



parents fly off daily to feed and the chicks are left under the watchful eyes of appointed nannies. The flamingos feed on crustaceans, blue-green algae, and other materials they strain from the nutrient rich waters, which actually turns their feathers pink. The chicks spend their day exploring the shallow waters while the nannies keep them in a compact group to lessen the chance of predation. After a long day of foraging for food, thousands of parents fly back, turning the sky pink. One of the most fascinating things about flamingos is that they find their own chick amongst the thousands by its voice. Imagine trying to find your child in a sea of thousands of children just by voice! It is amazing to say the least.

The annual research trip is coordinated by the Dallas Zoo and two Mexican organizations: Ninos y Crias and the Ria Lagartos Reserva de la Biosfera. Dave Miller, aviculturist at the National Aviary, has traveled to Mexico for the past two years and was joined this year by Dr. Pilar Fish. Although it takes an entire year to plan, this amazing project

Once again, the National Aviary made its annual pilgrimage to the small fishing village of El Cuyo, Mexico. This area is located on the northern tip of the Yucatan peninsula and is home to the largest breeding colony of Caribbean Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*). Since all of the Caribbean flamingos live in one main area in Mexico, any single crisis could decrease their numbers dramatically. The flamingos are a threatened species due to pollution, environmental toxins, predators and diseases. The purpose of this annual conservation trip is to put identification leg bands on fledgling flamingos and collect samples for numerous research programs. The information

gathered will help identify specific problems and ways to help. For example, researchers noted that flying into power lines frequently killed flamingos. The simple solution of placing large red balls on the lines acted as a deterrent and stopped the deaths.

Flamingos are fascinating birds for many reasons. Once a year, they pick a lagoon or "Ria" and flock together by the thousands to make tall mud nests. The chicks are fed by both of the parents and remain on the nests until they are old enough to enter the water, at about ten days old. These fragile chicks will leave the nest permanently to swim to a nursery or "crèche" located on a sandbar. The

## an update on FLAMINGO

takes place in one morning. At daybreak, over a hundred local residents wade into the water and form a "human chain" around just the flamingo chicks. Approximately 400 chicks are herded into a man-made corral on the beach. Leg identification bands are placed on every bird by experienced zoo professionals. The chicks are then weighed with body measurements taken for research studies on growth. Blood and crop samples are taken from some birds to screen for diseases.