

# World's Oldest Bird

(Continued from Page B10)

navigated from the ground to the tallest branches to escape predators.

Protoavis also would imply that birds were much more diverse in the remote past than previous evidence has suggested. Not until the late Cretaceous period, 70 million to 135 million years ago, did birds begin to flourish worldwide. Many of them were water birds with skeletons similar to those of modern birds.

The gap between such species and Archaeopteryx has always seemed illogical to scientists. The Cretaceous burst of bird life, including some species remarkably close to modern families, indicated the presence of earlier birds such as Protoavis.

But bird bones, particularly those of small species, are hard to find. Hollow and fragile, they are likely to be crushed, deformed, or eroded. Predators and scavengers may feast on dead birds, leaving the bone fragments scattered and broken. The best preservation occurs when mud covers the carcass soon after death.

### Flash-Flood Fatalities

That's what happened to Protoavis in the quarry carved out of the Dockum Formation, a bone-rich bed of ancient mudstone. Chatterjee thinks the two birds were drowned in a flash flood and their bones preserved by mud and debris.

There is little water around the Dockum today. Chatterjee and his team work in a bleak landscape of red mudstone mesas, surrounded by mesquite and dwarf juniper.

Since the oil bust, there's been little human activity in the area. "Even the rattlesnake that used to pop out of its nearby den to take the sun has disappeared," says Chatterjee, whose research is supported by the National Geographic Society.

The heat's still there, however. Temperatures sometimes soar to 110 degrees, forcing the scientists to erect impromptu cloth shelters to shield them from the sun.

It hasn't always been so hot and barren. Stretching from New Mexico to western Texas, the Dockum Formation 225 million years ago was lush in tropical vegetation and full of ponds, lakes, and large rivers. Chatterjee thinks the flood that devastated the birds and other strange creatures he has found at the site was triggered by a tributary of a river the size of the Mississippi.

## 'Ag In The Classroom' Events Slated Next Week

LANCASTER — Ag In The Classroom activities will be conducted in three Lancaster County school districts this coming week, according to the program's educational coordinator, Jane Eshelman.

Activities will be held in all fourth-grade classrooms in the Conestoga Valley, Manheim Township and Warwick School Districts from Monday through Wednesday.

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Ag in the Classroom, is designed to introduce the non-farm sector to modern agriculture. "It makes the students aware of the part that ag plays in their daily lives," says Eshelman.

Eshelman said that Wednesday activities normally center around the dairy industry because of dairy's dominance in the county. The Manheim Township program will include a field trip to Oregon Dairy on Wednesday, she said. The Penn Manor district will observe Ag in the Classroom in their third grade classrooms on Nov. 17 to 19.

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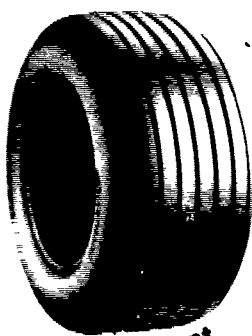
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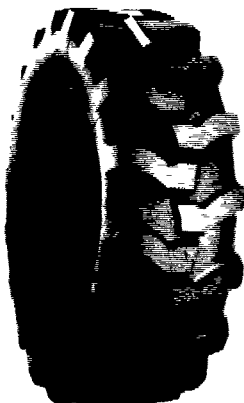
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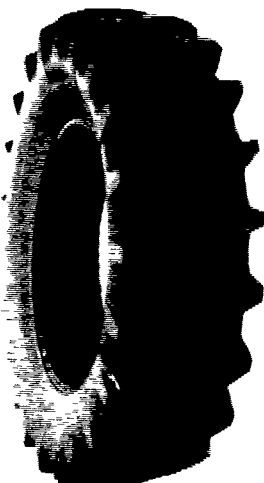
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13 6x28 8 Ply	\$195 00
14 9x28 4 Ply	\$165 00
14 9x28 6 Ply	\$185 00
16 9x28 6 Ply	\$225 00
16 9x28 8 Ply	\$245 00
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