

## Pink ladies Birds' 'make-up' secrets



They are already one of the most striking sights in the natural world. Now scientists have discovered that wild flamingos use "make-up" to look more attractive to potential mates.

The birds - particularly females - rub a reddish pigment, released in oil from a gland near the base of the tail, on to their feathers to bring out their vibrant colour.

Researchers in Spain believe the appeal is not down to the eye-catching colour but the fact that the process is timeconsuming, so if a bird can afford to take time on its appearance, it must be healthy and well-fed. This makes it most attractive to other birds.

Dr Juan Amat, from the Donana Biological Station in Spain, told the journal *Behavioural Ecology and Sociobiology*. "The rubbing is time-consuming. And the more frequently the birds practise it, the more coloured they appear. If the birds stop the rubbing, [their] plumage colour fades in a few days because [the pigments] bleach quickly in the sunlight."

Dr Amat added that the brightest coloured birds started breeding first, meaning they took the best breeding sites, giving them a reproductive advantage over their paler rivals.