

YZC Animal of the Month, August 2012

Greater Flamingo

Phoenicopterus roseus



If you're looking out for a flurry of pink feathers in you'll be disappointed on this occasion – the Greater Flamingo specimen we have on display is a

skeleton. However, the bones are fascinating, and show some wonderful characteristics of this big wading bird from Africa, Southern Europe, the Middle East and Southern and South West Asia.

The Greater Flamingo is the largest species of flamingo. They can be found in enormous flocks – imagine coming across 40,000 large pale pink birds in one place! The pink colour seen in their feathers comes from the

algae and tiny crustaceans in their diet. But enough about the feathers that we can't see on this specimen. What can we say about these magnificent birds from the skeleton?

The Greater Flamingo skeleton shows the long long legs of this animal. The body by comparison looks tiny. The skeleton is displayed in the pose it would have when feeding – with its head down – so you'll need to look near the floor for this bit. Flamingos feed in water, with much of the head submerged. The beak is unmistakably that of a flamingo. Look at its shape – deep, and curved downwards. Inside the beak are comb-like plates that filter tiny bits of food out of the water. You can see now why the long neck is important in this animal! If you have time count the number of bones in the neck. Now find the giraffe – a mammal that has an extremely long neck. How many bones can you count there?