

Flamingos

Where Do They Live?

Flamingos are wading birds that live in tropical and subtropical North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. Flamingos build their nests at the top of **mud mounds** in shallow salt lakes and lagoons.



What Do They Eat?

The flamingo diet of shrimp, plankton, small fish, insects, and algae makes them **omnivores**. Flamingos are **filter feeders**. They stir the water and plunge their heads in upside down, scooping up and straining food. **Lamellae** (a comb-like structure on the inside of both the upper and lower bill), and **bristles on the tongue** help flamingos strain food from water when feeding.

What Are Their Natural Enemies?

Predators include crocodiles, big cats, wild dogs, and other species of birds. Eagles and vultures prey on chicks and eggs. **Human interference** causes habitat destruction and as well as interruption in breeding and feeding.

How Many Species of Flamingo Are There?

There are **six species** worldwide. Four species are found in the Americas and two in Southern Europe, Africa, India, and the Middle East.

American flamingo, or **Caribbean flamingo**, is the largest flamingo in the Americas and the **only species in North America**. It has orange-pink feathers, and an orange-pink and black bill.

Andean Flamingo found in South America and is the rarest species and the only with yellow legs and a pale yellow and black bill. *Endangered.*

James's flamingo lives in the Andes of Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, and Chile. Their feathers are pale pink since they feed mainly on microscopic algae. *Endangered.*

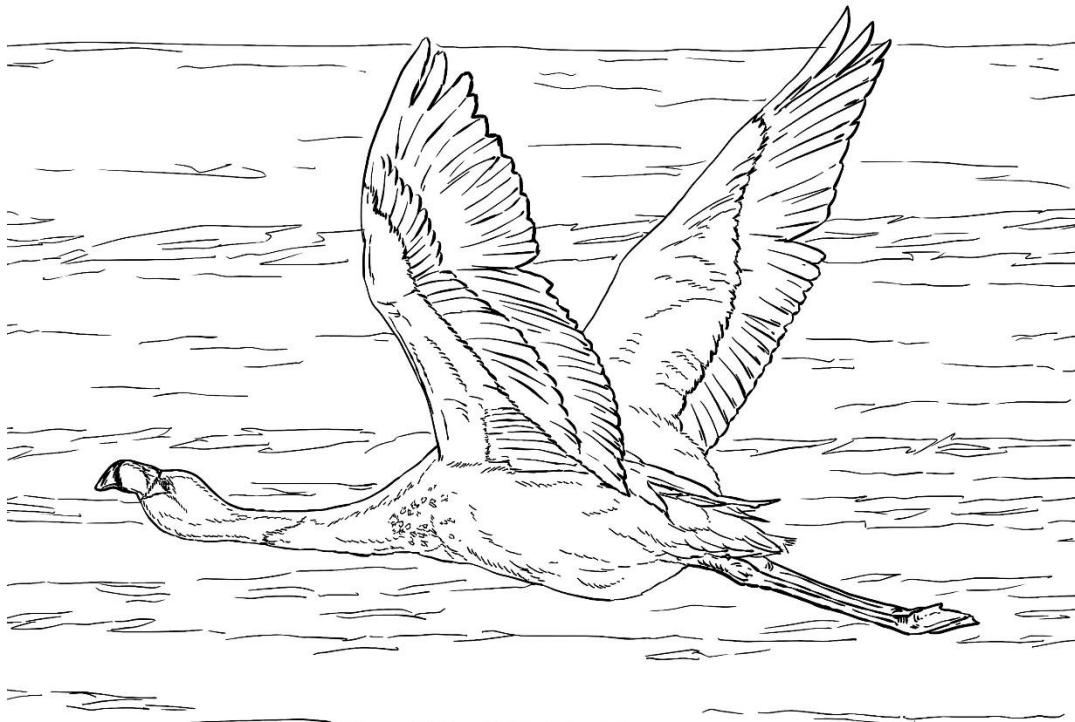
Chilean flamingo also breeds in South America. *Endangered.*

Lesser flamingo is the smallest of all the flamingo species. They live throughout India and Africa.

Greater flamingo is the largest and most widespread flamingo species living in the Middle East, Africa, southern Europe, and India.

Did You Know?

- Flamingos are in the **family** Phoenicopteridae and the only bird family in the **order** Phoenicopteriformes.
- Flamingos get their pink color from eating shrimp and other crustaceans.
- The flamingo's long neck allows it to reach food either close to the bottom of deep water or near the surface of very shallow water.
- A flamingo chick's bill develops its distinctive curve after a few months.
- Flamingos can fly up to 35 miles per hour.
- A group of flamingos is called a **flamboyance** or **colony**.
- Flamingos grow to about 5 feet tall and weigh about 6 pounds.
- The wingspan of flamingos ranges from 3 to 5 feet.
- Flamingos mate for life.
- A flamingo's flight feathers are black.
- Flamingos are not considered migratory birds, but those living in high altitudes where lakes freeze will over winter someplace warmer.
- Flamingos sleep on one leg. Biologists are not sure why exactly, but think it has to do with conserving energy or reducing muscle fatigue.
- A cowry-type shell, the **Flamingo tongue**, is in the Vanderbilt collection.



Andean flamingo

American flamingo

