

# Big birds: Giant, 1,000-pound birds once roamed around Europe

June 27 2019, by Edward Baig, Usa Today

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An artist's conception of the giant, 1,000-pound bird that once roamed around Europe. Credit: Andrey Atuchin

Talk about your big bird.

At 1,000 pounds and over 10 feet tall, it was one of the largest birds that ever lived in Earth's history. And almost 2 million years ago, early Europeans lived alongside some of these huge birds, according to new research published Wednesday.

Bones of the huge, long-extinct bird were recently discovered in a cave in Crimea.

"We estimate it weighed about 1,000 pounds," said study lead author Nikita Zelenkov of the Russian Academy of Sciences. "This formidable weight is nearly three times the largest living bird, the common ostrich, and nearly as much as an adult polar bear."

The bird would have towered above [early humans](#). Scientists speculate that it was likely flightless but was probably able to run quite fast.

Speed may have been key to the bird's survival, the study said. Alongside its bones, scientists also found fossils of huge carnivores such as giant cheetah, giant hyenas and saber-toothed cats.

According to the study, the bird may have also been a source of meat, bones, feathers and eggshells for early humans.

It was previously thought that such giant birds only lived on the islands of Madagascar and New Zealand as well as Australia. This is the first giant bird ever discovered in the Northern Hemisphere.

What current bird might it most resemble? "We don't have enough data yet to say whether it was most closely related to ostriches or to other [birds](#)," Zelenkov said.

The bones were discovered during the construction of a new highway in Crimea. "Last year, mammoth remains were unearthed (there) and there

may be much more the site will teach us about Europe's distant past," he said.

The study was published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology*.

**More information:** Nikita V. Zelenkov et al. A giant early Pleistocene bird from eastern Europe: unexpected component of terrestrial faunas at the time of early Homo arrival, *Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/02724634.2019.1605521](https://doi.org/10.1080/02724634.2019.1605521)

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