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Dinsmore, Stephen J., "Roseate Spoonbill in Otoe County" (1999). *Nebraska Bird Review*. 46.

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Roseate Spoonbill in Otoe County

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On 5 August 1997, W. Ross Silcock and I were birding the heron roost at the Waubonsie Wildlife Area in Fremont County, Iowa. We were hoping to see the Roseate Spoonbill I found there on 4 August (see Dinsmore 1998), and thought there might be a chance it would fly into Nebraska upon leaving the roost. At 5:53 a.m., the bird left the roost. It flew directly over us (in Iowa) and headed to the north with a Great Egret. We continued to watch the bird as it gained altitude and was joined by a second Great Egret. The birds were now flying northwest. After a couple minutes, all three birds turned suddenly to the west, and were soon over Nebraska. They then turned south and appeared to be following the bluffs along the Nebraska side of the Missouri River. At this time, they were barely visible through a 20x spotting scope. We watched them fly south over Nebraska City and eventually disappear to the south. When we last saw them, they were flying west of the Otoe County Omaha Public Power District (OPPD) power plant stack, clearly over Nebraska. We lost sight of the birds at 6:15 a.m. The Roseate Spoonbill was very distinctive because of the color and bill shape. It was slightly smaller and shorter-legged than a Great Egret, and flew with more rapid wingbeats. The bill was long, laterally compressed, and had a spatulate shape. The head, neck, and body were white. The wings were pink, and in flight the primaries had dusky tips. The tail was also pink. The legs were pinkish with darker knees. On the basis of the mostly white head and neck and the dusky wingtips, I aged the bird as an immature (first-fall plumage). On 15 August 1997, I briefly observed the spoonbill in flight over the wetlands near the OPPD plant in Otoe County.

This sighting represents the fourth record of a Roseate Spoonbill in Nebraska. Other records are on 5 June 1932 in Buffalo County (Bray et al 1986), 2 on 20 August 1966 near Hastings, Adams County (Maunder 1966), and 1 on 16 September 1884 in Lancaster County (Bray et al 1986).

Literature Cited

- Bray, T. E., B. K. Padelford, and W. R. Silcock. 1986. The Birds of Nebraska: A Critically Evaluated List. Published by the Authors. Bellevue, Nebraska.
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- Maunder, V. 1966. Roseate Spoonbill. Nebraska Bird Review 34: 77.