



# Marine Education Poster Contest 2013

Sponsored by Blue Lagoon Island & Vendors from Nassau

Dolphin Encounters-Project BEACH

Contest Deadline: February 28th, 2013



## Flight for Survival: Birds of the Bahamas!

What comes to mind when you hear the word survival? The ability to find food or shelter? Survival is the struggle to remain alive! Many birds spend a lot of their energy on hunting, some even on avoiding being hunted. Various species have to migrate to The Bahamas in the winter for food. In colder regions of the world, food may be buried under snow or even under ice!

Not only does winter effect food sources, location does as well. The human population is continually growing and because of this many birds are affected by deforestation and pollution. We will take a look at three different birds—ospreys, flamingos & pelicans—found in The Bahamas and the different ways they struggle to survive!



### The Brown Pelican: Feathered Star of Flipper!

Pete the Pelican was the famous feathered star of the movie Flipper! The Brown Pelican is a very large, stocky bird with a dark brown and gray body, white chest and a very long gray bill. With a wingspan near 7 feet, they fly up to 30mph!



This bird can be found around coastal areas with sandy beaches and lagoons, such as on Andros, Eleuthera, Inagua and Bimini.

Brown Pelicans may fly in a "V" formation but usually fly in a single file line, low over the water. They have amazing vision which enables them to see through the water. Unlike any other Pelican, they can dive into the water from heights of up to 50 feet to capture their prey!

Pelicans eat a variety of fish, ranging from herring, mullet, and sheephead and also feed on shellfish. Using its bill like a net, it can hold 2-3 times more fish than its stomach can hold, with close to 3 gallons of fish and water!!! A pelican only uses the pouch to scoop up fish, not to carry them around. After capturing their prey and a lot of water, they tip their bill



downward to drain the water out before swallowing the fish. Sometimes gulls will try to steal fish from the pelicans pouch. They will even perch on the pelican's head and wait for just the right moment to grab a fish!

Pelicans may nest in trees, bushes or on the ground. Nests built in trees will consist of sticks, reeds and straws.

On islands without predators, they often build on the ground and their nest will consist of feathers and soil. The choices in nesting have put the pelican's eggs and young at risk to predators like gulls, skunks and cats. Adults and young alike are continually threatened by human disturbance and entanglement with marine debris.



### The West Indian Flamingo: The Pink Giant

The West Indian Flamingo is a shy bird with a large curved bill, long legs and neck, and a beautiful bright pink colour. They live in remote desert-like spots, dry islands and shorelines where salt is made where few other creatures can survive.



Flamingos are filter feeders, eating microscopic plants and animals found in ponds and mud, mainly salt marsh fly larvae (yum!). They also eat brine shrimp, rich in beta-carotene which gives flamingos their vibrant pink feathers.

These birds separate their food from the water or mud by pumping and straining it through their bill. Cool facts: flamingos have 19 bones that make up their long neck AND are the only birds which feed with their bill upside down!

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## The West Indian Flamingo continued...

Flamingos are very social birds and love to remain in flocks. Their cone-shaped nest is made up of mud, shells, grass and pebbles, with a flat top and strong base.



After eggs hatch, chicks feed on special red-colored 'milk' - provided by both parents—that is very nutritious.

Nesting on the ground puts these birds at risk from predators. However, hunting in the 1950's almost lead to this species'



extinction, leaving fewer than 5,000 birds. It was the teamwork of the National Audubon Society and The Bahamas National Trust that saved flamingos and led to a healthy, growing population now estimated at 60,000 individuals!

Flamingos can be found mainly on Great Inagua and are slowly re-inhabiting Acklins, Mayaguana, Crooked Island, Exumas, Long Island and Andros. Even though their numbers are impressive, this bird is still endangered and protected from hunting or capture by The Bahamas Wild Bird Act. As the national bird of The Bahamas, the flamingo needs our proud protection!

## The Osprey: Fisherman of the Skies!

Often called the "fish hawk" or "sea eagle", the osprey is a fish-eating bird of prey and can be found on all islands in the Bahamas. This amazing hunter has razor sharp hook-shaped talons with a reversible toe that can swivel backwards to grasp a fish in a death lock.



These birds are very skilled hunters with over 80% of their hunts ending in a catch. An osprey can spot a fish from over 130 feet in the air and dive into the water at a speed over 25mph! With a 6-foot wingspan, this 5-pound lightweight champion is one to be taken seriously!

A distinctive eye stripe runs down the side of its head, masking the golden eyes and icy blue ring like the "Face of a bandit"! The osprey has an all white under belly and head which makes it easy to be told apart from its cousins, hawks and eagles.



Ospreys mate for life and make several nests of sticks, branches, driftwood, kelp and seaweed. Females will lay 3-4 eggs in the largest nest. The nests can be found in dead trees, tall poles or near ponds. Both parents take turns protecting and feeding the chicks, but if there is too little food, only the bigger and stronger ones survive.



Ospreys live on average 7-10 years but can get up to 30 years old!

In the 1950's, this bird was endangered due to widespread use of pesticide called DDT, used to kill mosquitoes and other insects. DDT made the egg shells of the birds weak and brittle. To encourage the osprey numbers to grow, DDT was banned and scientists built man-made nests at the top of electricity poles, resulting in over 600,000 birds worldwide today – a true conservation success story!



## Silent Birds: Protect them for our future!

The pelican, flamingo, and osprey may all be very different from each other but they do have one thing in common: SURVIVAL. Surviving in the wild is already difficult. Let's pledge to take an active role in protecting and conserving these species!

**Trash** can hurt many kinds of animals, especially birds. When an animal is **entangled**, such as in plastic or fishing line, the debris can strangle or suffocate the animal or become so tight that it leads to wounds and infection.

Entanglement can also severely limit an animal's ability to fly, swim or even escape predators.

When an animal **eats trash**, it can cause starvation or malnutrition when the items cannot be digested or broken down in the body. An object with sharp edges can damage the airway or stomach of the animal leading to infection or pain.

Small changes to your behavior will add up! Practice conservation with the 3R's:



**Reduce, Reuse & Recycle!** For example, you can take your recycle totes to the food store instead of using new plastic bags each time OR you can refill a reusable water bottle rather than buying small bottles of water each day. And of course, making

sure litter gets in a trash can and not on the ground is essential.

Another important step is to **get involved!** Join one of these local environmental groups that helps protect nature: The Bahamas National Trust, Friends of the Environment, or BREEF. Take some time and visit your local parks and zoos to see these amazing animals in person. By making small changes, we can create a big change in our country. So whether they fly, walk or swim, we can protect the animals that share our country with us!