

## ***A Peek Inside the Beak***

When a flamingo needs a bite to eat, it sinks its head, upside down, into the water and swings its large, scoop-shaped beak back and forth. This lets the water flow through, while trapping the shrimp and algae it dines on with bristly, hairlike structures that act like a filter.

Its tongue moves back and forth like a piston, sucking water in through the filter as it pulls backward, and expelling it from the beak as it pushes forward.

Salt water is home to flamingos' preferred dining delicacies, but like most animals (and humans!), they need to drink *fresh* water. So, God equipped the flamingo with a special gland in its head to filter out salt, which it expels out its nostrils.

As if that weren't impressive enough, flamingos aren't bothered by hot, cold or even super-high alkalinity in their water. Some flamingos, like the lesser flamingo of Tanzania, live safely in caustic lakes, where the tough skin of their legs protects them from incredibly high alkalinity levels, enough to melt the skin of most animals. And flamingos are even capable of drinking (nearly) boiling water from a geyser!

Pictured: American flamingo  
(*Phoenicopterus ruber*)



***Photography by James Capo***

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