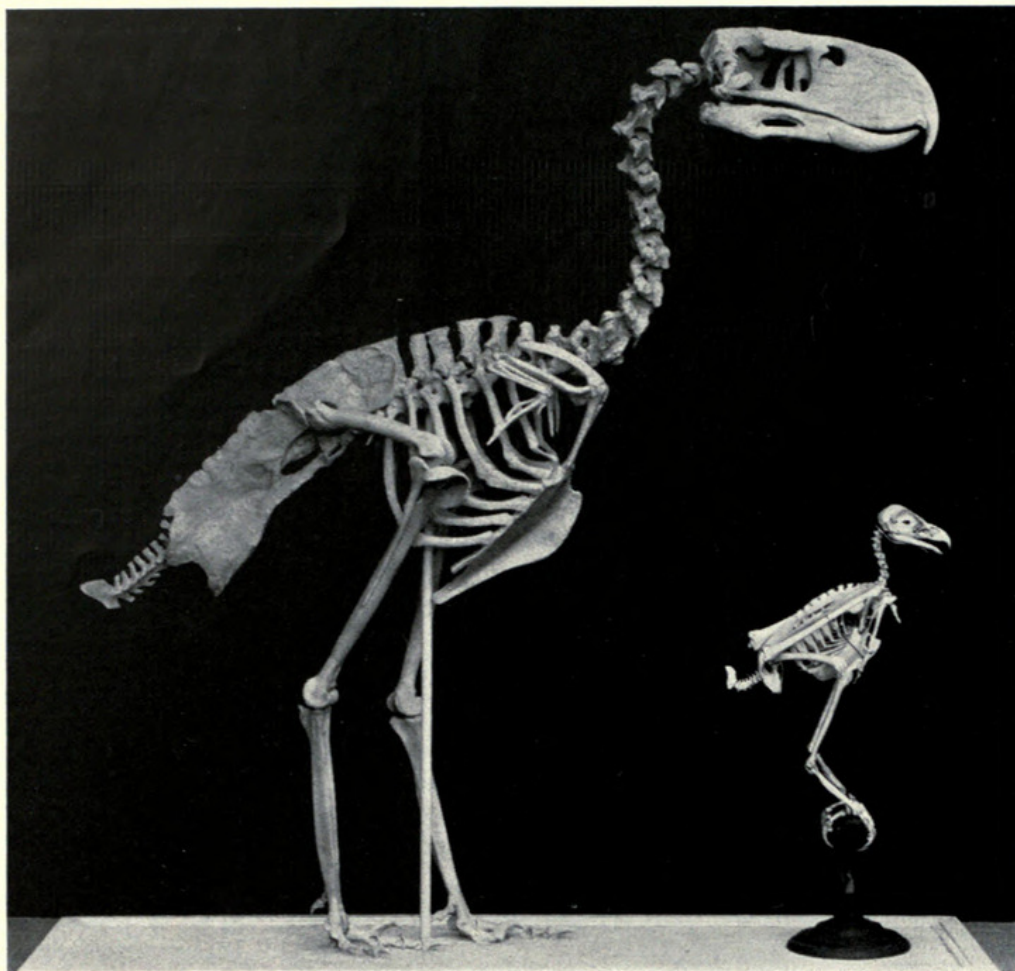




Extinct Bird Dwarfs Modern Eagle

Skeletal restoration of the flightless *Mesembriornis*, now exhibited in Graham Hall, compared with the skeleton of a golden eagle, one of the larger modern flying birds of prey. The ancient giant from South America, like the present-day ostrich, used its proportionately small wings only for purposes of balancing while running. Indications are that this formidable engine of destruction may have been able to attain the speed of a galloping horse.

tory birds, the hawks and eagles, and the owls. For some time after their discovery there was considerable controversy among paleontologists and ornithologists over their true position in the bird class, a dispute that was settled in 1899 by the late Dr. C. W. Andrews of the British Museum. As a result of an exhaustive investigation, based on excellent specimens of the Miocene genus *Phororhacos*, Andrews came to the conclusion that the phororhacoids were more closely related to the peculiar cariamas and chuña of Brazil and Argentina than to any other birds living or extinct. Research carried out at Field Museum on the splendid material collected by the Marshall Field Expedition has amply substantiated this conclusion. The cariamas are members of the crane order.

Stating to North American readers that the phororhacoids are related to the cariamas is rather like saying that x is related to y . Some information on x has been given in this article, but y is also well worthy of attention. The cariamas are exceedingly interesting not only because of their affinities with the spectacular phororhacoids, but also in themselves. They are long-legged, long-necked birds which stand about two feet in height. Capable of speeds of 25 miles per hour, they run when disturbed

and take to the air only as a last resort. Their food generally consists of insects and other invertebrates and the smaller reptiles and mammals, but they will attack larger game when opportunity offers, and they have been known to raise havoc among domestic fowls. Oddly enough, they can be domesticated, and in this condition are reported to act as guardians of the poultry they might otherwise prey upon. They roost and nest in bushes and low trees, activities of which their phororhacoid relatives were incapable. The cariamas have been aptly described as birds which are in transition toward a completely ground-dwelling mode of life. This is perfectly true, but if fragmentary fossil evidence may be relied upon they have remained more or less "fixed" in this transitory condition for millions of years. A logical explanation of this interesting state of affairs at once suggests itself. Cariamama, with its marked tendency toward ground-dwelling habits, its insectivorous-carnivorous diet, and its weak powers of flight, is an almost ideal structural descendant for the phororhacoids in which such characters and tendencies were carried to an extreme. It is, in fact, almost certain that the phororhacoids did evolve from an ancestral cariamid which probably was quite similar to the living

bird. Once this had taken place, the diversification of the phororhacoids effectively prevented any further offshoots along the same lines from the parent cariamid stock. The latter was thus held down in a state of "suspended transition."

EVOLUTION FAVORS UNSPECIALIZED ANIMALS

The cariamas afford an example of what has come to be known as the "law" of the survival of the relatively unspecialized. They were able to survive the great faunal changes that took place in South America following the elevation of the land bridge at Panama, whereas their much more highly specialized relatives, the phororhacoids, were not. It is probable that in spite of their long history they have lost none of their evolutionary potentiality, and that if all carnivorous mammals were to vanish from the southern continent they would again give rise to a group of carnivorous ground birds whose members might well develop into forms strikingly similar to *Mesembriornis* and its allies.

The preparation of the specimens and the mounting of the skeletal restoration were carried out by Mr. James H. Quinn, Chief Preparator, Division of Paleontology.

Special thanks are due to Dr. Martin Doello-Jurado and Professor Alejandro F. Bordas, of the Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales, Buenos Aires, for their courtesy in supplying data on a specimen of *Mesembriornis* in their charge.

THE WORSHIP OF METEORITES

Few natural objects have more generally been worshiped by the human race than meteorites. Instances of the worship of meteorites by the aborigines have been found in the New World. The oldest are probably those revealed by the discovery of meteorites in association with the remains of the Mound Builders. In 1836 white men first saw, in what is now Wichita County, Texas, a mass of meteoritic iron weighing 320 pounds. The meteorite was an object of worship of the Comanche Indians. It was set up at a junction of several trails, and Indians who passed by made a custom of leaving beads, pipes, and tobacco as an offering. A specimen of this meteorite may be seen in Hall 34 of the Department of Geology.—S. K. R.

Fierce Tuareg Fighters

The Tuareg tribes of the Sahara have recently appeared in the war news with hints that they might intervene in some of the strategic struggles in Africa. Field Museum has an exhibit in Hall E illustrating the life of these camel-keeping fighters who are noted for their ferocity.

The Herbarium of Field Museum now contains more than 1,000,000 specimens of plants from all over the world.



1941. "Fierce Tuareg Fighters." *Field Museum news* 12(3), 2-2.

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