

Evidence Neanderthals used feathers for decoration

February 23 2011, by Lin Edwards



(PhysOrg.com) -- Researchers studying a large deposit of Neanderthal bones in Italy have discovered the remains of birds along with the bones, and evidence the feathers were probably used for ornamentation. The findings add evidence that the now extinct Neanderthals could have been as cultured as our own ancestors.

Paleoanthropologist Marco Peresani from the University of Ferrara in Italy and colleagues were studying Neanderthal remains in the Fumane Cave near Verona in northern Italy when they discovered the bones of birds in layers that were on the surface around 44,000 years ago.

The 660 bird bones included wing bones showing evidence of scraping, peeling and cutting by stone tools at the points at which the large flight [feathers](#) would have been attached. The feathers would have been of no culinary value and many of the bird species are poor food sources in any case. Feathered arrows had not yet been invented, and so the feathers would have had no practical value either, which suggests they were most likely removed for use as ornamentation or decoration.

The researchers found the first bird bones in September 2009 and this spurred them to re-examine all the bones found in that layer. Among the 22 species of birds they found were bearded lammergeiers, red-footed falcons, Eurasian black vultures, golden eagles, common wood pigeons, and Alpine choughs. The feather colors included black, blue-gray, gray and orange-slate gray.

Dr Peresani said bird feathers have been widely used by humans and have served a variety of purposes including making ornamental and ceremonial objects, and in games, but they have not previously been found associated with [Neanderthals](#). Other researchers have found shells in association with Neanderthal bones and suggested they may have worn them as jewelry.

The paper is published in the journal [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#) (*PNAS*).

More information: Late Neandertals and the intentional removal of feathers as evidenced from bird bone taphonomy at Fumane Cave 44 ky B.P., Italy, by Marco Peresani, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Published online before print February 22, 2011, [doi:10.1073/pnas.1016212108](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1016212108)

Citation: Evidence Neanderthals used feathers for decoration (2011, February 23) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-02-evidence-neanderthals-feathers.html>

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