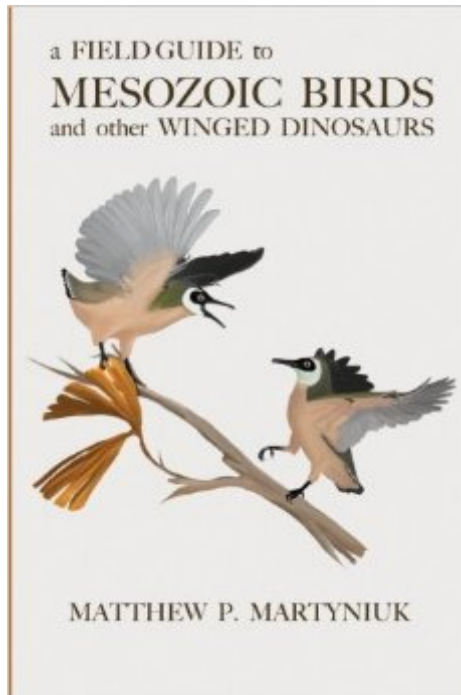


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A Field Guide To Mesozoic Birds And Other Winged Dinosaurs



Synopsis

A comprehensive illustrated guide to the birds of the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods and their dinosaurian forebears. Each species is illustrated in multiple views with size and distinguishing features highlighted. Includes introduction summarizing current research into bird origins and evolution, and what we know (and don't know) about the life appearance and habits of the first birds.

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Customer Reviews

Overall, Martyniuk does quite a good job with this book. There are many illustrations, which, for example, (rightfully) depict many predatory dinosaurs as being far more avian (i.e., birdlike) than what has been done in the past. There are very interesting sections, such as on Troodontids and Microraptors. (I wish he would have attempted an illustration of Hesperonychus... that interesting microraptor from my own area -- the U.S.A.-- that so many are not aware of. However, there is not a lot of fossil evidence to go on with regard to illustrating Hesperonychus.) I disagree with his postulation that small Paronychodon teeth may possibly represent juvenile Troodon formosus. I've seen small Troodon teeth, likely from juvenile T. formosus and I've seen larger sized Paronychodon teeth that could not -- in any measure of any sense (or morphological transformation) -- change into smaller Troodon teeth. Indeed, Paronychodon could very well be a type of Troodontid dinosaur, but not T.formosus. (Personally, I suspect that Paronychodon teeth were from an evolved type of Microraptorian dinosaur. The ridges on Paronychodon teeth may have helped the teeth to retain a sticky type of salivary-oriented substance... making it far easier to catch insect and furry mammal prey. The curving of the ridges would also aid in the recirculation of such a substance into the

mandible. And, regarding the Oviraptor species of theropods, I suspect that many had the upper two internal maxillary teeth for the purpose of crushing the heads of snakes and lizards and such. Snakes were very plentiful, back then, in the dunes where oviraptorians lived... and they were non-poisonous. Clam eating wasn't one of the functions... there was not enough water in the very dry climate back then.

I don't know much about Mesozoic birds aside from what I know about feathered dinosaurs, so when I saw "A Field Guide to Mesozoic Birds and Other Winged Dinosaurs" on .com, I knew I had to buy it. The author Matthew Martyniuk is an illustrator and educator specializing in early birds. As you might expect from the title, the format of this book is a "field guide," very much like the type used by birdwatchers. There is about 40 pages of introductory material: Bird Ancestry, The Origin of Feathers, Restoring Mesozoic Birds, etc. Then we get to the field guide itself. For about 200 species, this book lists the common name, the scientific name, the location and time (e.g. 80 Myr. ago), size, characteristics, and something about the expected lifestyle. This material is fairly detailed and very up to date. Of course, Mesozoic birds do not have a common name the way living birds do (e.g. "blue-footed booby"), so for the field guide, one must use the translation of the scientific name: "Sinornithosaurus millenni" becomes "Millennial Chinese Bird Lizard." For each bird there is a silhouette against the outline of a man for scale and a picture of the bird restored as a living animal, some with some striking colors. A lot of animals we think of as classic dinosaurs, for example Deinonychus and Oviraptor, are restored as birds, fully covered in long, sometimes brightly colored feathers. This is within the realm of plausibility, certainly--who can say where feathered dinosaurs end and birds begin, but it is a departure of what is normally done in most paleoart. Appendices include the list of excluded species (for which the remains are not sufficient to say much) and cladistic definitions of the bird groups.

Mesozoic birds are a good example of prehistoric creatures that often get overlooked. It is good then to see a field guide that tries to show as many Mesozoic birds as it can. Not all known Mesozoic birds are included. One of the appendixes of the book lists various species not included due to their remains being too fragmentary or their classification too unclear. Also, there have been some new Mesozoic bird species discovered after the publication of this book (e.g. Aurornis). Interestingly, the author of the book uses the term "bird" in a wider sense than it is generally used, including all avialans, deinonychosaurs and oviraptorosaurs (or caenagnathiformes, as they are referred to as in the book) as birds. This makes sense, as the line between which

dinosaurs are birds and which are not is far more blurred than many would think. Some of the classification terms the author uses are a bit odd. He refers to tyrannosaurids as deinodontids, therizinosaurs as segnosauroids, oviraptorosaurs as caenagnathiformes, and dromaeosaurids as ornithomimids. There does seem to be a justification to all this though, as the appendixes on clade names and definitions shows when the names were coined and shows that the unusual sounding names the author uses are actually older than the more familiar names and thus take precedence according to the rules of nomenclature. The book explains the basics of bird evolution and physical features (including an interesting discussion on figuring out what feather colours would and would not have been plausible in prehistoric birds and other dinosaurs) and goes on provide an illustrated guide to numerous different Mesozoic birds, in a similar style to many field guides one could find on present day animals.

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