



FACULTY OF SCIENCE
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
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DEAN
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Press Release

HKU Hosts International Symposium on the Origins of Birds and Flight and Presents Related Display in the Stephen Hui Geological Museum

March 30, 2018

30 palaeontologists from seven countries gather at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) for the *International Pennaraptoran Dinosaur Symposium* (IPDS) to present the current state of knowledge on avian and flight origins. Held between March 29 and April 1, 2018. The symposium, hosted by Dr Pittman and eminent palaeontologist Professor Xing Xu of the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (IVPP), Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, is supported by Mr Kenneth HC Fung and the First Initiative Foundation.

The Stephen Hui Geological Museum of HKU presents a temporary display in connection with the symposium to showcase HKU's recent contributions to the study of avian and flight origins as well as dinosaur ecosystems. A reception was held on March 29 (Thursday) to mark the opening of the symposium and the exhibition.

Dr Pittman said: "This symposium comes at a crucial and exciting time in the field. In the last 20 years our understanding of how dinosaurs took to the skies has expanded dramatically, particularly because of spectacular fossils found in China. However, answers to crucial questions like 'How differently did early birds fly compared to living birds?' remain unclear. Our symposium aims to push these and other frontiers through discussions with leading experts as well as early career researchers, including HKU PhD students."

Professor Xu added: "The IPDS symposium is an invaluable opportunity to make progress in several key areas and to set the agenda for future efforts. Myself, Dr Pittman and our international colleagues are very excited and look forward to our time at HKU."

The first part of the display at the Stephen Hui Geological Museum is on avian and flight origins. It features research published by Dr Pittman and his colleagues in 2017 in the top-ranked journal *Nature Communications*. This research covers the body plan and feathering of two animals that are key to this study area.

The research papers can be viewed at:

www.nature.com/articles/ncomms14972 and www.nature.com/articles/ncomms14576

The second part of the display reconstructs life in the Gobi desert of Erlian, China ~80 million years ago. Two scenes show the range of animals and plants present and depict a warm, humid climate just like modern day Hong Kong. These were produced by the award-winning palaeoartist Julius T. Csotonyi as part of HKU's first free online science MOOC course Dinosaur Ecosystems, which was launched in 2017 (course webpage: <https://www.edx.org/course/dinosaur-ecosystems-hkux-dinox>). This part of the display also features real fossil specimens as well as accurate hand-painted models of the habitat's most iconic dinosaurs.

Exhibition period: March 29 to April 1, 2018

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Image download and illustration: <http://www.scifac.hku.hk/news/media?page=1>

Image 1. From the left: Dr Michael Pittman and his supporters Mrs Nelly Fung, Mr Kenneth HC Fung and Chairman of First Initiative Foundation Ms Michelle Ong.



Image 2. The logo of the *International Pennaraptoran Dinosaur Symposium (IPDS)* is inspired by the traditional Chinese seal. The design incorporates HK's iconic skyline, the well-known local black kite bird and the famous gliding raptor dinosaur *Microraptor*. The bottom of the logo includes a simplified family tree of early birds and their closest relatives. Credit: Ray Lau / M Pittman.



Image 3. A temporary display in connection with the symposium is open to the public at the **Stephen Hui Geological Museum**. This display was produced to coincide with the International Pennaraptoran Dinosaur Symposium, which takes place from March 29th to April 1st 2018. Credit: Stephen Hui Geological Museum / M Pittman

