

Did you know there is a beautiful South American bird with an amazing colorful bill (beak) that makes up one third of its body? This bird is the toucan.

There are about 40 species of toucans. The largest, the toco toucan, is pictured on Fruit Loops cereal boxes. The toco toucan's 7½ inch long bill is the biggest of all bird bills in relation to body size.



Upon first glance you might think a toucan's bill might be a good weapon for fighting or defense. It does have a serrated edge, and its size can be intimidating. However, it's not very effective in a fight. You see, the bill is light in weight and mostly hollow. It's made of

keratin, the sarr

The bill's r and berries off I insects, and, oc



g humans.

bill to pluck fruit its bill to catch

It's fun to watch how a toucan uses its bill to eat. First it grabs the food in the bill's tip. Then, with a toss of its head, the toucan throws the food into its throat. A long bristly tongue helps move the food down.

Toucans also use their bills to preen (to smooth or clean the feathers) other toucans and to toss food to one another. They use their bills in play, as well – grabbing one another's bill in a kind of "beak wrestling".

Since both males and females have brightly colored bills it may not be important to attract a mate. However, mating birds will throw fruit to one another with their bills.

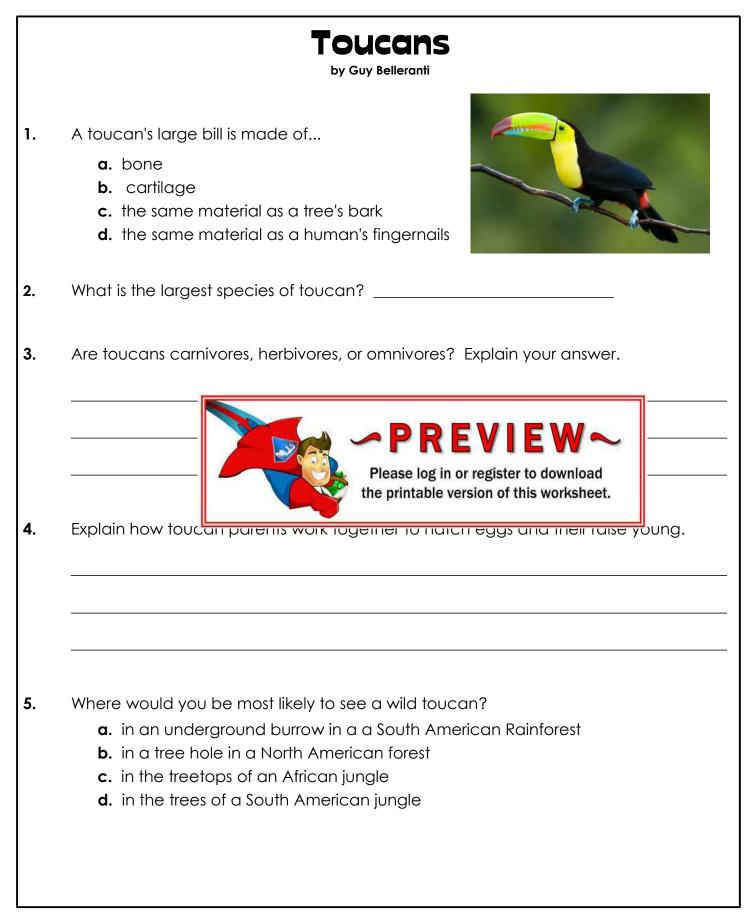


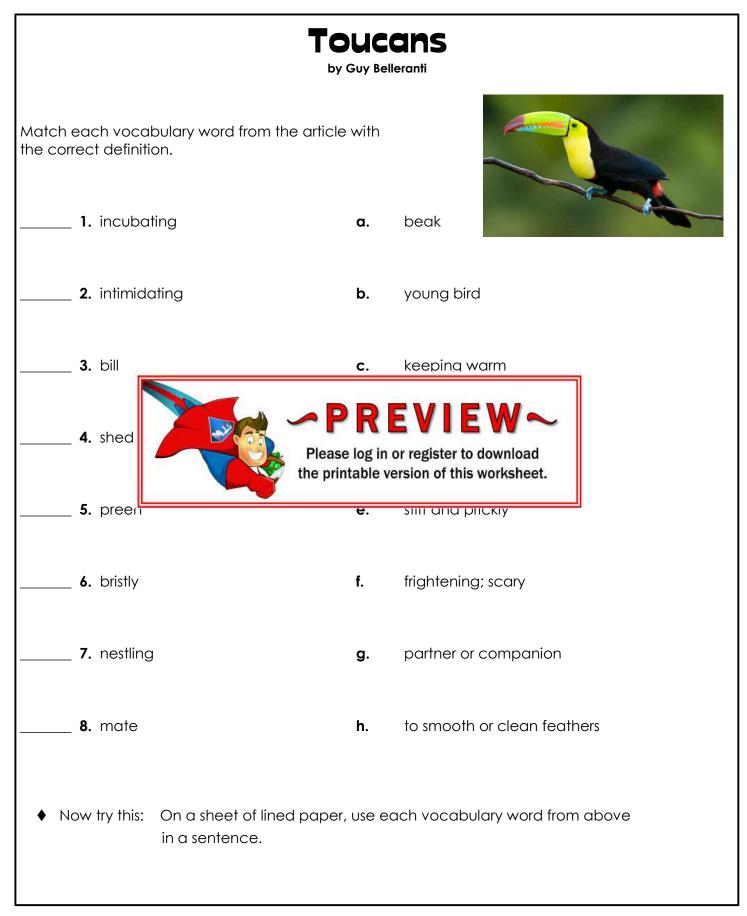
Finally, the bill might be used for cooling.

the 2 to 4 eggs. Nestlings are born without feathers. They are blind and are fed fruit by both parents. The bill of the nestling is small, but it grows as the bird grows.

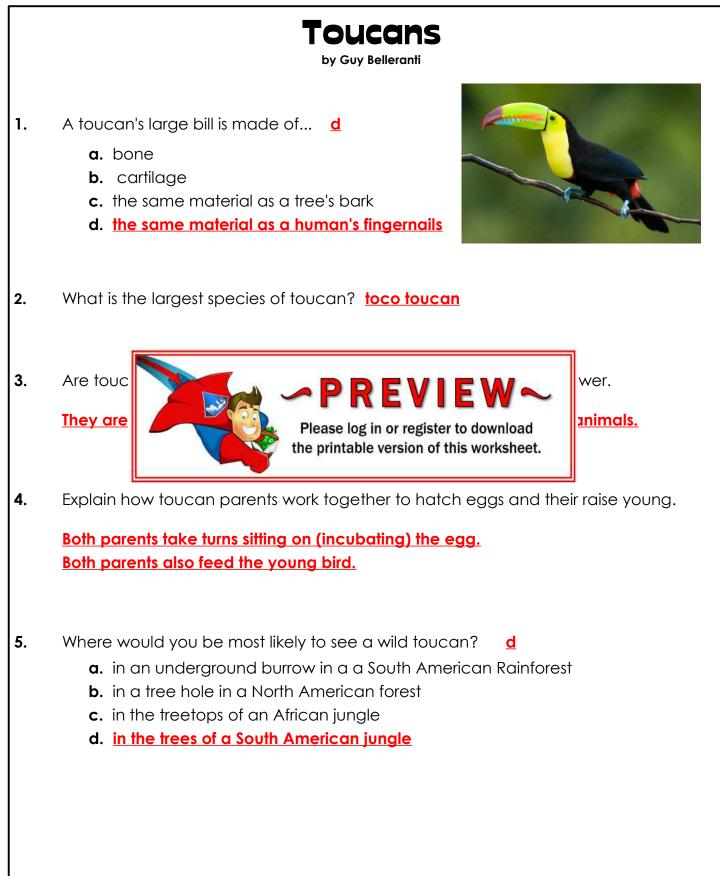
## About the Author

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## **ANSWER KEY**



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