

Trotting with emus, walk with dinosaurs

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Scientists are watching emus to learn more about dinosaurs that once trotted along a long-lost U.S. coastline during the Middle Jurassic period.

One way to make sense of the 165-million-year-old dinosaur tracks found in northern Wyoming may be found in observing emus, large flightless birds which are about the same size, walk on two legs and have feet similar to that of many dinosaurs, said Brent Breithaupt, director of the University of Wyoming's Geological Museum in Laramie, Wyo.

Since there are nearly no documented dinosaur bones from that period in North America, researchers say it's difficult to connect the tracks to a particular dinosaur.

Breithaupt and colleagues decided to look for a modern analog animal they could study to help decipher the tracks. Although large flightless birds are the most logical choice, all are not good options; ostriches have an attitude problem and rheas are "like working with a bunch of kindergarteners on too much sugar."

That left emus, which turned out to be perfect: three toes, the right size, and relatively easy to work with.

The study was presented Wednesday in Philadelphia, during the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America.

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