

Flying Serpents and Four-winged Dinosaurs

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The Bible only mentions flying serpents twice, both times as prophetic beasts in Isaiah (Isa14:29; 30:6). Despite the apparent paucity of Biblical evidence, Seventh-day Adventists have embraced the idea that snakes flew until God cursed them after the fall (PP 53). It would seem that evidence of flying reptiles would be attractive to traditional Bible believing Adventists. Despite this, since the recent publication of a paper describing four-winged dinosaur fossils from China, correspondence containing confident predictions that the fossil in question must be a forgery has piled up in my mailbox.

It is true that forgery is a concern when it comes to feathered dinosaurs. During 1999 *National Geographic* published an article based on a fraudulently constructed fossil, then had to retract it in humiliating fashion (C. P. Sloan, “Feathers for T. Rex?,” *National Geographic* 196/5 (1999): 98-107). The possibility of forgery should be investigated as a normal part of good science. However, predicting that all feathered dinosaurs are forgeries as if the Genesis creation requires this is disturbing. The Biblical account of creation makes no such prediction. Insisting that the Bible requires fakery in the four-winged dinosaur fossils from China has potential to cause serious confusion.

Sometimes Christians in their zeal to fight “the enemy” get drawn into positions that ultimately hurt our cause. In reality, we as believers in the Biblical creation can view the data with greater objectivity than our evolutionist friends because we have no need for “missing links” to bolster our belief that life was created. Our interest in nature stems from an interest in the gift our Creator gave us, and what it can tell us about Him. Creationists don’t need nature to confirm a theory about the origin of life; nature is studied as a revelation of the

Creator we already know. When this is forgotten, our motivation becomes reactionary and those who have a different view of life and our place in it suddenly drive the agenda for discussion.

So, is the four-winged dinosaur from China real? Authors of the paper describing it in *Nature* give some reason for caution (X. Xu, Z. Zhou, X. Wang, X. Kuang, F. Xhang, X. Du, “Four-winged dinosaurs from China,” *Nature* 41 (2003): 335-340). The best examples were purchased in an area where forgery of feathered dinosaur fossils has occurred in the past. Data for evaluating the fossil’s validity is provided in the *Nature* article. These particular fossils came from rocks containing fossil birds exhibiting all the major traits of birds today (L. M. Chiappe, “The first 85 million years of avian evolution,” *Nature* 378 (1995): 349-355; E. N. Kurochkin, “Synopsis of Mesozoic birds and early evolution of class Aves,” *Archaeopteryx* 13 (1995): 47-66); in fact, even earlier bird fossils may have been found (S. Chatterjee, “The Triassic bird *Protoavis*,” *Archaeopteryx* 13 (1995): 15-31). If birds lived before and at the same time as feathered dinosaurs, they cannot be missing ancestral links between dinosaurs and birds. Unfortunately, many scientists feel under significant pressure to declare them “missing links” and this complicates the task of evaluating what has actually been found. Scientists who believe in Biblical creation are under no such pressure and may even see fossils of this type fitting perfectly with the first three chapters of Genesis.