"She's just a really terrific person," Ksepka said. Now, there's an 11-million-year-old fossil of a bird named Centuriavis lioae, and it's a testament to the work of the team of scientists who couldn't name something after themselves, but that Lio has named the bird in honor of the Bruce Museum and its Managing Director and Chief Operating Officer, Elaine Velie.

Ksepka, the lead scientist on the project, was a member of the team that re-discovered the fossil while completing his PhD at nearby Columbia University. Now, the fossil is back at AMNH, and since it is a type specimen, it cannot be loaned to another museum on a permanent basis. Ksepka says it's unlikely it will ever leave the collection.

The 11-million-year-old fossil was incredibly well-preserved. (image courtesy Daniel Ksepka)

Although the fossil is millions of years old, the team will need to unearth more fossils to verify their hypothesis. They have already collected hundreds of fossils since 2007 while completing their work on the project, but they have yet to find another diapsid bird from this time period. They are hopeful that another diapsid bird from this time period will be discovered soon.

It's possible that the fossil was buried during a volcanic eruption, which Ksepka says could have been caused by an underwater volcano. The team is also investigating the possibility that the bird may have been a result of climate change, as the area during this time period was covered by a large sea that was later replaced by the prairies of today.

In the meantime, the team is working to understand the environment in which the bird lived and what it may have looked like. They are using CT scans to model the bird's brain and trying to understand its sensory abilities.

"This is our first step in understanding the bird," Ksepka said. "We want to understand its sensory abilities and how it may have perceived its environment."