



PRESS RELEASE – IMMEDIATE

ROSEATE TERNS FOUND ON SABLE ISLAND!

October 20, 2006 – The endangered bird species, Roseate Terns, have been found recently on Sable Island. This past summer, the Sable Island Preservation Trust, Dalhousie University and Environment Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service worked together to study the endangered Roseate Terns and Ipswich Sparrows on Sable Island. The goals of the project were to conduct a breeding census of both bird species and band Roseate Terns if they were found. This work will contribute to the objectives outlined in the Management Plan for Ipswich Sparrows in Canada and the Recovery Strategy for Roseate Terns in Canada. The team consisted of Julie McKnight, Brad Toms and Andrew Boyne of the Canadian Wildlife Service and Andy Horn and Catherine Dale of Dalhousie University.

The work plan was to spend the first few days flushing Ipswich Sparrows from their grassy hideouts so they could be counted as they flew past, and then switch efforts to finding the terns' nests and counting the eggs. As part of the study of the Ipswich Sparrows, two survey designs were employed to count the sparrows: flush transects (walking in a straight line and counting all the birds as they are flushed out on either side) and patch counts (counting all birds that flew from a large patch of vegetation they disturbed). The transect count took the team within 500 meters of literally every inch of Sable Island.

The team surveyed the terns as they found them. In all, 14 colonies of terns were found, and most had nestling Common and Arctic Terns. A few Roseate Terns were seen, however it could not be determined if they were nesting on the Island.

The team was delayed in departing Sable Island due to poor weather, so with the sparrow and tern census completed, this allowed time for some banding of Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls. As well, some feather samples of sparrows were collected for isotope analysis to see if the wintering grounds of summer-caught sparrows can be identified, and relate that to their breeding success. Additional detailed data was collected on nest site and habitat characteristics to be able to relate habitat to nesting success.

In the early 1970's, there were 200 pairs of Roseate Terns documented on Sable Island, and today it is thought that there may be fewer than 150 pairs in all of Canada. They have not been surveyed on the Island since 2002, and not found since 2001. Therefore, the confirmation of this study that they are still on the Island is an important one. Sable Trust hopes to be able to assist with future similar studies. The Trust's funding, which enables such assistance, is primarily through the Atlantic Coastal Action Program (ACAP) and their Science Linkage program.