

Living Dinosaurs offers a snapshot of our current understanding of the origin and evolution of birds. After slumbering for more than a century, avian palaeontology has been awakened by startling new discoveries on almost every continent. Controversies about whether dinosaurs had real feathers or whether birds were related to dinosaurs have been swept away and replaced by new and more difficult questions: How old is the avian lineage? How did birds learn to fly? Which birds survived the great extinction that ended the Mesozoic Era, and how did the avian genome evolve? Answers to these questions may help us understand how the different kinds of living birds are related to one another and how they evolved into their current niches. More importantly, they may help us understand what we need to do to help them survive the dramatic impacts of human activity on the planet.

Gareth Dyke is a vertebrate palaeontologist who specialises in the evolution of birds and their flight. He has worked on birds of all ages, from the 140 million years old *Archaeopteryx* right through to the bones of living ducks and gamebirds. He has searched for fossils all over the world, but has a particular interest in the geology and palaeontology of Eastern Europe. He has worked in Ireland since 2002.

Gary Kaiser worked as a field biologist in Canada's migratory bird program from 1968 until retirement in 1999. He specialized in the capture and tagging of birds, particularly seabirds but began to study avian evolution in 1995. He combined this new interest with knowledge gained from handling birds to write *Inner Bird* in 2007. He has also contributed to *Birds of British Columbia* and *Seabirds of the Russian Far East*.

Cover images: Left: Skull with feathers of small landbird from the Danish Lower Eocene. Courtesy of Bent Lindow (Geologisk Museum, Copenhagen). Top right: Holotype of the Jiufotang Formation enantiornithine *Pengornis houi*. Courtesy of Jingmai O'Connor. Bottom right: Referred specimen of the Jiufotang Formation basal pygostylian *Sapeornis chaoyuensis*. Courtesy of Jingmai O'Connor.

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