

# Chilean Flamingo

*Phoenicopus chilensis*



**Class:** *Aves*

**Order:** *Phoenicopteriformes*

**Family:** *Phoenicopteridae*

**Characteristics:** Flamingos are one of the most identifiable bird species due to their pink color. They have long necks with small heads, bare faces, yellow eyes, long skinny legs, and webbed front toes ([Animal Diversity](#)). Chilean flamingos have a mostly white pale pink color and their long, curved beaks are black and white. The legs of this species are light blueish gray with bright pink joints. **Lamellae** line both jaws to aid in filter feeding. The wings of the Chilean flamingo have black feathers with crimson on the edge. Chilean flamingos have a large wingspan of 50-60 inches and can reach heights up to 57 inches tall. These flamingos weigh 5.5-8 pounds, with the males usually weighing more than the females ([Encyclopedia of Life](#)).

**Behavior:** Chilean flamingos are found in very large flocks of up to tens of thousands of birds. Flamingos are excellent swimmers and fliers. They migrate in a similar V formation to geese. They also communicate with loud goose-like calls in the air. Chilean flamingos are often seen standing on one leg with the other tucked close to the body. This behavior conserves body heat. Flamingos spend a great deal of time preening the feathers to keep them waterproof ([Animal Diversity](#)). Flamingos filter the water for food, similar to a baleen whale. They will stir up the mud with their feet and hold its head **upside down** in the water to capture food particles ([Woodland Park Zoo](#)).

**Reproduction:** Chilean flamingos have several different **courtship behaviors** to attract a mate. A monogamous breeding pair will cooperatively build a pillar-shaped nest in the mud and both parents share in the incubation of the egg. The egg is incubated for 26-31 days. Upon hatching, the flamingo chick is **gray in color** and will not gain pink color for 2-3 years ([Lincoln Park Zoo](#)). The chicks rely on the **parents for food** for the first 65-70 days after birth. The young reach sexual maturity at 6 years of age ([Encyclopedia of Life](#)).

**Diet:** Wild: aquatic crustaceans and other marine invertebrates, zooplankton, algae, and phytoplankton insects, mollusks, aquatic or marine worms,  
Zoo: Flamingo pellets

**Conservation:** The flamingo is listed as near threatened by [IUCN Redlist](#). Over the next three generations, the population is expected to undergo a rapid population decline. This decline is mostly due to egg-harvesting, hunting, habitat degradation, and disturbances from tourism. Our zoo participates in the Chilean Flamingo Species Survival Plan.

**FYI:** Flamingo chicks begin vocalizing hours before hatching while still inside the egg. This allows a bond to form with the parents so they can be easily located once hatched ([Woodland Park Zoo](#)). Flamingoes turn pink from pigments found in the invertebrates and algae they eat ([Live Science](#)).



## Range & Habitat:

Inhabit muddy, shallow alkaline and brackish lakes. They live in warm and tropical environments, and range from sea level, along the coast, to high altitudes in the Andes. Found in temperate South America from central Peru through the Andes and Uruguay to Tierra del Fuego.



**Lifespan:** up to 44 years in captivity,  
50+ years in the wild.

**Special Adaptations:** They have bristle-like projections on the tongue to filter water.

## IUCN Conservation Status:

Near Threatened

