

How baby flamingos become pink

Did you know that flamingos are white when they are born? This video shows the fascinating red milk that they drink to give them their beautiful pink colour.

Tasks

Do the preparation task first. Then watch the video and do the exercises. You can also read the transcript.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. curved
2. a bill
3. to filter
4. algae
5. a chick
6. to feed
7. your throat
8. to drain something

Definition

- a. plants that grow in water, usually very small and with no roots or leaves
- b. to reduce something (energy, colour, money, etc.) to a point where there is not enough of it
- c. a baby bird
- d. the hard part of a bird's mouth (also known as 'a beak')
- e. a shape which is not straight
- f. to extract small, solid items from a liquid
- g. the area inside your neck, at the back of your mouth
- h. 1) to give food to a person or animal; 2) to eat (this usage is only for animals or babies)

Task 1

Write a number (1–5) to put the ideas in the order they are mentioned in the video.

- How adult flamingos produce milk
- Why adult flamingos become less pink
- How adult flamingos eat
- The shape of the baby flamingo's bill
- How baby flamingos become pink

Task 2

Circle the phrase that best completes the sentence.

1. The shape of the adult flamingo's bill allows it to ...
 - a. catch fish under water.
 - b. drink water.
 - c. extract pieces of food from water.
2. The baby flamingo's bill is ...
 - a. curved.
 - b. shaped like a key.
 - c. straight.
3. The adult flamingo produces milk ...
 - a. in the fat under its skin.
 - b. inside its mouth.
 - c. inside its neck.
4. The baby flamingo receives milk from ...
 - a. both its mother and father.
 - b. its father.
 - c. its mother.
5. The narrator says that when the adult flamingos lose a little of their colour, it is ...
 - a. a common feeling for all parents.
 - b. a dangerous moment.
 - c. necessary for them to wash themselves.
6. The baby flamingo continues to receive milk until ...
 - a. it becomes a similar colour to its parents.
 - b. its beak becomes curved.
 - c. its feet become bigger.

Discussion

Have you ever seen a flamingo? What kinds of birds do you commonly see?

Transcript

These Caribbean flamingos are the brightest members of the flamingo family. They are unusual in many ways.

Their curved bill is a specialist bit of equipment, containing a unique structure that filters algae and small crustaceans out of the water.

And this bill is the key to their parenting strategy.

Their chicks are born with straight bills, that can't yet filter water to feed.

So these bird parents produce milk. It's made in their throat and comes out of their mouths but has the same amount of protein and fat as milk.

The hormone prolactin stimulates milk production, the same as for humans. Except, here, both parents have prolactin, so dad produces milk too.

The milk is bright red, as it contains the chemicals that give the chick its pink colour until it can feed itself. The feeding drains the parents of their own colour and they start to look a bit washed out, a feeling most parents are familiar with!

With both parents working together, they manage to produce enough milk to sustain their chick until its bill has developed and it's able to stand on its own two feet.

Answers

Preparation task

1. e
2. d
3. f
4. a
5. c
6. h
7. g
8. b

Task 1

- 3 How adult flamingos produce milk
- 5 Why adult flamingos become less pink
- 1 How adult flamingos eat
- 2 The shape of the baby flamingo's bill
- 4 How baby flamingos become pink

Task 2

1. c
2. c
3. c
4. a
5. a
6. b