

Catie PolICASTRO  
Education Specialist  
8/23/2017  
"Flocking" to the Zoo

When visiting the zoo, guests stop to admire the flock of Chilean flamingos with their bright, pink, feathers. While watching these unique birds, many ponder "how do flamingos come by their brightly colored plumage?" It's because of what they eat!

Flamingos use their beak to filter small plants and animals from the mudflats and lagoons of central and southern South America. Their beak is adapted for a special feeding technique where they put their head upside down and hold it at the surface of the water. In this position, the beak functions like a strainer allowing water and small food items to fit through while keeping bigger items out. To access more food the flamingos will do a stomping, shuffle, movement with their feet to move food items from the pool floor closer to the surface of the water.

Once the flamingos have filtered their meal, their body goes to work digesting the food. Their digestive system is able to process the orange and yellow pigments from the small crustaceans they eat and those pigments color their feathers. The Chilean flamingo consumes more plant matter than other flamingos and therefore has a reduced ability to process pigments from its food, causing them to be a pale pink color compared to other species.

If you still have questions about the flamingos there are daily Keeper Chats at the Chilean Flamingo habitat at 1 pm. At the Keeper Chat, you'll have the opportunity to find out more about these amazing animals from the keepers who care for them and ask the keepers any questions you have about the flamingos.

This year, the flamingos at Lee Richardson Zoo are getting extra attention. A new sales tax is up for a vote in November which would raise funds for a variety of city projects including projects at the zoo. Three zoo projects would be funded through the sales tax if it passes and the flamingos would benefit through the construction of a completely new habitat. One project would be a new flamingo habitat to replace the current one which is aging. To learn more

about the sales tax ballot proposal and the projects visit the City of Garden City website [www.garden-city.org](http://www.garden-city.org).

Finally, A Wild Affair “Evening in Rio” is just around the corner. Rio is not known for Chilean flamingos, their habitat stops south of Rio de Janeiro around the southern edge of Brazil, but Rio is known for its over-the-top celebrations. Celebrations in Rio feature samba dancers dressed in brightly feathered outfits. With so many feathers, some might say that the outfits look like a bedazzled flamingo. The zoo will be closed September 9th for the Friends of Lee Richardson Zoo to prepare for the fundraiser. This event starts at 6 pm on September 9th and offers adults a wild evening. As you enter the event you will meander through the zoo trails, being greeted by Ambassador Animals and Zoo Docents. As you continue down the path, you’ll pass the flamingo exhibit where you might spot them doing their own samba to stir up food to filter from their pool. Once at the event site, guests will enjoy music by Mike Bennis and Buckner Creek Band, adult beverages, food samples from different local restaurants and caterers, as well as bid on unique items in both the live and silent auctions.

Tickets are all inclusive and are on sale now for \$40 per person (guests must be 21 or over to enter) at Lee Richardson Zoo, Blue Fox Boutique, Patrick Dugan’s Coffee House, and Ward’s Garden Center or online at [www.folrz.org](http://www.folrz.org). Make sure to "flock" on over to purchase your tickets soon because this early bird pricing won’t last; tickets will be \$50 per person after Labor Day.