

The Flamingo — Biology Behind Nature's Pink Wader

Reading Worksheet — Level F | tahricteaches.com

The flamingo is one of the most recognisable wading birds in the world, instantly identified by its vivid pink plumage, long neck, and towering legs. There are six living species, found in warm, **shallow** lakes and lagoons across Africa, South America, the Caribbean, southern Europe, and parts of Asia. These wetlands are often extremely salty or alkaline, environments most animals avoid, which gives flamingos access to a rich food supply with little competition. In flight, each **wing** reveals hidden black flight feathers, a striking contrast to the bird's pink body.

A flamingo is not born with its famous color. Chicks hatch with gray or white **feather**s and only turn pink over several years. The transformation happens because of **chemical** compounds called carotenoids, found in the algae and tiny brine shrimp the birds eat. As a flamingo digests this food, the pigments are absorbed into its bloodstream and deposited in its growing feathers, gradually turning the bird a brighter shade of pink or orange.

Flamingos are filter feeders, a method few other birds use. A flamingo **bend**s its long neck downward and submerges its head upside down in the water. Inside its curved beak are comb-like structures that trap small **shrimp**, insects, and algae while pushing water back out, much like a sieve. The bird's thick tongue pumps water through this filter several times a second, allowing it to feed efficiently in shallow mud.

Flamingos are also famous for resting on a single leg for hours at a time. Researchers studying this unusual **balance** have found that a locking joint in the leg allows the bird to stay upright using almost no **muscle** effort, so the pose is restful rather than tiring. The flamingo can even **float** briefly on calm water, paddling with webbed feet before wading back into the shallows to continue feeding.

Flamingo colonies can number in the thousands, and living in such large, noisy groups helps **protect** individual birds from predators like eagles and jackals. However, habitat loss, water pollution, and shrinking wetlands now threaten several flamingo populations around the world. Conservation groups are working to protect the shallow lakes these birds depend on, since a single damaged wetland can affect an entire regional population of flamingos.

A. Vocabulary

1. balance ____	a. having little depth; not deep
2. protect ____	b. to rest on the surface of a liquid without sinking
3. chemical ____	c. one of the light, soft parts that cover a bird's body
4. bend ____	d. a small, edible shellfish with a long tail and many legs
5. shallow ____	e. the ability to keep a steady, even position without falling
6. muscle ____	f. to keep someone or something safe from harm or danger
7. feather ____	g. a substance with a particular molecular composition, especially one involved in a natural p
8. wing ____	h. to move a part of the body, or a whole object, out of a straight line
9. float ____	i. a band of tissue in the body that contracts to produce movement
10. shrimp ____	j. one of the limbs or organs a bird uses to fly



B. True or False

1. There are six living species of flamingo. ____
2. Flamingos mostly live in freshwater rivers far from the coast. ____
3. A flamingo chick is born with bright pink feathers. ____
4. Carotenoid chemicals from a flamingo's food cause its pink color. ____
5. A flamingo feeds by filtering food through comb-like structures in its beak. ____
6. A flamingo chews its food with its teeth before swallowing. ____
7. A locking leg joint lets a flamingo balance with little muscle effort. ____
8. Flamingos always stand in large, silent groups to avoid attention. ____
9. Habitat loss is a threat to some flamingo populations today. ____



C. Fill in the Blanks

Word Bank: shallow, chemical, bend, balance, protect

1. Flamingos live in warm, _____ lakes and lagoons around the world.
2. Carotenoid _____s in a flamingo's food slowly turn its feathers pink.
3. A flamingo must _____ its neck downward to filter-feed in the mud.
4. A locking leg joint helps a flamingo _____ with very little effort.
5. Living in a large colony helps _____ individual flamingos from predators.

D. Comprehension Questions

1. Why do flamingos thrive in salty or alkaline lakes that most other animals avoid?
2. Explain how a flamingo's diet changes the color of its feathers over time.
3. Describe how a flamingo's beak allows it to filter-feed in shallow mud.
4. What role does the locking leg joint play in how a flamingo balances on one leg?
5. What threats are putting some flamingo populations at risk today?

E. Discussion Questions

1. Flamingos get their color entirely from what they eat. What other animals or situations can you think of where diet changes an organism's appearance?
2. Engineers sometimes study animal joints, like a flamingo's locking leg, to design better equipment. Why might studying nature help solve human problems?
3. If you were designing a nature reserve to protect a flamingo colony, what features would it need?





Answer Key

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A. Vocabulary: 1-e, 2-f, 3-g, 4-h, 5-a, 6-i, 7-c, 8-j, 9-b, 10-d

B. True/False: 1-T, 2-F, 3-F, 4-T, 5-T, 6-F, 7-T, 8-F, 9-T

C. Fill Blanks: 1-shallow, 2-chemical, 3-bend, 4-balance, 5-protect

D. Comprehension:

1. Shallow, salty or alkaline lakes are harsh environments that most animals avoid, so flamingos face little competition for food there.
2. A flamingo chick hatches gray or white, but carotenoid chemicals from the algae and brine shrimp it eats are absorbed into its bloodstream and deposited in its feathers, gradually turning it pink or orange.
3. A flamingo bends its neck down and submerges its head upside down in the water, using comb-like structures inside its beak to trap shrimp, insects, and algae while pushing water back out.
4. A locking joint in the flamingo's leg allows it to stay upright using almost no muscle effort, which is why standing on one leg is restful rather than tiring.
5. Habitat loss, water pollution, and shrinking wetlands are threatening some flamingo populations, since damaged wetlands can affect an entire regional colony.

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