

**Population genetic relationships in the roseate tern:
globally, regionally and locally**

Thesis submitted by

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B. Sc. (Hons) ANU

in May 2004

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the School of Tropical Environment Studies and Geography

James Cook University

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Abstract

The roseate tern, *Sterna dougallii*, is a colonially nesting seabird which breeds on tropical and temperate islands in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. The roseate tern is considered threatened in a number of regions, including the United States, Europe and South Africa. There are currently four or five recognised subspecies of roseate tern: one in the Atlantic Ocean; and three or four in the Indo-Pacific, with many authors questioning the validity of currently circumscribed subspecies.

In this study, two kinds of genetic marker, ND2 and ND6 mitochondrial DNA sequences and microsatellite genotyping, were used to investigate the historical and contemporary relationships among roseate tern breeding colonies. I used samples from breeding colonies in Australia, Japan, Seychelles, South Africa, Azores, Ireland and the United States to investigate population structure in the roseate tern at a global scale, a regional scale and at a local scale within Australia. In addition, samples obtained from the non-breeding aggregations in Australia were included to determine whether mitochondrial DNA or microsatellite markers can be used to determine the origins of individuals in non-breeding aggregations.

Sequencing of a combined total of 1381 base pairs of the ND2 and ND6 genes, and genotyping with five polymorphic microsatellite markers, revealed two distinct lineages of roseate tern: an Atlantic lineage; and an Indo-Pacific lineage. The genetic divergence between the two lineages (3.9% corrected mitochondrial DNA sequence divergence) represents a significant historic separation, with continental Africa implicated as the major long term barrier to gene flow between the two oceanic basins. The star-shaped phylogeny observed for both lineages suggests a recent range expansion from a

common source in each oceanic basin, which is likely to have coincided with the stabilising of sea level following the last glacial period, approximately 20 000 years ago. The lack of population structure in mitochondrial DNA haplotypes within each oceanic basin suggests that cycles of range expansion and contraction to a glacial refuge have occurred during interglacial and glacial periods, respectively. This periodic range contraction, to a common glacial refuge within each oceanic basin, has allowed regular gene flow to occur among individuals within each oceanic basin, ameliorating any genetic divergence that may develop during interglacial periods. The most recent range expansion has resulted in secondary contact and introgression of the two lineages, identified in the breeding colony sampled in South Africa.

The Atlantic subspecies, *S. d. dougallii*, is well supported by this study, but the currently recognised subspecies in the Indo-Pacific are not warranted based on genetic data. I recommend a formal revision of the subspecies designations, merging the three or four currently recognised subspecies in the Indo-Pacific.

Microsatellite markers reveal that population structuring has developed among some breeding regions since the last range expansion. In the Atlantic Ocean, microsatellite analyses suggest that breeding colonies in Ireland and the United States have diverged from the Azores ($R_{ST} = 0.28 - 0.36$, $P < 0.05$); however, due to the potential influence of population declines on the genetic variation in these colonies, I cannot reject the alternate hypothesis that individuals from the north Atlantic breeding colonies are regularly interbreeding.

In the Indo-Pacific, the breeding colony in the Seychelles is divergent from the colonies in Australia and Japan ($R_{ST} = 0.14 - 0.22$, $P < 0.05$), suggesting that the Indian Ocean serves as a current barrier to gene flow. There is no evidence for genetic divergence

among colonies in Australia and Japan ($R_{ST} = 0.03$, $P = 0.22$), indicating that gene flow between the two regions, and among colonies in Australia, is occurring regularly. This may be facilitated via the mixing of individuals from different breeding colonies in the non-breeding aggregations. Due to the lack of genetic structure among breeding colonies in Australia and Japan, neither mitochondrial DNA or microsatellites could be used to determine the origins of individuals in non-breeding aggregations in Australia.

During this study, I obtained evidence of hybridisation between roseate and black-naped terns. Further investigation of this revealed that paternal leakage, the transfer of paternal mitochondrial DNA along with the usual maternal transfer, had occurred as a result of the hybridisation event. This is the first evidence of hybridisation between the roseate and black-naped tern, and one of only a handful of instances of paternal leakage of mitochondrial DNA in animals.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I must thank my supervisors, Emma Gyuris and Michelle Waycott. But for their backing, support and guidance I would not be writing this today. They gave me flexibility and freedom, but were always readily available for discussions or draft-reading. Thanks Michelle for the level-headedness and all your help in the lab - the optimism when I had lost mine and for ideas when all seemed to have been tried. Thanks to Emma for your honesty, encouragement and enthusiasm, particularly when things weren't looking so good for a while.

Many people have contributed to my memories of unique and amazing field trips: I shared the Great Barrier Reef with many Queensland Parks and Wildlife staff – for their essential roles I would like to mention Bruce Knuckey, Kete Pelling and particularly Paul O'Neill who not only assisted with sample collection and logistics but with whom I shared many important discussions and of course an amazing excursion to Japan. In Japan, arigatō gozaimasu to Takao Baba, Shigemoto Komeda and Kiyooki Ozaki for sharing their field trip with me, and for dealing with my primary school Japanese. In Western Australia, Nic Dunlop made me the captain of the boat (and made me swim to get it!) and Chris Surman was the perfect host during countless days of howling winds and the occasional piratical expedition (arrrrr). I also couldn't have answered these questions without the people that have helped with collection of samples in places I was unable to get to: Clive Minton, Veronica Neves, Stephen Newton, Carlos Pacheco, Jaime Ramos, Patty Szczys, Tony Tree, Dick Veitch and Rebecca White.

Special thanks to Patty Szczys for her trust in sharing her microsattellites with me, and to Julie Feinstein for the initial ND6 sequence that got everything started. In the lab here many people have made the days pass more quickly: Ainsley Calladine (A), Mark 'the dish' Disher, Jennifer Kunzelman, Brenda McDonald, Jessica Moss (my colony picking and creative dancing queen) and Grant Whiteman (who got me up early for tennis). Thanks to Glenn Dunshea for joining me in the wrestle with the roseate tern. Scott Smithers helped me with the world of geomorphology, David Blair and Jon Luly provided valuable comments when some outside perspective was required, and Tim Harvey's fine tooth comb picked up on things at the end that I was never going to see.

Shirley Bruce, Clive Grant, Sue Knight and Rob Scott answered countless queries about paperwork or computers, and Adella Edwards helped with maps.

Financial assistance for this project was provided by the Cooperative Research Centre for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, the Raine Island Corporation and the School of Tropical Environment Studies and Geography.

To the collection of other students who have shared this crazy time with me, I can't imagine what it would have been like feeling as though I was the only one and am thankful for the constant reminder that it wasn't so. My regular uni 'housemates' Ameer, Ramona and Nadine made the office an easier place to be on weekends and at night with their regular passings by. Thanks to Ramona and Liz for breaking up each day (with food!) and especially to Liz for surviving the last few months in the office with me, helping me to find the right word. Rohan and Ben gallantly put up with being my entertainers in the last few months. Most especially to Vimoksalehi and Amanda, for providing me with an office to retreat to when everything got too insane and escape was the only option, and dealing with every up and down in the last few years. My housemates in recent years, Guido and Monica, have dealt with the traumas with good humour and forgiven me my outbursts without question – thanks guys. And last but not least of my fellow students, to Amanda for being in the same place, for understanding and sympathising and for food, laughs and a heap of trashy television – thanks maaate!

Finally, thanks to all those at home and further away, especially my mum and the girls – Anita, Faye, Imogen, Jane, Lara and Zoe - for their endless support, for helping me to forget (what's a PhD?) when I wasn't here and for always believing in me.

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I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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