

## What is a flamingo?

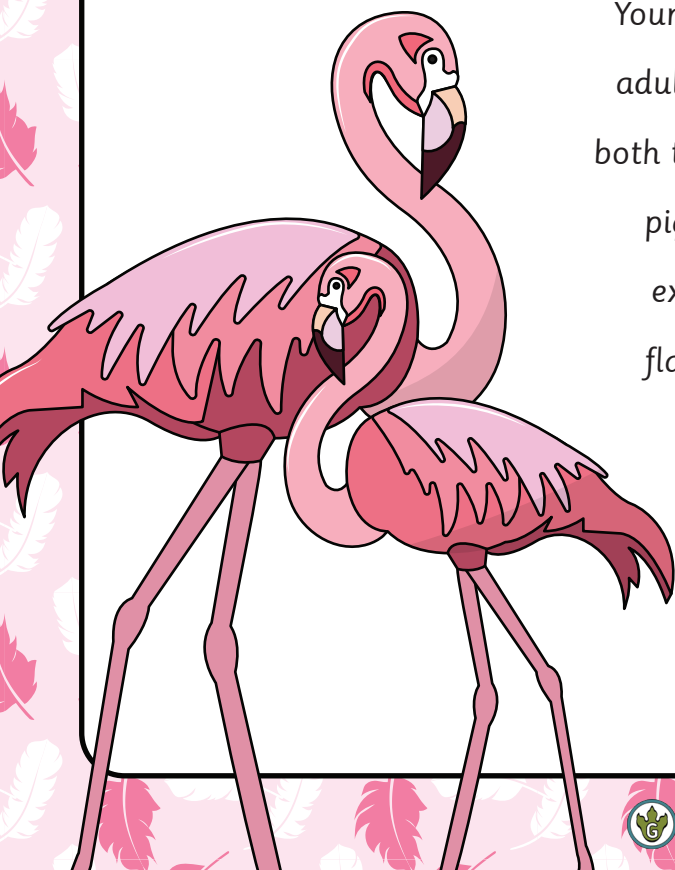
A flamingo is a type of bird that lives in a big group called a flock. There are six different species of flamingos – and they can be found in different continents. They are wading birds, which means they live by bodies of water, such as lakes.

## Why do flamingos stand on one leg?

Did you know that flamingos usually stand on one leg while the other is tucked beneath their body? They are not doing yoga though! No one really knows the reason for this behaviour. One possible reason is that standing on one leg lets the birds to conserve more body heat as they spend a long time standing in water. Another theory is that standing on one leg reduces the amount of energy needed to power the muscles to stand and balance on one leg. Not only is standing on one leg a distinctive behaviour, flamingos also stamp their webbed feet in the mud to help awaken and move food to the surface.

## Why are flamingos different colours?

Young flamingos hatch with grey feathers, but adults range from pale pink to bright red due to both the bacteria in water and the beta-carotene pigment obtained from the food they eat (for example, shrimp and algae). A well-fed, healthy flamingo is more brightly and vibrantly coloured and this makes them a more desirable choice of mate. A pale flamingo, however, is usually unhealthy so this may put off potential mates.



**How do flamingos eat?**

Flamingos' bills are specially adapted to separate mud and silt from the food they eat. They have a large rough tongue to help the process also.

**Do flamingos fly?**

You may have seen flocks of flamingos at a zoo and wondered if they can fly as they don't appear to want to escape! It is true, however, that flamingos are confident flyers. The flamingos in captivity often have their wings clipped, so they cannot fly away.

**Why do flamingoes live in flocks?**

Flamingos live in colonies, whose population can be as big as several thousands.

These large colonies are believed to help flamingos to:

1. Avoid their predators
2. Get more food
3. Have more effective nesting sites.

**What is a the dance that flamingos do?**

Both males and females in flocks perform synchronized ritual displays to each other. Flamingos will stretch their necks upwards, call out, head-flag, and also flap their wings. They do not perform for the attention of just one mate – rather it is directed towards the whole group. It's a bit like a dating service for flamingos, as those who do not already have a mate will pair up after these displays.

Couples spend a long time together and will defend their habitat together.

Sometimes, they will swap for new mates though. Both the male and the female help building the nest and both will defend the nest and egg.



**How do flamingos look after their young?**

Both the male and the female feed their chicks with a milk they produce themselves. When a chick is first born, the parents and the chick stay together in the nesting site. However, once they are seven to twelve days old, the chicks begin to move out of their nests and explore their new habitat. From two weeks old, the chicks join together with other chicks and form a crèche, independent from their parents. They eventually rejoin the main flock again when a little older in order to stay safe from predators.



## QUESTIONS

1. Circle the correct statement.

Flamingos cannot fly.

Flamingos can fly.

2. What is a 'wading bird'?

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3. Why are flamingos pink?

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4. Why do flamingos live in flocks?

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5. True or false: Flamingos have one mate for life.

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6. Find and copy a phrase that tells us why flamingos in captivity cannot fly away.

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7. Circle three things flamingos do in a ritual dance

stretch their necks upwards

run away

sit down

call out

flap their wings

eat plankton

8. Males and females both help to raise a chick. Circle two things they do.

Protect the nest

Teach them how to fly

Sing them lullabies

Feed them milk



## ANSWERS

1. Circle the correct statement.

Flamingos cannot fly.

Flamingos can fly.

2. What is a 'wading bird'?

A bird who lives by water.

3. Why are flamingos pink?

Flamingos are pink due to eating shrimp and algae, which has beta-carotene in it.

4. Why do flamingos live in flocks?

Flamingos live in flocks as it keep them safer from predators, it helps them to find more food and it helps to make their nesting sites better too. (Only one reason of the 3 fine)

5. True or false: Flamingos have one mate for life.

False

6. Find and copy a phrase that tells us why flamingos in captivity cannot fly away.

have their wings clipped



7. Circle three things flamingos do in a ritual dance

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