



Care For Us

Flamingo

(Phoenicopteriformes)

Animal Welfare

Animal welfare refers to an animal's state or feelings. An animal's welfare state can be positive, neutral or negative.

An animal's welfare has the potential to differ on a daily basis. When an animal's needs - nutritional, behavioural, health and environmental - are met, they will have a good standard of welfare.

A good life in captivity might be one where animals can consistently experience good welfare - throughout their entire life.





Understanding that animals have both sentient and cognitive abilities as well as pain perception, reinforces the need to provide appropriate husbandry for all captive animals, to ensure positive welfare.

In captivity, the welfare of an animal is dependent on the environment provided for them and the daily care and veterinary treatment they receive.

Flamingos are grouped into two distinct species, Greater flamingos and Lesser Flamingos.

All flamingo species range from a light pink to deep red in colour. They have loud, honking, goose-like voices and are extremely vocal.

As a group, flamingos are widespread. Their habitats range from tropical coastal lagoons to high altitude lakes, with occurrences tied directly to food resource availability.

Population numbers of flamingo species range from near-threatened and vulnerable, to least concern by the IUCN Red List.





Flamingos are social

All species of flamingos live in groups, foraging and nesting together. Groups are called colonies and can range from millions of birds (Lesser flamingos) to a few pairs of birds (Caribbean flamingos).

Flamingos will often engage in the same behaviours at the same time, even in large groups. Marching is a common behaviour that happens within a large group and is important for courtship.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Flamingos are best kept in large flocks of at least 100 birds. Positive breeding and social behaviours are observed with flocks of 100+ birds. Ensure the environment is large enough to hold future offspring as well as the current number of birds.

Flamingos like to build nests

The nest is similar in all flamingo species. Flamingos build nests using mud, stone, feathers and other materials they can find. They build these near to water and use their bills to make the mounds. The parents will make a well on the top of the mound with their feet, where they will lay an egg. Mound building continues during incubation, as the flamingos pick up materials close to the nest.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

As well as providing some artificial or ready-made mounds, provide mud and other materials so that the flamingos can choose to make their own nests and build on the current mounds during incubation.





Flamingos like to fly

Flight is important to flamingos as it is for most birds. They can fly far and travel at high altitudes during daytime and nighttime flights. They can fly in large groups or on their own. Young flamingos can fly from around 2-3 months.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Ideally provide an environment where flamingos can fly – this requires netting the top of an enclosure and creating enough space for take-off and landing of groups of birds to avoid injuries.

Flamingos like water

Flamingos enjoy both wading and swimming. They often choose to live by shallow water habitats. Wading helps them source food through filter feeding and they will also wade and swim in large groups. They will use water to bathe in and hatchlings can swim at a very young age.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Ensure that pools are large enough for the entire colony/group to use at the same time. Allow water to flow freely but calmly to avoid build up of dirt and disease. If possible, provide multiple pools of differing depths so birds have choices of pool use.





Flamingos like to have a varied diet.

Flamingos are obligate filter feeders. Their long flexible neck and large bill is built for this feeding behaviour. They spend a lot of time finding food, mostly at night or early morning when the water is calm. Captive flamingos are active throughout the day, but also active at night.

Flamingos get their feather colours from pigmented compounds called carotenoids, which they get from their diet. Carotenoid supplements must be provided in captivity.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Provide a safe enclosure that allows feeding, roaming and social behaviours throughout the day and night. Provide plenty of filter feeding opportunities that all birds in the group can access.

Flamingos like to dance

During courtship, both females and males will carry out group dances to attract mates. Head flagging is when flamingos call out loudly, extending and shaking their necks. Stretching of wings and other "dance" moves are common during courtship behaviours. Flamingos are seasonally monogamous by nature but have been known to keep the same partners year on year.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Allow for monogamous pairing as well as opportunities for mate choice. Provide an appropriate colony number and enclosure space so birds can carry out group courtship behaviours, such as marching and wing saluting.





Flamingos have sensitive feet

The bottom of a flamingo foot has many folded layers of skin which can become sensitive if continually exposed to abrasive surfaces such as concrete. In the wild they mainly roam on soft surfaces and mud. Their feet can be prone to issues such as bumblefoot, lesions and abscesses without the opportunity to walk on softer surfaces.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Provide different surfaces so the birds have choices and ensure to minimise concrete or other harsh substrate use. Soft and natural substrates such as grasses, river or estuary sand, and rubber matting can all be effective in ensuring healthy feet in flamingos.

Flamingos like to keep clean

Flamingos do spend a good proportion of their days preening their feathers to keep them clean. Swimming can also help with this. Preening helps distribute the oil in their feathers. During courtship, flamingos apply further oils to their feathers to enhance their colours.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Provide plenty of shallow water and land space for preening activities. Offer retreat spaces (areas that are hidden from the public) by planting shrubs or creating artificial barriers so all birds can feel confident in their environment.





Flamingos are diurnal & nocturnal

Flamingos are active during the day and night depending on their needs. Feeding often takes place at night and early in the morning, whilst courtship, preening, sunning and other group behaviours happen day and night.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Ensure that the environment is large and complex, with multiple wading, swimming, nesting, sunning and retreat spaces for all individuals. Create spaces that allow for flight when possible. If necessary, provide enriching indoor spaces with feeding/wading and social behaviour opportunities for the birds at all times.



Flamingos enjoy...

Large open enclosures that have multiple pools for wading and swimming, nesting materials and space to preen, fly, court and feed in.

In captivity we should always try and replicate their natural and normal behaviours so they are happy and healthy throughout their lives.

