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## Roseate Spoonbills Feed on Vegetable Material

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## GENERAL NOTES

Fla. Field Nat. 10 (1) : 18, 1982.

**Roseate Spoonbills feed on vegetable material.**—On 29 April 1979 from 1630-1645, at the Long Pine Key campground, Everglades National Park, Dade County, Florida, I watched 2 recently fledged Roseate Spoonbills (*Ajaja ajaja*) (aged at 6-8 weeks by the following characteristics; sooty yellow bills, yellow irises, mostly white feathering with small suffusion of pink on tail and under wings, some dusky in outer primaries, see Palmer 1962, Handbook of North American birds, vol. 1, New Haven, Yale Univ. Press) as they wandered through the occupied campgrounds. The birds were not present at dawn the following day.

The spoonbills restricted themselves to the mowed lawns and roads and did not enter the dense understory of the adjacent slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*) forest. The spoonbills used their usual head-swinging feeding movement while walking on the mowed grass, but also picked at objects from a stationary position in the manner of herons. Almost any object attracted the attention of the spoonbills. They examined chunks of bark, pine cones, pieces of cut grass and other vegetative debris from lawn mowing, pine needles, and even a blowing leaf which resulted in a 3 m "pursuit and capture." All such objects were picked up, examined with the bill, and then either swallowed or dropped. I noted that at least a few objects were actually ingested including a small chunk of bark, some pieces of dried grass, and a few insects, possibly small beetles and ants. One bird picked up a small stone approximately 2 cm long, examined it within the distal third of the bill, then dropped it and did not further investigate other stones or pebbles. Allen (1942, Nat. Aud. Soc., Res. Rep. No. 2) noted that vegetable material made up 3% by volume of the aggregate total contents of 5 stomachs in United States Roseate Spoonbills and a Florida specimen had swallowed a pine cone fragment, fibers, wood pulp, and vegetable debris, constituting 2% by volume of the stomach contents. Although Allen (1942) did not observe any Roseate Spoonbills feeding on vegetable material, James A. Kushlan (pers. comm. 1979) has often seen young spoonbills picking at vegetation in the vicinity of nesting colonies.

Feeding on vegetable material has also been recorded for the European Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) and the Black-faced Spoonbill (*P. minor*). Witherby et al. (1939, The handbook of British birds 3: 118-121) mentions that "the European Spoonbill seems to eat a good deal of vegetation and grasses." Delacour and Jabouille (1931, Les Oiseaux l'Indochine Francaise 1: 79) mention plant fibers and various marsh grasses being ingested by *P. minor*.

The ingestion of vegetable material I witnessed may have been in part a response to poor feeding conditions brought about by unseasonably heavy rainfall (23.21 cm, 22 April 1979 at Royal Palm Hammock). The storm struck when many young spoonbills had fledged. The unusual behavior of the juvenile spoonbills was probably due to poor feeding conditions in the wetlands and was an experiment in finding alternative food sources. The birds appeared to have little success with their campground foraging.—ROBERT P. RUSSELL, JR., 108 N. Lakeshore Drive, Apt. 438, North Palm Beach, Florida 33408.