

New pterosaur species named after political cartoonist Gerald Scarfe

22 November 2011



Gerald Scarfe's iconic Thatcher image



Restoration of the skull outline of *Cuspicephalus scarfi*

(PhysOrg.com) -- A new species of pterosaur, discovered by a University of Portsmouth palaeontologist, has been named after the artist famous for his notorious and iconic caricatures of Margaret Thatcher.

The pterosaur is named *Cuspicephalus scarfi* after Gerald Scarfe, the political cartoonist whose pen demonised Mrs Thatcher as a pointy nosed 'torydactyl'. The new discovery was so-called because of its extremely long pointy head, which is most unusual for a pterosaur.

The species was found by fossil collector Steve Etches in Kimmeridge Bay, Dorset, and identified by palaeontologist Dr David Martill. The specimen is 155 million years old from the Late Jurassic period and is the most substantial pterosaur skull to be found in the UK for nearly 200 years. It is

now on display in Dorset's Museum of Jurassic Marine Life.

Mr. Scarfe said: "I'm thrilled and flattered - I never thought Mrs. Thatcher would do anything for me - even if it is to be immortalized as a 155 million year old fossil. I have spent many holidays in Kimmeridge and to think my namesake was buried beneath my feet is wonderfully bizarre."

The pterosaur skull was found compressed in a slab of dark grey mudstone and although some bones had been removed by marine erosion much of it is still intact. The specimen is the first significant remains of a pterosaur found in Kimmeridge Bay, despite the area being part of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site and renowned for its wide diversity of fossil vertebrates.

Dr. Martill from the School of Earth and Environmental Studies said: "This discovery is unique because pterosaur remains are so rare in the late Jurassic period in the UK and the skull is extraordinarily slender. It is also remarkable to find such a complete skull, allowing us to identify the species more easily.

"I've always been a fan of Gerald Scarfe because he's so cruelly funny. The pterodactyl, a type of pterosaur, is a trademark of his caricatures so I decided to name this specimen in his honour. I didn't seek his permission to use his name as he doesn't gain permission to depict the characters he has inked, but thankfully, I've since found out, he's absolutely thrilled.

"Although the new pterosaur discovery has a strong resemblance to his caricature of [Margaret Thatcher](#), [pterosaurs](#) were never as divisive as Thatcher!"

Pterosaurs are flying reptiles that lived at the same time as dinosaurs, between 210 million and 65 million years ago. The skull of the new species *Cuspicephalus scarfi* is 326 mm long - similar in

size to a stork or heron.

Dr. Martill said: "Although we've not yet carried out an analysis of the evolutionary relationships of *Cuspicephalus scarfi*, we believe this discovery is evolutionarily significant because it seems to be filling a gap between primitive, small, long-tailed pterosaurs evolving into more advanced short-tailed forms.

"Short-tailed pterosaurs differed hugely from their primitive long-tailed counterparts. Some were gigantic in size compared with the earlier forms and they had larger wings, enabling them to glide farther, faster and higher. *Cuspicephalus scarfi* appears to fill this large, tantalizing gap between the two forms."

The research is published in the journal *Acta Palaeontologica Polonica*.

Provided by University of Portsmouth

APA citation: New pterosaur species named after political cartoonist Gerald Scarfe (2011, November 22) retrieved 18 October 2021 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-11-pterosaur-species-political-cartoonist-gerald.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.