

ARCHAEOPTERYX AND THE “DINOSAURS-TO-BIRDS” THEORY

by

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Evolutionary scientists would have us believe that dinosaurs actually still exist on Earth. In fact, these same scientists will provide testimonials about the presence of these modern-day dinosaurs in your very own backyard! But don't worry. These dinosaurs are not scaly reptilian creatures with long, sharp teeth that stand ready to devour your family pet. These modern-day “dinosaurs” weigh only a few ounces, and are quite harmless. In fact, there may be 10-20 gathered around your bird feeder even as you read this paragraph.

“Birds are dinosaurs!” This is the provocative beginning to the chapter on the origin of birds in a 1996 book, *The Evolution and Extinction of the Dinosaurs*, by D.E. Fastovsky and D.B. Weishampel. The notion that birds evolved from dinosaurs has become the dominant evolutionary theory since its introduction over twenty years ago by John Ostrom of Yale University, one of the world's leading authorities on the origin of birds (see Ostrom, 1975, 1979). The results of his dogged persistence in promoting this theory can be seen in most textbooks of vertebrate zoology. Granted, the idea of dinosaurs evolving into birds, if true, would help explain one of the most serious problems facing evolutionists today—the origin of birds. The key words here, of course, are “if true.” Actually, the theory leaves evolutionists with the problem of explaining just how those early reptiles got off the ground and into the air—and then stayed there!

Most evolutionists today contend that the scales of ancient dinosaurs evolved over millions of years into the feathers of modern-day birds, but no fossil evidence exists for this type of transformation. Considering the complex embryonic origin and subsequent development of feathers, this hardly is surprising. Scales are flat, horny plates. Feathers, on the other hand, are very intricate in structure, consisting of a central shaft from which radiate barbs and barbules. The barbules are equipped with tiny hooks that lock onto the barbs and bind the feather surface into a flat, strong, flexible vane. Also, we now realize that feathers and scales arise from different layers of the skin. Furthermore, the development of a feather is not only a complicated process, but also is fundamentally different from that of a scale—in that feathers, like hairs, develop from follicles. A hair, as it happens, is a much simpler structure than a feather. The developing feather is protected by a sheath, and forms around a bloody, conical, inductive dermal core. The developing feather not only is sandwiched between the sheath and dermal core, but also is quite complex in its design. Development of the cells that eventually will become the mature feather involves several complicated physiological processes. Cells form, then migrate and split apart in highly specific patterns to form the complex arrangement of barbs and barbules (see Lucas and Slettenhein, 1972). And so, without a true intermediate form at which to point, biologists are left on their own to invent speculative and imaginative theories about how “lizard-size” dinosaurs ever got off the ground. One cannot help but be reminded of the comments of evolutionist Richard Dickerson, writing in a special issue of *Scientific American* some years ago on the topic of the spontaneous generation of liv-

ing organisms from nonliving antecedents. After noting that there was little to no actual evidence for anything of the sort, he indicated that this was not necessarily bad since it left one free to “speculate endlessly, unfettered by inconvenient facts” (1978, 239[3]: 85). The same might be said today of the dinosaur-to-bird theories of evolutionists.

ARCHAEOPTERYX— MISSING LINK OR TRUE BIRD?

In 1860, a single refined, asymmetrical feather was discovered in the Solnhofen Limestone. Discovery of this feather came just one year after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and therefore the discussion of the origins of birds already was underway. About one month later, the first “bird” skeleton was found near Langenthal, and so evolutionists quickly gathered up their needles and began weaving the yarn of how birds fit into the evolutionary tree. This discovery at Solnhofen provided the ultimate gift of the evolutionary gods to scientists of the day who were searching diligently for something (anything!) in the fossil record that portrayed the combined traits of two distinct classes of animals. *Archaeopteryx lithographica* must have had a considerable impact on a society that already was

discussing Darwin's recent proposals regarding the theory of evolution. This “missing link” was the first real evidence that Darwinists felt supported their position of a transition from land-dwelling animals into birds. For over 100 years, evolutionists have considered *Archaeopteryx* the transitional form that allowed land-dwelling animals finally to get off the ground. Today, practically all evolution-based science textbooks contain a breathtaking photographic reproduction and description of *Archaeopteryx*, with genealogical lines showing the descent of modern birds from this ancient “intermediate.”

However, this one “missing link”—which was supposed to revolutionize mankind's understanding of bird evolution—ultimately created more problems than solutions for evolutionists. An ongoing debate as to whether or not this animal was merely a bird, or a true intermediate, has been continuing nonstop for over a century. And to add to the controversy, some scientists have raised questions publicly as to whether or not *Archaeopteryx* may even be a fraud.

According to paleontologists, the available fossils of *Archaeopteryx* reveal that it was a crow-sized animal that may have been able to fly, but probably not very far. *Archaeopteryx* had a wingspan of about 1.5 feet, was approximately 1 foot long from beak to tail, and likely weighed around 11 to 18 ounces. To date, 7 specimens of *Archaeopteryx* have been found (not including a single feather).

Many evolutionists have regarded *Archaeopteryx lithographica* as one of the most important fossils ever discovered, and as a result it has been touted as the perfect example of “evolution in action.” However, others are not so sure. In speaking of *Archaeopteryx* in 1975, Ostrom wrote:



...these specimens are not particularly like modern birds at all. If feather impressions had not been preserved in the London and Berlin specimens, they [the other specimens—BH/BT] never would have been identified as birds. Instead, they would unquestionably have been labeled as coelurosaurian dinosaurs [such as *Compsognathus*—BH/BT] (3:61).

Even a modern-day dinosaur encyclopedia adds doubt as to the validity of this species. "Apart from the proportions of its wings, the skeleton of *Archaeopteryx* is strikingly similar to that of a small, lightly built, running dinosaur, such as the coelurosaur *Compsognathus*" (Dixon, et al., 1988, p. 172).

Shortly after *Archaeopteryx* was announced, Sir Richard Owen, curator of the British Museum of Natural History, suggested that the creature was unequivocally a bird—a peculiar and distinctive bird, but a bird nevertheless. So what is it about this famous fossil that has some people seeing birds, and others seeing dinosaurs?

The urgency of needing to locate some sort of "intermediate" caused evolutionists to concentrate on as many features of *Archaeopteryx* as possible in order to discover "combined" traits. According to Niles Eldredge of the American Museum of Natural History, *Archaeopteryx* had "advanced characteristics of birds, and retained a tremendous amount of 'primitive' characteristics, like teeth" (as quoted in Sunderland, 1988, p. 78). However, some fish have teeth, some do not. Some amphibians have teeth, and some do not. How can a scientist look at the presence of teeth, and simply "assume" that this animal evolved from something else?

Many scientists point out things like an opposable hallux (big toe), the furcula (wishbone), and an elongated pubis directed backwards—and see nothing but a bird. Evolutionist Alan Feduccia said: "Paleontologists have tried to turn *Archaeopteryx* into an earth-bound, feathered dinosaur. But it's not. It is a bird, a perching bird. And no amount of 'paleobabble' is going to change that" (as quoted in Morell, 1993, 259:764).

So what is the truth about *Archaeopteryx*? Perhaps the late Colin Patterson, while serving as senior paleontologist at the British Museum of Natural History, summed it up best when he stated that *Archaeopteryx*

has simply become a patsy for wishful thinking. Is *Archaeopteryx* the ancestor of all birds? Perhaps yes, perhaps no: there is no way of answering the question. It is easy enough to make up stories of how one form gave rise to another, and to find reasons why the stages should be favoured by natural selection. But such stories are not a part of science, for there is no way of putting them to the test (as quoted in Sunderland, 1988, p. 102).

As ornithologist Alan Feduccia put it: "*Archaeopteryx* probably cannot tell us much about the early origin of feathers and flight in the true protobirds because *Archaeopteryx* was, in the modern sense, a bird" (1993, 249:792). Our point exactly!

"DINOSAURS-TO-BIRDS"— A THEORY ON LIFE SUPPORT

In the February 1998 issue of *Scientific American*, Kevin Padian and Luis Chiappe, while fully backing the dinosaurian origin of birds, added a sidebar explaining the major points of contention:

- The hands of theropod dinosaurs and birds differ in important ways.
- Theropod wishbones differ significantly from those of birds.
- Avian lungs are very complex, and could not have evolved from theropod dinosaur lungs.
- Theropod dinosaurs seem to have been exclusively ground dwellers; thus, flight would have had to originate from the cursorial or "ground-up" theory, which many scientists do not accept (Padian and Chiappe, 1998).

CONCLUSION

For more than a century, the approach of some evolutionists has been to find some supporting evidence, tout it as "proof" of evolution, and then ignore conflicting theories or data. But what do the actual facts reveal about creatures such as *Archaeopteryx*? In real-

ity, the story that scientists have attempted to weave in regard to this ancient "missing link" is unraveling before their very eyes. Scientific data have shown colossal differences in reptilian and bird lungs, scales as opposed to feathers, and the embryological hand development of dinosaurs versus birds. **It may well be that we are witnessing the last gasps of a dying hypothesis about how birds evolved from dinosaurs!** Faced with such overwhelming evidence against true evolutionary descent, it would be unrealistic to accept the position that *Archaeopteryx lithographica* is anything like the missing link that evolutionists once claimed it was. The *Archaeopteryx* hoax continues in some quarters to this very day, in spite of such admissions as this one from evolutionary ornithologist Alan Feduccia, who wrote in *Science* over a decade ago:

I conclude that *Archaeopteryx* was arboreal and volant [i.e., possessing extended wings for flight—BH/BT], considerably advanced aerodynamically, and probably capable of flapping, powered flight to at least some degree. *Archaeopteryx*... was, in the modern sense, a bird (1993, 259:792).

And so, once again, it is not merely the "link" that's missing in evolutionary theory—it's the entire chain! Given **all** the facts about the origin of birds, it is little wonder that Charles Darwin remarked in a letter to his American friend, Asa Gray, on April 3, 1860: "[T]rifling particulars of structure often make me very uncomfortable. The sight of a feather in a peacock's tail, whenever I gaze at it, makes me sick!" (as quoted in MacBeth, 1971, p. 101). Mr. Darwin, considering the paucity of the fossil record, and the elegance of the design inherent in a single feather, we certainly can understand why.

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