



BRUCE MUSEUM
One Museum Drive • Greenwich, CT 06830-7100
203.869.0376 • www.brucemuseum.org

Press Release

EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY, JULY 7, 2014 (3:00 PM EST)

Media Contact Karen Schwarz
Interim Director of Marketing and Communications
203 413-6735 | kschwarz@brucemuseum.org

Bruce Museum Scientist Identifies World's Largest-Ever Flying Bird

Daniel Ksepka, Curator of Science at the Bruce Museum, Publishes Discovery

GREENWICH, CT, EMBARGOED UNTIL JULY 7, 2014 (3:00 PM EST) -- Scientists have identified the fossilized remains of an extinct giant bird that is likely to have the largest wingspan of any bird ever to have lived. A paper announcing the findings, "Flight Performance of the Largest Volant Bird," was published July 7 in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, and is authored by Dr. Daniel Ksepka, the newest Curator of Science at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich.

With a wingspan of 20 to 24 feet, *Pelagornis sandersi* was more than twice as big as the Royal Albatross, the largest living flying bird. This enormous wingspan places the new species above some theoretical upper limits for powered flight in animals, but nonetheless it is clear from the skeleton the bird was a masterful flyer. Ksepka estimated the length of the feathers based on the relationship between bone lengths and feather lengths in living birds, and used computer models to infer that this species was an efficient glider.

"*Pelagornis sandersi* could have traveled for extreme distances while crossing ocean waters in search of prey," said Ksepka.

The new fossil was discovered by Charleston Museum volunteer James Malcom in 1983, when excavations began for a new terminal at the Charleston International Airport in South Carolina. The presence of bony tooth-like spikes in the jaw allowed Ksepka to identify the find as a previously unknown species of the Pelagornithidae, an extinct group of giant seabirds. The skeleton was very well-preserved, a rarity because of the paper-thin nature of the bones in these birds. Now in the collections at the Charleston Museum, the fossil has been designated the type specimen of a new species named in honor of retired Charleston Museum curator Albert Sanders, who collected the fossil.

"Pelagornithids were like creatures out of a fantasy novel - there is simply nothing like them around today," said Ksepka. These giant birds occurred all over the globe for tens of millions of years, but vanished during the Pliocene, just three million years ago. Paleontologists remain uncertain about the cause of their demise.

The Bruce Museum will host a lecture about the *Pelagornis sandersi* by Dr. Daniel Ksepka on Tuesday, September 9. The lecture, "Fossils Take Flight: Reconstructing the World's Largest Bird," will be held at 7:30 pm.

#

About the Bruce Museum

The Bruce Museum is a museum of art and science and is located at One Museum Drive in Greenwich, Connecticut. The Museum is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 am to 5 pm and Sunday from 1 pm to 5 pm.



BRUCE MUSEUM
One Museum Drive • Greenwich, CT 06830-7100
203.869.0376 • www.brucemuseum.org

Press Release

pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission is \$7 for adults, \$6 for students up to 22 years, \$6 for seniors and free for members and children less than five years. Individual admission is free on Tuesday. Free on-site parking is available and the Museum is accessible to individuals with disabilities. For additional information, call the Bruce Museum at (203) 869-0376 or visit the website at brucemuseum.org