

Name: _____

Fancy, Feathered Flamingos

by Guy Belleranti

Perhaps you've seen someone place a bright-pink, plastic flamingo on their front lawn as a decoration. Maybe you've seen a flock of bright pink flamingos at a zoo. Because of its bright feathers and unusual body shape, the flamingo is one of the most recognizable birds in the world.



Where do flamingos live?

Flamingos can be found mostly in South America and Africa, but a few even live in parts of Asia, North America, and

Europe too.
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Why are flamingos pink?

A young flamingo is usually grayish in color. However, as it grows it eats lots of small shrimp and other crustaceans as well as lots of algae. These food items contain pigments called carotenoids that give the bird its color. Carotenoids are also in some foods that we eat, foods like carrots, watermelon and shrimp. But we don't eat enough carrots, watermelon, or enough shrimp, to turn us pink or orange.

Can they fly?

Yes! First, they get a running start to pick up speed for take-off. As they lift into the air they flap their wings rapidly. They continue to flap their wings while stretching their long necks forward. At the same time they stretch their long legs behind themselves. Seeing a flock of these brightly colored birds soaring through the sky is a marvelous sight to behold!



Why do flamingos have such long legs and necks?

A flamingo's long legs and neck helps it find food in different depths of water. By stomping its webbed feet the flamingo can stir up all sorts of food from the lake's muddy bottom. Then the bird sweeps its bill upside down through the water, filtering out food with its bristly tongue and special hair-like structures called lamellae.

Do flamingos prefer living in small groups or in large groups?

Flamingos are very social birds. They often gather in large colonies with hundreds to even thousands of other flamingos. They use their long necks to form a mirror to the sky and to trick their predators.



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Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes mainly from his experiences working with animals and teaching others.

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1. Sara was at the zoo, looking at the flamingo habitat. There were 23 pink flamingo and 3 gray ones. The gray flamingos....
 - a. were probably sick
 - b. probably weren't eating enough
 - c. were probably younger than the other flamingos
 - d. were probably from Asia
2. Why might a zoo put a mirror in a flamingo exhibit?
 - a. The flamingos like to look at themselves when they clean their feathers.
 - b. They will be more likely to lay eggs and have baby flamingos.
 - c. It keeps the flamingos from seeing the zoo's visitors.
 - d.

3. Where



~ PREVIEW ~

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the printable version of this worksheet.

4. Name three human foods mentioned in the article that have carotenoids.

5. In which country would you be most likely to see a wild Flamingo? (circle one)

United Kingdom	Canada	Dominican Republic	Netherlands
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Explain why you chose the country above.

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.

_____ 1. mirrors

a. look at; see

_____ 2. lagoons

b. chemicals that add color

_____ 3. elevations

c. reflective pieces of glass

_____ 4.



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_____ 5.

liquids

_____ 6. pigments

f. areas of shallow sea water

_____ 7. behold

g. move to another place to find food

_____ 8. filtering

h. small, swimming animal that is sometimes eaten as food

◆ Now try this: On a sheet of lined paper, use each vocabulary word from above in a sentence.

ANSWER KEY

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3. Where



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4. Name three human foods mentioned in the article that have carotenoids.

Shrimp, watermelon, and carrots

5. In which country would you be most likely to see a wild Flamingo? (circle one)

United Kingdom

Canada

Dominican Republic

Netherlands

Explain why you chose the country above.

The Dominican Republic has a tropical climate. The other countries have cooler climates.

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