

News & Comments

Early Australians consumed eggs of the 2-meter-tall bird

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Burn marks on old shell scraps found some years ago led to a vigorous debate about what long-extinct bird laid those eggs that were eaten by early Australians.

In order to determine an animal's evolutionary position, a team of international scientists compared the protein sequences encoded in powdered egg remains to those encoded in live birds' genomes. It lays large eggs about the size of a melon, weighing 1.5 kilograms, laid by a gigantic flightless bird called Genyornis. Because of the thunderous sounds it made, Mihirung was known in ancient times as the Thunderbird.

The bird was around 2 meters tall and some 220-240 Kg in weight, with small wings and huge legs. This mega bird vanished a few thousand years after humans arrived, which points toward the human role in its extinction.

According to Prof Gifford Miller, "There is no evidence of Genyornis butchery in the archaeological record. However, eggshell fragments with unique burn patterns consistent with human activity have been found on different continents." Which indicated that humans raided the eggs of this giant and weren't afraid of these creatures.

An archaeological site called Wood Point in South Australia was tested for eggshells. According to Prof Miller's previous research, the far western coast of Ningaloo has been documented to contain hundreds of similar burnt shells.

KEYWORDS

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