

## RARE FOSSIL BIRD BACK IN BC

Following a three-decade detour to Europe, a unique fossil bird has migrated back to its BC homeland, where it now roosts at the Royal BC Museum (RBCM).

Discovered in the late-1970s near Smithers by a tourist couple – rock hound hobbyists who took their find home to Germany with them – the 50-million-year-old fossil’s return has researchers in a flap.

Why all the excitement? Well, British Columbia has precious few fossil bird records – and even fewer representing north-central BC, where this one was discovered.

In fact, the fossil might never have found its way back to Canada were it not for the curiosity of a Harvard-trained paleontologist from Simon Fraser University.

As it happened, in August 2008, Dr. Bruce Archibald paid a visit to the Bulkley Valley Museum near Smithers, where he stumbled upon an old newspaper clipping that told of a pair of tourists who had painstakingly pieced together one of the best avian fossil specimens in BC history.

“I took a photocopy of the article back to Vancouver with me,” says Archibald who figured chances were slim that, 30 years later, he’d find the folks who brought the fossil back to Germany with them.

But, being a good scientist, Archibald couldn’t let sleeping birds lie. He searched the Internet until he found a woman in Smithers who remembered the fossil find and knew Albrecht and Margaret Kloeckner, the tourist couple mentioned in the newspaper article he’d read.

Archibald passed the couple’s contact information to Dr. Gareth Dyke, an Irish specialist in bird fossils. In November 2008, Dyke visited the Kloeckners – and the bird – in Germany. Having been to the Royal BC Museum in the past, Dyke knew the RBCM was where the bird belonged. “The Kloeckners are really lovely people, so it did not take any work to convince them that the best place for their amazing fossil was back in BC,” writes Dyke in an email.

But you can’t just FedEx a fossil, and Dyke wasn’t heading to BC anytime soon. So the bird – which can’t be identified, because its head is missing – waited patiently until RBCM research associate Gary Kaiser attended a conference in Bristol. Dyke, who was also at the conference, gave the bird to Kaiser who brought the treasure back to BC.

Richard Hebda, RBCM curator of botany and earth history, is excited to have the fossil bird back in BC. “Every new bird specimen is a major discovery, a new jewel for the collection,” he says. “The Kloeckner specimen reflects British Columbia’s ancient Eocene skies, complementing the plants, insects and fish that lived on the land and in the water.”



An ancient bird made headlines when first discovered in the 1970s by a pair of German tourists (Albrecht Kloeckner on right, second photo from the top). Dr. Bruce Archibald (above) was instrumental in helping the fossil find its way back to BC.

## RETIRING RBCM STAFFERS TO KEEP BUILDING THEIR OWN BC STORIES

On a mid-December's eve, David Mattison, Terry Eade and Margaret Hutchison set their alarm clocks for the last time. For work, that is. After collectively giving 93 years' service to the provincial museum and archives, these Royal BC Museum (RBCM) staffers have bid a final farewell to the collections, maps and records they've grown to love.

There's never a dull day at the Royal BC Museum, reflects Eade, registrar of the museum's historical collections. "We have some amazing artifacts with histories that are just fascinating," says the woman who spent 33 years cataloguing BC history. One of her favourites? Hand-held fans and "fan language," a system of subtle signals used by 19th century women to convey discrete messages as they delicately fanned themselves. In recent years, Eade developed a program to teach visitors about this intriguing style of communication.

Eade, who now plans to show her horses at competitions throughout the west, says working at the RBCM has been the best job in the world. "You never know what the day will bring."

Margaret Hutchison, an archivist and map expert who's worked with the BC Archives for 31 years, agrees. "The people are great here," she says, adding, "I'm also going to miss the collections. Cartography is a huge part of the BC world. It shows our knowledge of the terrain and the places where people settled. It's a really interesting subject." But it's a subject Hutchison isn't leaving behind. She'll put her mapping skills to good use soon enough during her visits to family overseas.

For David Mattison, a 29-year BC Archives veteran, retirement doesn't mean putting away his tech tools. His most rewarding project? Moving the archives into the digital age, beginning in the early-1980s. Mattison's passion for computing continues to burn bright. He welcomes retirement as an opportunity to plunge himself into his ongoing project, a web directory chronicling nearly 100 years of BC photographers. The RBCM hasn't seen the last of him yet, he says. "I'll still be using the archives to complete my work."

We wish these three all the best as they continue to build their own BC stories.



Terry Eade (above) works with a set of glass lamp shades on her last day at the RBCM. Below, David Mattison (second from left) and Margaret Hutchison (far right) say goodbye to their BC Archives colleagues at a tea in their honour.



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Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily

## Updates

- Near closing time on Dec. 26, a young man proposed to his sweetheart on the steps of the hotel in Old Town, in the RBCM third-floor galleries. Though they now live in Toronto, the couple grew up in Victoria and share fond memories of visits to the museum as youngsters. The RBCM honoured the couple's special day with some creative scheduling, security guards to ensure their privacy and of course, a gift. Congratulations!



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