

A successful first flight for International Flamingo Day, 26th April 2020

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Abstract

The Flamingo Specialist Group (FSG) is always looking for new ways to engage with its audiences, be they in person or online. A prominent standing on social media, a website used as a hub for key information and a yearly newsletter containing scientific and technical articles on all aspects of flamingo ecology and management are successful ways for the FSG to meet its objectives. Missing from these ways of information sharing and engagement was an international day to bring focus on to flamingos for everyone to share in, wherever they are in the world. As no official day celebrating the six species of flamingo currently existed, the FSG decided upon 26th April as the new International Flamingo Day (IFD). The creation of a new logo for this venture, along with the production of educational materials (free to download from the FSG website) and a schedule of social media events throughout the weekend of 25th and 26th April 2020, saw IFD reach a large audience and successfully meet its aims of explaining the beauty and wonder of flamingos and their wetland homes to a wide and diverse audience. IFD will return for 2021 and beyond, and it is the hope of the FSG that it becomes a fixture in the yearly calendar of “animal themed dates”.

Resumen

El Grupo de Especialistas en Flamencos, Flamingo Specialist Group (FSG), siempre está buscando nuevas formas de interactuar con su público, ya presencial o por internet. Una posición destacada en las redes sociales, un sitio web utilizado como centro de información clave y un boletín anual que contiene artículos científicos y técnicos sobre todos los aspectos de la ecología y el manejo de los flamencos son formas exitosas para que la FSG cumpla sus objetivos. En estas formas de intercambio de información y participación, faltaba un día internacional para centrar la atención en los flamencos para que todos pudieran compartir, en cualquier lugar del mundo. Como en la actualidad no existía un día oficial para celebrar las seis especies de flamencos, la FSG decidió el 26 de abril como el nuevo Día Internacional del Flamenco (International Flamingo Day, IFD). La creación de un nuevo logotipo para esta iniciativa, junto con la producción de materiales educativos (descarga gratuita desde el sitio web de la FSG) y un calendario de eventos en las redes sociales durante el fin de semana del 25 y 26 de abril de 2020, hicieron que IFD llegara a un público numeroso y cumpliera con éxito sus objetivos de explicar la belleza y la maravilla de los flamencos y sus ambientes en los humedales a una audiencia amplia y diversa. IFD regresará en 2021 y más allá, y la FSG espera que se convierta en un elemento fijo en el calendario anual de "fechas con temas de animales".

Résumé

Le groupe de spécialistes flamants (FSG) est toujours à la recherche de nouvelles façons de dialoguer avec son public, que ce soit en personne ou en ligne. Une position de premier plan sur les médias sociaux, un site internet utilisé comme un centre d'informations clés

et une newsletter annuelle contenant des articles scientifiques et techniques sur tous les aspects de l'écologie et de la gestion des flamants roses sont des moyens efficaces pour le FSG d'atteindre ses objectifs. Il manquait à ces moyens de partage d'informations et d'engagement une journée internationale pour mettre l'accent sur les flamants roses, pour que tout le monde puisse les partager, où qu'ils soient dans le monde. Comme aucune journée officielle célébrant les six espèces de flamants roses n'existait jusqu'alors, le FSG a choisi le 26 avril pour en faire la nouvelle Journée internationale des flamants roses (IFD). La création d'un nouveau logo pour cette initiative, ainsi que la production de matériel pédagogique (téléchargeable gratuitement sur le site internet du FSG) et un calendrier d'événements sur les réseaux sociaux tout au long du week-end des 25 et 26 avril 2020, ont permis à l'IFD d'atteindre un large public et d'atteindre avec succès ses objectifs d'expliquer la beauté et les merveilles des flamants et des zones humides qu'ils habitent à un public large et diversifié. L'IFD sera de retour en 2021 et au-delà, et le FSG espère qu'il deviendra un incontournable du calendrier annuel des «dates à thème animales».

Introduction

The FSG has a strong reach on social media, its Facebook page now has over 6000 likes and nearly 6500 followers (as of November 2020). This strong social media presence was useful for the launch and running of the first International Flamingo Day (IFD), launched by the FSG in the new year of 2020, IFD aims to celebrate the exceptional nature of flamingos, their behaviour, appearance and colour, as well as the beauty, fragility and uniqueness of their wetland habitats.

The FSG has been engaging with scientists, and flamingo experts as well as non-technical flamingo audiences for from its inception; successfully educating and informing audiences via its newsletter, website and social media pages. However, no "official" date existed as a focal point for attention on flamingos for all audiences globally. Numerous species and habitats have a global date designed to focus attention, awareness and advocacy for their cause.

World Wetlands Day (2nd February) and World Migratory Bird Day (9th May or 10th October) are just two examples of annual dates that celebrate key environmental features. In some case, such as World Giraffe Day (21st June) from the Giraffe Conservation Foundation, a species-specific date has proven extremely effective in garnering

tangible support for conservation action and educational activity.

The steering committee of the FSG decided upon a suitably ornithologically-centred, flamingo-focussed date to be named as IFD, settling on the birthday of that pioneer of flamingo advertising, John James Audubon (1785-1851). The ornithologist and painter who produced the, now unique, life-size picture of the American (Caribbean) flamingo for his book "The Birds of America" (started in 1827). Audubon's role in bringing flamingos to the public's attention meant that his birthday of 26th April seemed a fitting date for IFD to run on.

To ensure IFD had real presence and branding, a logo competition was launched on the FSG's Facebook page in the new year 2020, asking the flamingo-loving online audience to design a logo specifically for IFD, featuring the name of the date and the date, and to take some inspiration in the logo design from Audubon's original flamingo design. The winning design, chosen by the co-chairs of the FSG was by produced by 8-year-old Logan. The launch of the logo, one week before IFD itself, received 132 likes and was shared 30 times, getting an overall reach of 4200 people.



The American flamingo, from Audubon's "The Birds of America", painted 1838.



The logo for International Flamingo Day, designed by one of the FSG's youngest followers. Thank you, Logan!

Although wild flamingos can be remote, and not always accessible, flamingos are common and easy to see in zoos and wildlife parks-making them excellent ambassadors for their

wild cousins and one of the best ways of explaining and enthusing the story of the wild flamingo and its wetland home. It was heartening to see the number of zoological institutions that came on board for IFD, promoting the many features of flamingos to their visitors; utilising the event as a way of celebrating not only their flamingos and flamingos out in the wild, but also the wetlands habitats that flamingos call home.

Due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, IFD was hosted as an online event by the FSG, utilising Facebook and Twitter as means of communicating with a wide audience. To encourage engagement with this online audience, #flamingostoyourfrontroom was used to bridge the gap between the virtual world and the real world. Posts, features and stories provided by the FSG on IFD were aimed at bringing flamingos closer to the lives of the online audience interacting with the day's events.

Downloadable information on each of the six species was created and available on the FSG website, and they are still available for download now. Two posters were produced for each species; one that provided key facts about the flamingo ("Fast Flamingo Facts") including its behaviour, ecology, habitat and appearance, and the other a "spotter's guide" that outlined the distinctive features of that flamingo, and what made it different from the other flamingo species. Links to YouTube clips that illustrated key behavioural features of each species were included in the online flamingo facts poster.

The FSG also produced a "what flamingo species are you" jokey personality quiz, where participants answer several questions relating to the characters, in a humanised manner, of each of the six flamingo species to find out which flamingo matched their choices. Again, this quiz was freely available on the dedicated IFD section of the FSG website.

A link to a special edition of the WWT Flamingo Diary was also provided, with this

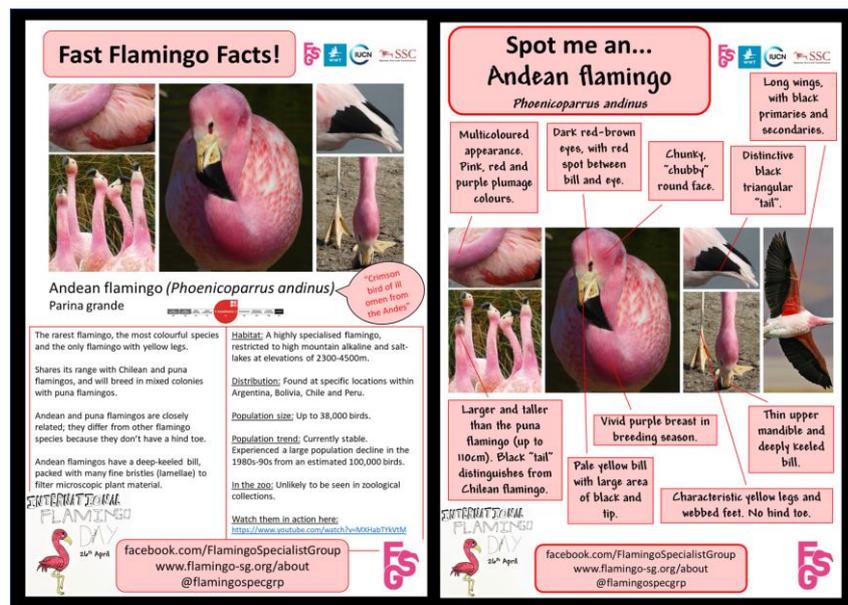
diary entry (written by the author of this article) explaining all about the need for IFD and what it aims to achieve, as well as discussing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated closure of zoological collections on flamingo-related research and conservation activities.

Posts throughout the date of 26th April engaged with audiences using photos and videos and narrated clips of the birds to explain the focus of IFD and its key aims. As of November 2020, totalling the reach for each post on IFD itself reveals 42,622 people were reached by all of the posts on that Sunday (based on Facebook analytics data). There is clearly a huge appetite for engaging with flamingos, learning more about them and sharing the work that scientists, flamingo

experts and others are currently involved in with these birds.

It is the FSG's aim to build on this solid foundation of interest in the pink birds to continue IFD into 2021 and beyond, investigating new and exciting ways of engaging our current and would-be followers in the wonderful world of the flamingo- its unique biology and behaviour, its conservation relevance and the story it can tell about its incredible wetland homes.

We hope that the readers of Flamingo 2020 will join in for IFD on the 26th April 2021 and share their stories, photos and love for the flamingos, where they are (and wherever you are) around the globe.



An example of the two forms of educational poster produced for IFD, in this case for the Andean flamingo.

Websites mentioned in this article

FSG Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/FlamingoSpecialistGroup>

Twitter @flamingospecgrp

IFD section of the FSG website <http://www.flamingo-sg.org/international-flamingo-day/>

What flamingo are you quiz <http://www.flamingo-sg.org/what-flamingo-are-you/>

International Flamingo Day WWT Flamingo Diary entry

<https://www.wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/slimbridge/diaries/flamingo-diary/2020/04/20/closed-but-still-caring-on-international-flamingo-day/18774#>

World Wetlands Day <https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/>

World Migratory Bird Day <https://www.worldmigratorybirdday.org/>

World Giraffe Day <https://giraffeconservation.org/world-giraffe-day/>