a single bird) are of a species whose North American range and propensity for wandering are very similar to the Roseate Spoonbill's.

Goethals Bridge Pond is owned and managed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. It is a shallow, brackish pond surrounded by Phragmites and has extensive growths of Rose Mallow and Saltmarsh Fleabane at its edges. It is an excellent site for shorebirds and herons. Among the species observed or reported on the pond during the spoonbill's visit were Marbled Godwit, Red Phalarope,

Pectoral and White-rumped Sandpipers. About 40% of the breeding herons in the Connecticut/New York/New Jersey region breed and feed on New York City wetlands. Prall's Island and the extensive adjacent wetlands are part of the Harbor Herons, a project that protects not just the heronries but also the adjacent feeding grounds. In addition to the herons and cormorants, Harbor Herons researchers recently have found several marsh species, including Seaside and Sharp-tailed Sparrows and Clapper Rail, breeding in the tidal wetlands in Richmond County. These are the first confirmed records of the latter for Staten Island and the harbor area since the 1930s.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Lorna Salzman is the wetlands planner of the Natural Resources Unit of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection and Carolyn Summers is the deputy director of the Unit. The Natural Resources Unit was created by Albert Appleton, the Commissioner of the Department and the former Conservation Chairman of New York City Audubon. The new Unit is intended to give the Department of Environmental Protection an emphasis on habitat protection and preservation; its objectives include better protection of the Catskill watershed, Jamaica Bay, the Harbor Herons Urban Wetlands Refuge on and adjacent to Staten Island, and New York City wetlands generally. We thank Chris Aquila for supplying the photograph.

29 Middagh Street, Brooklyn, New York 11201