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Bird Features: How Birds Get Their Food

Birds have feathers, wings, and bills. But there are so many different kinds of birds, each with their own features.

Birds live in different habitats all over the world. They eat different kinds of food. Each kind of bird has body parts that help it get the food it eats.



Swallows Eat Flying Insects

Swallows are superb flyers. Their long wings help them glide and change direction quickly in the air.

Swallows catch their food while they fly. Their bills are short and wide. They have large mouths that can scoop insects out of the air.



This picture shows different kinds of swallows.



This barn swallow has a small beak. Its large mouth helps it catch flying insects.



Like other swallows, a tree swallow has long wings and a slender body.

Cardinals and Grosbeaks Eat Seeds

Cardinals and grosbeaks live in scrub, woodland, and open areas where they can find seeds. Their beaks are thick and shaped like a cone. Their strong jaw muscles can crack even very hard seeds.

Finches and sparrows also eat seeds and have strong, conical bills. Their bill shapes have a lot of variety, depending on the kinds of seeds they eat.



Different kinds of grosbeaks and cardinals.
The cardinals have crests on their heads and long tails.



A black-headed grosbeak perches on a tree branch.



Evening grosbeak.



Northern cardinal.

Woodpeckers Eat Wood Grubs and Other Insects

Woodpeckers grasp tree trunks with their feet. Some of their toes point forward and some point backward. Their claws dig into bark.

Word Connection

grub—the early life stage (larva) of a beetle.

Woodpeckers have strong, straight, chisel-shaped beaks. They use their beaks to chisel into tree bark to find **grubs** and other insects. If you walk near a feeding woodpecker, you may hear it thump the tree as it pecks for food.



Different kinds of woodpeckers.

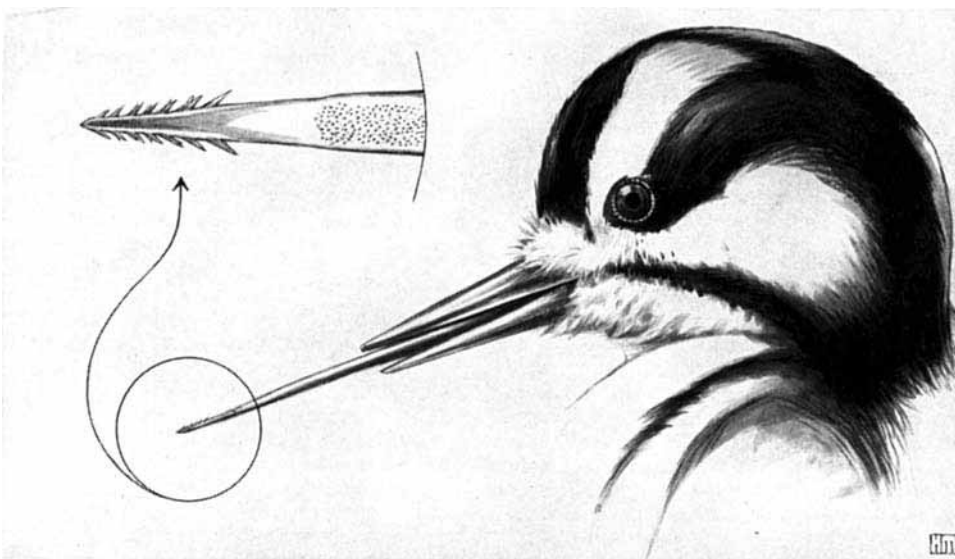


The acorn woodpecker has two toes that point forward, and two toes that point backward. Its toes and claws help it hold onto the side of a tree.

Woodpecker tongues are very long, and coil inside the bird's head. The tip of the tongue is barbed or sticky. Woodpeckers can extend their tongue deep into a crack or crevice to spear their food.

Habitats Fact

The tongues of some kinds of woodpeckers can extend as far as 13 cm (5 inches) out of the bill!

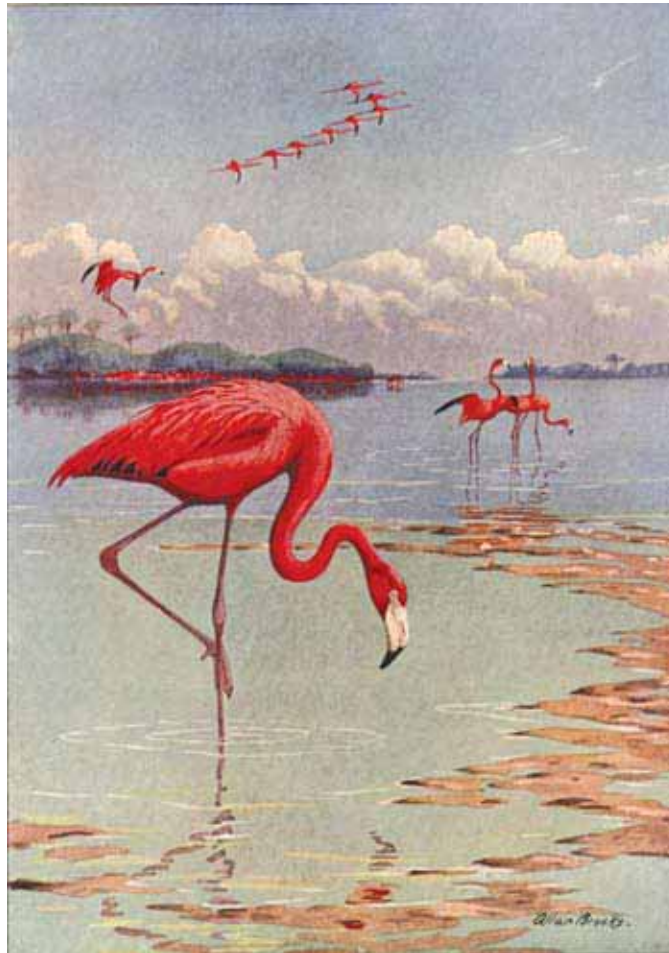


A woodpecker's tongue can shoot out from its beak. Its tongue has a barbed tip.

Flamingos Eat Small Plants and Animals from Water

Flamingos live on lakes, lagoons, or ponds. They also live on freshwater wetlands and tidal mudflats. They eat brine shrimp and other small organisms in the water.

Flamingos have a bill that is different from any other bird. It is large and thick, with a bend in the middle.

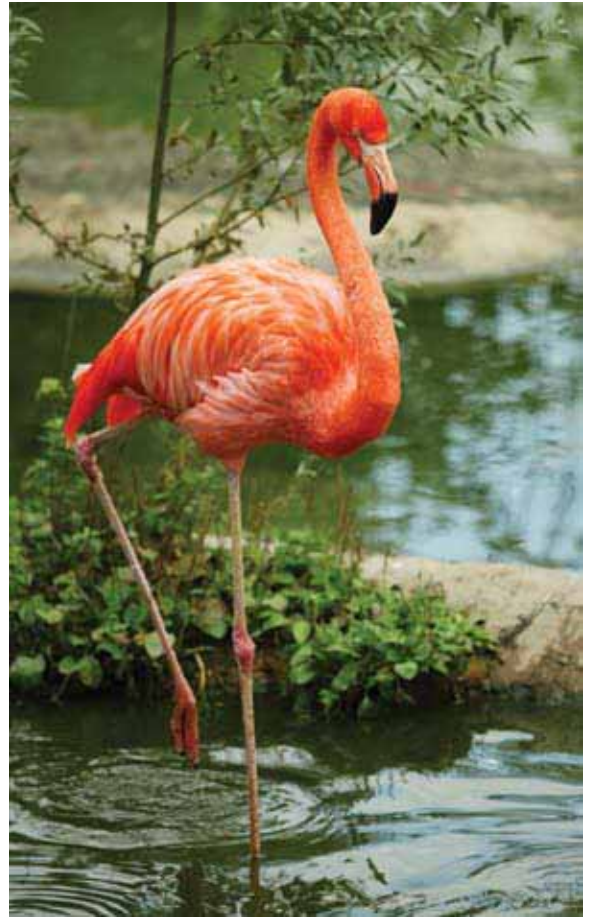


Flamingos wade in water and scoop their food out of the water.

When a flamingo eats it dips its bill in the water upside-down and backwards. It scoops up food and water. It uses its bill and tongue to filter food from the water.



A flamingo dips its head into the water to eat.



A flamingo wades into the water on long legs.

Flamingos have webbed toes that help them walk in mud or swim. Their long legs and long necks allow them to wade and feed in shallow water or deeper water. When they swim they can stick their long necks underwater to get food.

Robins Eat Worms

Robins feed on the ground. They hop a few meters at a time, and cock their heads looking for worms or other prey. When they see food they hop forward and grab it with their bills. They eat worms, beetle grubs, caterpillars, and grasshoppers. They also eat fruits and berries.

A robin bill is slender but not sharply pointed. It works well for soft foods like worms, insects, and berries. It is not good at cracking seeds.



The American Robin can make its home in many kinds of places: in forests, on farms, or in the city.



A robin searches for food on the ground.



A robin feeds its babies with prey it found on the ground.

Hawks, Eagles, and Ospreys Eat Meat

Some birds are hunters. Hawks, eagles, and ospreys fly over the ground or water. They have good eyesight to spot prey. When they see food, they dive down and grab it with their strong, clawed feet. They hold onto the food with their feet and tear the flesh with their hooked beaks.

Hawks and eagles may eat birds, mammals, amphibians, fish, and invertebrates. Ospreys usually eat fish that they snatch from the water. Their claws can grasp slippery prey.



A hawk uses its strong legs and sharp talons to capture its prey.



Red-tailed hawk.



Bald eagles have strong, hooked beaks and strong feet with claws.

Hummingbirds Eat Nectar

Hummingbirds are the smallest of all birds. Their tiny bodies weigh between 2.5 and 8 grams (0.1 to 0.3 ounces). Their wings move so fast they look like a blur. Unlike other birds, hummingbirds can hover in the air. This helps them fly close to flowers and pause long enough to eat. They stick their long, thin bills into flowers to get nectar.

Hummingbirds live in many places: tropical rainforests, meadows, and deserts. They can find flowers with nectar in all these places.



The wings of a flying hummingbird are hard to see.



An Allen's hummingbird puts its bill deep into a flower as it feeds.



An Anna's hummingbird perches on a small branch.