

JAMES'S FLAMINGO

Phoenicoparrus jamesi

- **Range:** High Andean plateaus of Peru, Chile, Bolivia and Argentina, with small numbers occurring around the lowland Laguna Mar Chiquita, Argentina.
- **Habitat:** During the breeding season, they inhabit wetlands in shallow saline or alkaline lakes, in elevations mainly above 2,300 to 4,900. In the nonbreeding season, they disperse to lower altitudes where they can be seen gathering in shallow wetlands.
- **Nutrition:** They feed mainly with small diatoms by filtering large amounts of mud that is rich in bacteria and organic matter as it feeds.
- **Reproduction:** 1 egg. Incubation 27 – 31 days.
- **Social structure:** Colonies made up of hundreds and even thousands of individuals.
- **Weight:** 1.5 to 4.1 kg.
- **Dimensions:** Height 90 – 110cm. Wingspan 1.40 – 1.87 m.
- **Estimated population in the wild:** 106,000 individuals.
- **Lifespan:** 20 – 30 years.
- **Threats:** Levels of diatoms may be affected by climate change to the detriment of flamingo food resources. Egg-collecting and hunting were intensive during the 20th century, but have been controlled in protected areas. Mining activity and the associated demand for water, as well as tourism are further threats to some wetlands.
- **IUCN Status:** NT (near threatened).

Why are flamingos selected as the ambassador species for the campaign?

- Flamingos are affected by same issues as other wetland inhabitants and they are also dependant on fresh water to replenish salt pans and other habitats. They symbolize wetlands – fragile and beautiful but tough and resilient. As charismatic species they are clearly popular with public, based on advertisements and zoo shop merchandise in which flamingos appear, and they are kept in approximately 2/3 of member institutions.

Did you know?

- The James's flamingo, or Puna flamingo, is the smallest flamingo in South America.
- It is the rarest of the family Phoenicopteridae.
- They have the shortest bill of any flamingo with a very small filtering area.
- During the winter they have to migrate as the high-altitude wetlands freeze, making it impossible to access the diatoms and algae in these lakes.
- Breeding is closely linked to rainfall patterns and takes place only when water levels are optimal – neither excessively high nor too low.
- James's flamingo is also thought to contribute to wetland conservation through its regular use of these habitats, as it continuously disturbs the sediment and enriches the environment with nutrients from its waste products.
- James' flamingos were named in honour of the English naturalist Henry Berkeley James, who financed several expeditions to Chile to gather bird specimens. During one of these journeys, he acquired a previously unidentified flamingo specimen, which was later named after him to recognize his contribution.