

# Houston Zoo at Home

## BROWN PELICANS

### Which Beak is Best?

**Ages: 8-12**

**Supplies:**

**Bird food:** raisins, sunflower seeds, rice cereal in water, water,

**Beaks:** scissors, clothespin, tweezers, straw, pliers, strainer, eye dropper, bowls

Birds don't have teeth, but they do have beaks! The beak is made of keratin, the same thing your hair and fingernails is composed of. The keratin on the bird's beak dries and become hard so the beak is strong and durable. Birds rely on their beaks for many tasks, gathering or capturing food, constructing nests, and defense. Gathering or capturing their food is the most important use of the beak. Beaks come in all different shapes, sizes and colors specifically suited to each species.

Beaks are specialized for the individual's diet. Birds of prey such as an eagle have a sharp, hooked beak for ripping or tearing their prey. A flamingo's beak is used like a sieve to filter out everything but the food. Pelicans have a very long beak with a pouch that can expand when trying to catch fish. The pouch can hold about 3 gallons of water. After the water drains out the pelican swallows the fish. Hummingbirds have long, needle like beaks that fit perfectly into flowers.

**Instructions:** Place each food item in a different bowl. Lay out the variety of tools (or 'beaks') in front of the children. Share with the group that there is a 'best beak' for each type of food and they will have to figure it out. The raisins represent meat and the 'beak' must be able to cut it in half. The sunflower seeds represent seeds and nuts and the 'beak' must be able to crack the shell. The rice cereal represents fish and the 'beak' must pick it up without the water. The water represents nectar and the 'beak' must be able to collect it. Once a tool or 'beak' has been assigned to a station, discuss with children what type of birds these beaks would belong to.

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# **Gone Fishin’**

**Ages: 4-8**

**Supplies:** strainer/colander, tub, water, legos (or other small toys that can get wet)

Pelicans are large birds with a long beak and a large throat pouch used for catching prey and draining water from the scooped-up contents before swallowing. In this activity, you’ll get the chance to act like a pelican and see how many fish you can catch with your ‘beak’.

**Instructions:** Fill a bathtub or kiddie pool with water. Place the small toys in the water. Have each child take turns catching ‘fish’ with the strainer or colander. Keep track how many they can get with each scoop and see who can get the most with one big gulp!

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