

# Zoo helps to build nests for flamingo flock



It is not only the pandas who need help at Edinburgh Zoo. The zoo's bird keepers are getting stuck in the mud as they help their flamingo flock build their nests in readiness for their flamingo babies.

Breeding season for the Zoo's 34 Chilean flamingos is just around the corner and the keepers are building the "mud pie" nests to help stimulate courtship behaviour, such as head flagging, wing saluting, vocalising and aggression between competing males. Around 25 nests will be built by the keepers, each ranging in shape and size.



Sean Meechan, Birds Keeper at Edinburgh Zoo, said:

"To be a zoo keeper you really can't be afraid to get a little dirty sometimes and when it comes to messy jobs this is one of the more entertaining ones. We make each nest a little different – some will be tall and thin while others will be short and squat – so that the female birds can then select the nest that suits her preference. Once the keepers have made a start on the nests, the flamingos will then add to it themselves, scraping extra mud up the sides or adding to the nest's height. We use a clay-based soil and keep the area wet to make it easier for the birds to move the mud.

"Flamingo nest-building is an annual tradition, and this year we have increased the size of the nest site, providing more

space between each mud pile. We have a well-established flock of Chilean flamingos at Edinburgh Zoo – three 53-year-old males are actually the oldest residents at the Zoo.”

In the wild, these flamboyant birds will build their nests on the banks of estuaries, lagoons and mud flats, using their beaks to create large columns out of the muddy ground.

Although the wild population currently sits around 300,000 the species is increasingly under threat from habitat loss, egg-harvesting, hunting and tourism-related disturbance.