



FLAMINGO
FLINGO

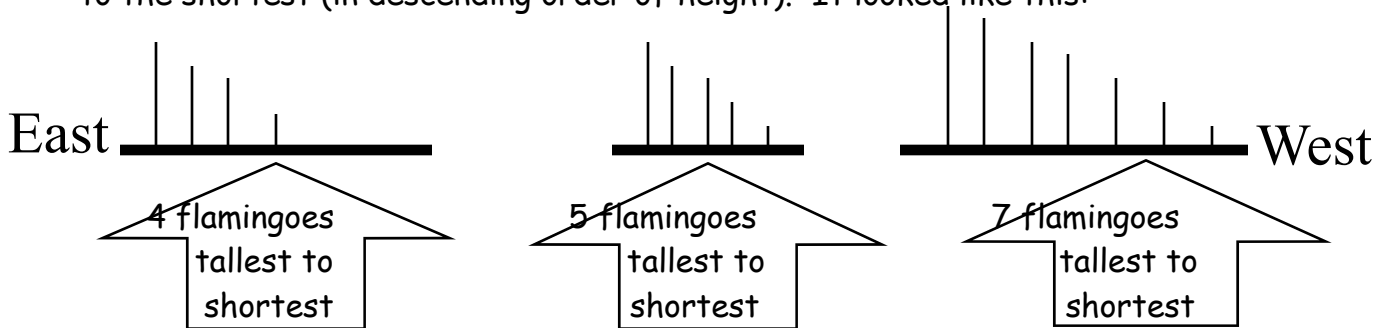
PATTERNS
AND
RELATIONS

THANK YOU TO RALPH MASON, UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA, FOR A WONDERFUL LESSON

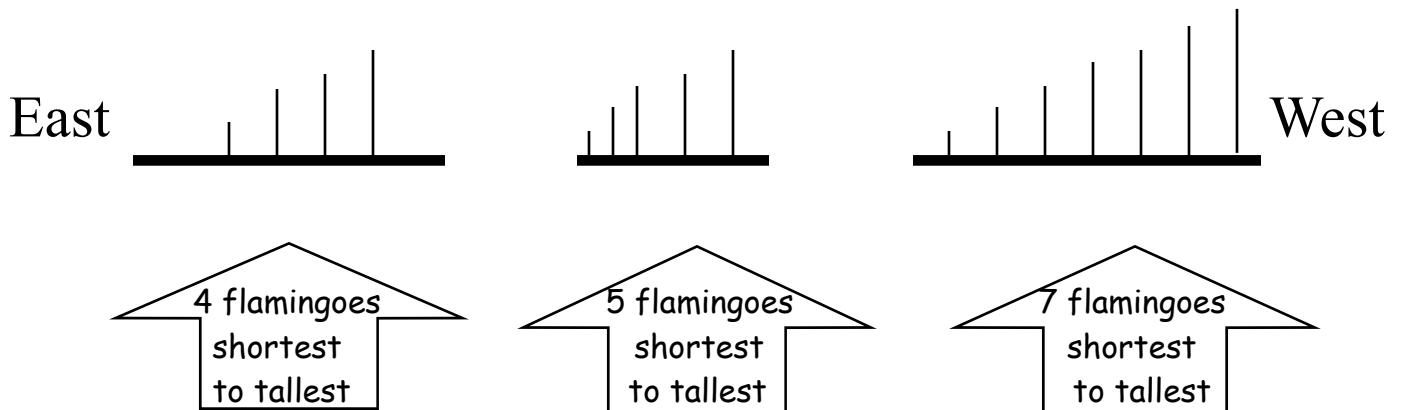
FLAMINGO FLINGS

THE STORY:

While vacationing in Florida, I couldn't help but go observe the beautiful flamingos on Lake Okeechobee and waterway. One morning as I was on my way to a golf match, I drove west, past the lake, I looked out my driver's side window to see, for the first time, many flocks of flamingos standing in Lake Okeechobee. I noticed that the flamingos were not standing in the water but rather on anything (logs and rocks) that stuck out above the water-line. I also noticed that the flamingos were in a very interesting pattern! As I drove past the groups of flamingos, I noticed the height of the flamingos gradually went from the tallest to the shortest (in descending order of height). It looked like this:



I spent the day golfing and on my drive home decided to take the same way route so that I could have a closer look at the flamingos. Driving east and looking out my passenger side window, I couldn't believe my eyes! The flamingos were still lined up on all the logs and rocks that ran east to west, however, they had completely changed the order they were in! They now looked like this:



Over the next two days I noticed this same pattern and naturally began to wonder why this happened. Do you know why the flamingos might be switching positions during the day?

I decided on the fourth day to spend the a full relaxing day on the shores of Lake Okeechobee observing the flamingos behavior patterns. My first big question was why the flamingos didn't dare put a foot in or even near the water. Why do you think that they didn't stand in the water?

The morning was quite boring as the flamingos hardly moved a muscle. However, around noon, a great deal of commotion took place in the groups. The flamingos seemed quite anxious as the sun shone over-head and began to switch places on their logs and rocks. It was not a chaotic event, rather it was quite organized and orderly. If you're still not certain why they felt a need to change positions, it had to do with the heat generated by the intense Florida sun. In the morning when the sun was in the east, they lined up so that they all had some protection from the sun. The tallest flamingo would shade the next tallest and so on down the line. In the afternoon, when the sun was in the west, they changed positions so that they once again would be able to share some shade. The reason that they were unable to go into the water was because of the numerous predators like alligators and crocodiles that were waiting for one little flamingo slip and subsequent free meal. I wondered how they could change positions without going into the water? Flamingos are not very quick to get off of the ground when flying, so that wouldn't be an option because their first few steps would require some contact with the surface of the lake. Flamingos are certainly not the most graceful bird, so trying to climb under or over each other would cause a tangled mess. I could not imagine how they could change positions but I would soon find out as noon approached.

For the first time in my life, I was able to observe the famous "FLAMINGO FLING"!! The shortest flamingo turned to the next tallest flamingo. They extended their right and left wing respectively. When their wings locked like two square dancers, they flung each other so that they didn't touch the water but assumed new positions. The small flamingo continued working his way up the line until he was on the end where the tallest flamingo once was. The second tallest flamingo repeated these steps until she was to the right of the shortest and so on until their order was completely reversed and they were shaded for the remainder of the day. The rock with two flamingos only took one fling of course to change their positions. How many flings do you think it took a group of three, four, and more to complete their change from tall to short to tall to short? You may want to try it yourself. It's fun!!

