

Discovered the intact skull of 'Magical Chicken': the ancestor of today's birds, living with the dinosaurs 67 million years ago

After CT scans of the stone, the scientists discovered a complete bird skull wrapped inside the rock and dated to 66.7 million years. At the same time as the infamous meteorite fell to Earth and wiped out the dinosaurs.

At a limestone beach on the border of Belgium and the Netherlands, scientists discovered a small piece of bone protruding from inside a stone. Based on the sophistication and light weight of the bone fragment, they were able to determine that it belonged to a bird.

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After studying, the scientists realized that this bone mass has similar properties to the bones of chickens and ducks living today. This means that the bird not only existed at the same time as the dinosaurs, but it also survived the meteorite boom and thrived.

This is the oldest skull of ancestors of modern birds, and the house gave it a beautiful name "Wonderchicken". Their study was published in a scientific report published in Nature Wednesday.



Daniel Field has a magic model of Chicken in his hand

"The moment when discovering what lies inside the stone is the most exciting moment in all my scientific research career," Daniel Field said. He is the author of the report and a paleontologist at Cambridge University.

"This is the most intact fossil regardless of age and location. We thought we were dreaming when we saw it, and realized that it came from a striking time in the history of the Fruit. Land " .

The scientific name of the magic chicken is *Asteriornis maastrichtensis*, named after the astrological god Asteria in Greek mythology.

"We thought it was a fitting name because it was a living creature before the meteorite incident happened," said Daniel Ksepka, co-author of the report and scientific curator at the Bruce Museum. Greenwich town, Connecticut, USA. *"In Greek mythology, Asteria transformed into a quail and we believe that this bird is very closely related to the ancestors of quail, chicken and duck today . "*

Chickens and ducks belong to the Dieu Cam family, the scientific name is Galloanserae. According to scientists, *Asteriornis* is a strange bird due to both the characteristics of chickens and ducks.

From the leg bone fragment, they identified the leg of the Chicken Magic quite long. Some 66.7 million years ago, parts of Belgium were tropical, home to giant sea reptiles swimming in the ocean and tyrannosaurs hunting on land.

Scientists believe that the Magic Chicken is a bird living on the coast. They found its fossils in ocean sediments and estimated its body weight to be only 0.2 kg.



Some birds are like chickens

At present, up to 11,000 bird species exist and fully understanding their lineage is very difficult. One of the reasons is that the bones of the birds are so fragile that fossil intact rarely exists.

"The differentiated origins of the bird are covered in a mysterious veil. We know that modern birds began to develop after the dinosaurs, and before the meteorite fell, there was little evidence of their existence , " said Albert Chen, co-author of the report and a PhD student at Cambridge University. *"This fossil gives us a direct view of modern bird species at a critical time in the history of evolution . "*

However, scientists have not been able to realize the importance of the findings without CT scanning.

"The ability to CT scan fossils has completely changed the method of paleontology research of the 21st century ,
" Field said.

Field and co-author Juan Benito (also a Ph.D. student) came together to find the bird skull when they were undergoing CT scans.



Photo comparing skull of turkey, Magical chicken and mallard

"I was surprised to find the skull , " Benito said. "Without these advanced scanning technologies, we would not have known we were holding the skull of the oldest bird in the world . "

According to Field, this discovery is likely to support future discoveries and will help us understand the causes, when and where modern bird-like first appeared.

The discovery of bird fossils in Europe and the Northern Hemisphere makes this finding even more special.

"The bird fossils that belong to the Cretaceous Europe in Europe are extremely rare," said John Jagt, co-author of the report. He works at the Maastricht Natural History Museum, Netherlands. *"The discovery of the Asteriornis bird provides the first evidence that Europe is an important area in the evolutionary history of modern bird breeds . "*

If that were true, the current birds might have evolved from the Asteriornis and it could be considered a crown bird. The crown bird is a term for birds that are considered the common ancestor of all birds.



Some birds are like duck

"This fossil tells us that in ancient times, birds were small and lived near beaches," Field said. "The Asteriornis helps us identify the target of our future fossil discoveries and I hope that it could open an era of evolutionary discovery about the methods, times, and places of evolution in current birds. "

But important questions have not been answered. Why do these and other birds survive a meteorite disaster?

The report author said they believed that these birds had unique properties that helped them survive.

"This bird seems to have a small body and has a habit of not living on trees, capable of flying and omnivorous , " Field said. *"We believe these features ensure the survival of birds after the meteorite, although their dinosaur neighbors do not . "*

Earlier, Field published a report on other birds that survived mass extinction events. They are also small, terrestrial birds similar to this bird.

Field and colleagues will study other rock samples in hopes of discovering more about the history of modern birds.

The fossil of the Chicken Magic will be displayed at Sedgwick Earth Science Museum, located in Cambridge, England. The show will be dedicated to it only and is named *"Magical Dawn Dawn"* . However, the museum is now closed due to a disease outbreak.

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