

Weird Bird Beaks

A Reading A-Z Level R Leveled Book
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WEIRD BIRD BEAKS



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Written by Joe Slade

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Fountas & Pinnell	N
Reading Recovery	30
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Table of Contents

Bearded Barbet	4
Crossbill	5
Rhinoceros Hornbill	6
Huia.....	7
Sword-Billed Hummingbird	8
Brown Pelican	9
Shoebill Stork.....	10
Spoonbill.....	11
Toucan.....	12
Glossary	14



Bearded Barbet

I am a bearded barbet, as you can see from the hairlike feathers that look like a beard on my beak. My large, thick beak also has pointed parts on the bottom like sharp teeth.

I live where it is dry in Africa, and I am a member of the woodpecker family. Like the woodpecker, I often use my tail feathers to help me hold onto trees.

I use my beak to make a hole in a dead tree or stump to build my nest. I feed on fruit and sometimes on insects.

I live with a partner and three or four other birds that help incubate our eggs and care for the chicks after they hatch.



Crossbill

I am a type of finch called a crossbill because my beak is crossed like an X, which helps me pull the seeds out of pinecones. I hold a cone with one foot and then pry open the scales of the cone to get the pine nuts.

Pinecones grow on trees called conifers, but conifers don't produce good pinecones every year, so I travel all over to find pinecones instead of living in one place. If I can't find any pine nuts to eat, I will settle for other seeds and even insects to survive.

Like the canary, which I'm related to, I sing beautiful and elaborate melodies.



Rhinoceros Hornbill

I am called a rhinoceros hornbill because of the horn on top of my beak, which I use to knock down fruit. I also use my horn to fight and sometimes to attract a mate.

When my mate is incubating eggs in a tree-hole nest, I seal her in with mud. I leave a small opening in the mud for my beak to fit through so that I can bring her food. She breaks out once our babies hatch, but then we seal them in again for safety until they are old enough to leave the nest.

If you think my horn looks weird, you should see my eyelashes! I am one of the few birds that have them.



Huia

We huias (HOO-yuhs) lived in New Zealand until we became **extinct**.

“I am the male. My beak is thick and strong.”

“I am the female. My beak is thin and curved.”

Our beaks were so different that for a long time, people thought we weren't related to each other at all. We looked alike otherwise, though, with orange fleshy **wattles** and shiny black feathers except for the white tips of our tails. We ate insects and insect larvae, spiders, and sometimes berries.



Sword-Billed Hummingbird

I am a sword-billed hummingbird, a very small bird with a very long beak; in fact, I'm the only bird with a bill longer than my body.

My beak is heavy, so when I land, I tilt my head up to reduce the strain on my neck.

I use my long beak and even longer tongue to get nectar from tube-shaped flowers.

I can stick my tongue out and pull it back in again about 13 times per second.

I live in the Andes Mountains of South America, where I build my nest of moss and leaves held together with cobwebs.



Brown Pelican

I am a brown pelican, and I have a pouch of skin under my beak that can hold a lot of fish and water—almost three gallons! I hunt in the ocean, diving down into the water from the air, although I'm not above taking fish from fishing boats.

I sometimes steal fish from other birds, but they steal from me, too. Gulls even sit on my head and back while they take fish right out of my pouch!

I have webbed feet, which I use to warm my eggs, unlike most birds, which use their breasts.



Shoebill Stork

I am called a shoebill stork because my beak is shaped like a shoe but with a hook on the end that helps me eat fish. I hunt fish by waiting for one to swim by and then falling onto it with my mouth open. Sometimes I'll eat frogs and even small crocodiles.

I live in the swamps and marshes of Africa, where I have one mate for life. We don't really hang out with other shoebill storks unless food is **scarce**. We share the work of parenting, including keeping our eggs cool by **dousing** them with mouthfuls of water and surrounding them with wet grass. Even after our chicks are born, we keep cooling them off until they grow their own feathers.



Spoonbill

I am called a spoonbill because I have a long beak that flattens out at the end like a spoon. People often confuse me with a flamingo because of my white and pink color, but not after they see my bill, which looks nothing like a flamingo's.

To find food, I sweep my bill back and forth in the mud and shallow water, using touch more than sight to hunt. When I feel something bump against my beak, I snatch it up. I like to eat frogs, **shellfish**, seaweed, and small fish, which I will **regurgitate** into my babies' mouths back at the nest.



Toucan

I am a toucan, and I have a huge and colorful beak that is actually very light because it's full of air pockets. I eat fruit, seeds, insects, eggs, and sometimes lizards. My beak helps me reach fruit while I sit in rainforest trees, and to toss it back and forth with another toucan as part of a mating **ritual**. I can also use my beak to skin the fruit.

I have two claws that point forward and two that point backward to help me hold onto branches, and my nest is in a tree hole. Baby toucans take several months to grow the large beak typical of adult toucans.



As you can see, many birds have weird beaks. Some beaks help birds to catch or eat their food. Other beaks just look incredible. Which beak is your favorite?



Glossary

- dousing** (*v.*) throwing a liquid on (p. 10)
- extinct** (*adj.*) no longer living anywhere (p. 7)
- regurgitate** (*v.*) to throw up partially-digested food (p. 11)
- ritual** (*n.*) a repeated series of acts for a particular purpose (p. 12)
- scarce** (*adj.*) hard to find; rare (p. 10)
- shellfish** (*n.*) animals that have shells and live in the water (p. 11)
- wattles** (*n.*) flaps of skin that hang from birds' necks (p. 7)