



BE A FLAMINGO BIOLOGIST

K-5 Animal Behavior Observation Activity

OVERVIEW

In this activity, students will hone their observation and data collection skills by conducting research on the flamingos at the zoo. Use the [flamingo fact sheet](#) to learn more about these birds before your zoo visit. The pre-visit preparation will ensure that students are prepared to conduct a behavior observation of the flamingos during their zoo visit.

KEY TERMS

- **Focal animal:** an animal selected for a behavioral observation

PRE-VISIT PREPARATION

- **Brainstorm possible behaviors:** Have your students list some of the behavior that they think the flamingos will exhibit over a period of several minutes. Some examples might include aggression, feeding/foraging, preening, resting/standing, or walking.
- **Create a data sheet for your students to use:** For each time interval (10 or 15 seconds for a two minute period is recommended), the data sheet should include a row with every behavior listed. Two sample data sheets are included, or you and your students can make your own.
 - **K-2 Data Sheet (page 3):** Primary students might find it helpful to have behaviors represented by simple illustrations or clip art images of people doing them. At each interval, students can circle the image matching the behavior they observe. Before your trip, review the behaviors with students so they will know what to look for when conducting their observations.
 - **3-5 Data Sheet (page 4):** Older students can brainstorm and describe some of the behaviors that they think they will see while observing the flamingos. In the top row of the data sheet, students can write a description or draw a picture to represent each behavior. While conducting observations at the zoo, students can mark the behavior observed at each interval. Noteworthy behavior and other observations can be described on the lines below the chart.
- **Practicing by acting out behaviors:** Students can practice conducting behavior observations by having half the class role-play animal behaviors and the other half record data. Choose a species of animal that is familiar to your students and have the whole class together practice role playing behaviors you brainstormed as a class. Make sure that each of the behaviors can be easily distinguished from the others. Then, divide the class in half, with one half as the 'animals' and the other half as the 'researchers'. Have each researcher choose one individual '*focal animal*' to observe. For three minutes, have the 'animals' role play the animals (using the behaviors) and have the researchers use the data sheet you created to mark the behaviors they observe at the end of every 10 or 15 seconds. You can keep time and call out "now" at every interval to help the researchers. Then switch 'animals' and 'researchers' and run the practice observations once more.

AT THE ZOO

Materials to bring with you to the zoo:

- Data sheets (one or two per student)
- Pencils
- Zoo map (www.zoo.org/maps)



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- Clipboard (or stiff cardboard with a binder clip)
- Stopwatches/wristwatches/cell phones with stopwatch function

Directions:

- At the flamingo exhibit, each student should select an individual animal (referred to as their "*focal animal*") to observe. Encourage students to select different animals so that as many animals as possible can be included in the data collection.
- Observations can be made every 10 or 15 seconds over a two minute time period (short intervals allow more behaviors to be recorded and minimize distraction time between noting behaviors). Have a chaperone keep track of time and call out 'now' at the end of every 10 or 15 seconds, so students know when to make and record their observations. At each interval, students should circle the behavior on the chart that they observe the animal doing at that moment.

POST-VISIT ACTIVITY

Students can compile, analyze and present their observations to the rest of the class using visual aids, such as photos, drawings, charts and graphs. Presentations can include what behaviors they observed and which behaviors were more frequently observed than others. Students could visually display with a chart or graph which one or two behaviors were most frequent and share their hypotheses for why those behaviors were most frequent.



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Flamingo Behavior Observation Chart

Researcher's Name(s): _____

Date: _____

Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

| | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| 15 seconds | Aggression | Foraging | Preening | Resting/Standing | Walking |
| 30 seconds | Aggression | Foraging | Preening | Resting/Standing | Walking |
| 45 seconds | Aggression | Foraging | Preening | Resting/Standing | Walking |
| 60 seconds (1 minute) | Aggression | Foraging | Preening | Resting/Standing | Walking |
| 75 seconds | Aggression | Foraging | Preening | Resting/Standing | Walking |
| 90 seconds | Aggression | Foraging | Preening | Resting/Standing | Walking |
| 105 seconds | Aggression | Foraging | Preening | Resting/Standing | Walking |
| 120 seconds (2 minutes) | Aggression | Foraging | Preening | Resting/Standing | Walking |



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Flamingo Behavior Observation Chart

Researcher's Name(s): _____

Date: _____

Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

- Choose one individual (focal animal) to watch for several minutes. After each 15 second interval, put a mark under the behavior you observe the focal animal doing **at that moment**.
- If you see any other behaviors you think are interesting or noteworthy, describe them in the "Behavior Notes" section.

| Minutes:Seconds | Aggression | Foraging | Preening | Resting/Standing | Walking |
|-----------------|------------|----------|----------|------------------|---------|
| 0:15 | | | | | |
| 0:30 | | | | | |
| 0:45 | | | | | |
| 1:00 | | | | | |
| 1:15 | | | | | |
| 1:30 | | | | | |
| 1:45 | | | | | |
| 2:00 | | | | | |

Behavior Notes: _____
