



## Wildlife Window: Roseate Spoonbill

Gorgeous At A Distance. Bizarre Up Close.

By the Rivendell Ponds & Preserves Committee

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The flamboyant Roseate Spoonbill looks gorgeous at a distance, yet bizarre up close with its bright pink feathers, red eye staring out from a partly bald head, and giant spoon-shaped bill. As the name implies, the Roseate Spoonbill has a large, spoon-shaped bill, which it sweeps back and forth in shallow water to capture prey. The Roseate Spoonbill is the only spoonbill endemic (native) to the Western Hemisphere and is in the same family as the Ibis.

Let's learn more about these unique and colorful wading birds.

### Size & Color:

This wading bird can reach a length of 30-40 inches with a wingspan of 50-53 inches. It has pink wings and underparts (some red on the tops of the wings) with a white neck and back, and pinkish legs and feet.

They fly with necks outstretched. While the species looks almost entirely pink in flight, they actually have no feathers at all on their heads. The pink coloration comes from the organisms on which they feed, which are full of carotenoids (organic pigment).



### Feeding & Habitat:

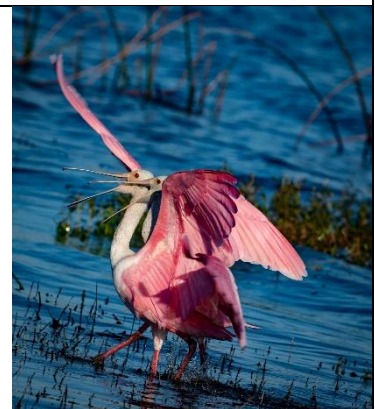
Roseate Spoonbills have a specialized bill that has sensitive nerve endings which help the birds search for food as it sweeps its spoonbill through shallow fresh or salt waters.

The diet of the Roseate Spoonbill primarily consists of crayfish, shrimp, crabs, and small fish – which accounts for its pink coloring.

These wading birds are found in coastal marshes, lagoons, mudflats, mangrove keys. They forage in shallow water with muddy bottom, in both salt and fresh water. Nests are in mixed colonies (near other wading bird species) often in mangroves or trees.

### Fun Facts:

- Roseate Spoonbill chicks don't have a spoon-shaped bill immediately after hatching. When they are 9 days old, the bill starts to flatten, by 16 days it starts to look a bit more spoon-like, and by 39 days it is nearly full size.
- The Roseate Spoonbill is sometimes incorrectly referred to as a "**Spoonbill Flamingo**." Roseate Spoonbills are found all over Florida and are native. However, Flamingos are rare in Florida, with only a few hundred in the Everglades, and Keys. Any flamingos seen in Florida are likely either imported or rare migrants from Central American or the Caribbean.



Roseate Spoonbills are a Florida State-designated threatened species. One historical threat to the roseate spoonbill was hunting for their feathers for plume fans and hat trade (now illegal). Today's threat to the spoonbill is the availability of adequate food sources, habitat degradation, and pesticides. Let's keep our ponds and preserves healthy for these and all of our favorite wildlife creatures.