

SWOSU's Falk Presents New Information on Primitive Birds

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Dr. Amanda Falk recently presented new results on a unique early bird from Northeastern China that has puzzled researchers for decades. She made the presentation at the American Ornithologists Union annual meeting. This picture is from a hike in China.

Dr. Amanda Falk, assistant professor at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, recently presented new results on a unique early bird from Northeastern China that has puzzled researchers for decades.

Falk made the presentation at the American Ornithologists Union annual meeting in Estes Park (CO).

Falk—along with presentation coauthor Dr. David Burnham of the University of Kansas, Tom Kaye of the Burke Museum of Nature and Science and Zhonghe Zhou of the Institute of Paleontology and Paleoanthropology in Beijing, China—have been researching the life habits and rarely preserved soft tissues (skin and muscle) and feathers of *Confuciusornis*.

Confuciusornis is a fossil bird from the Jehol Group of Northeastern China (Liaoning Province), which lived over 125 million years ago in the Early Cretaceous, at the time of the dinosaurs. Although there are more than a thousand individual fossils of *Confuciusornis*, there is still debate surrounding it, such as whether it lived in the trees or on the ground, whether it could fly, and the form and function of its paired, long tail feathers, which some researchers think represent sexual dimorphism.

Using a new method of photographic lighting called laser fluorescence, Falk and her collaborators discovered new and exciting features of these birds that have never been seen before. Falk was invited to the AOU's annual meeting in Colorado to present her findings as part of a special symposium on the origin and early evolution of birds.

Falk teaches Human Anatomy and Biological Concepts labs at SWOSU and is the current curator of the Vertebrate collections in the SWOSU Biology Museum. She is actively seeking students interested in researching ornithology, vertebrate paleontology and vertebrate form and function.