

Wildlife of Victoria Park

by John Serrao

Roseate Spoonbill

One of Florida's (and our country's) most spectacular birds doesn't really reside in Victoria Park, but it occasionally stops to feed at our ponds. If you want to get a look at some of these unforgettable birds, just drive an hour to Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (near Titusville) or Orlando Wetlands (near Christmas). I was there last week and took the above photo of the beautiful Roseate Spoonbill. Standing about 32 inches tall and with a wingspread of about 4 feet, the Roseate Spoonbill isn't a particularly large wading bird compared to a Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, or Wood Stork. But its colors are unparalleled:

vivid pink mixed with red, white, and orange near the tail. These bright pigments result from carotenoids in the bird's diet of shrimp, crayfish, crabs, mollusks, aquatic insects, and small fish. The Spoonbill's method of eating these creatures is also unique: walking slowly forward in coastal lagoons and marshes, swinging its head from side to side in the water with its bizarre, flat, wide, "spoon" bill slightly open, and snapping it shut at the touch of prey. Roseate Spoonbills reside in Florida, Texas, and Louisiana, as well as Central and South America and the Caribbean. By the early 1900s they were almost exterminated from our state by plume hunters — feathers of egrets, herons, and spoonbills were popularly used in hats and fans. Since given protection they have rebounded somewhat, but they're still uncommon and local, and considered "Threatened" in Florida.