

The Flamingo

Scientific Name: *Phoenicopterus* spp.
Irish Name: lasairéan

With its striking pink or red plumage, long neck and legs and large bill, the Flamingo is one of the world's most recognisable birds. There are six species of Flamingo and between them they can be found in tropical and temperate parts of the world - from Africa to Madagascar, southern Europe, India, the Caribbean, South America and the Galapagos Islands.

The Flamingo is a wading bird and lives near estuaries, lagoons and salty lakes. There it feeds on the muddy bottom, shaking it up with its webbed feet and toes. Its diet consists of plankton, tiny fish and insect larvae and its specially adapted blunt and angled beak is able to filter feed, sucking up the muddy water, extracting the food and expelling the water. Larger species of Flamingo can feed on larger animals, such as crustaceans, molluscs and worms.



Greater Flamingos are one of the world's tallest birds.



Flamingo are known for standing on one leg. Though it is not understood exactly why they do this, it is believed they may do it to regulate body temperature.

The 'Flaming' Flamingo

The Flamingo's name comes from the Spanish word "flamenco", which in turn comes from the earlier Latin word "flamma", meaning "flame".

Shrimp-like animals in the Flamingo's diet are responsible for their bright colour. The brighter the colour, the healthier the birds. The one exception is birds in captivity. These birds would not have access to the same food sources and so would be paler.

Sometimes zoos supplement their diet to enhance their colour.



A Flamboyance of Flamingos



A 'flamboyance' is the collective noun for a group of Flamingos.

Flamingos live in large colonies and this gives them safety in numbers. As they keep their heads underwater while feeding in the mud, other Flamingos can warn them if predators approach. Large colonies also make full use of limited nesting areas and improves their chance of catching food.

A striking feature of Flamingos is one of their mating rituals, whereby they march like a troop, raising their head and beak and turning them from side to side.

Both parents take turns to incubate a single egg. The egg sits on a flattened mound of mud, just of pecking reach from other nests. Once the chick can walk it moves into a large crèche, where it is looked after by a number of other adult flamingos.