

*Sylviornis* confirms that the Rhatites are distributed on fragments of Gondwanaland, supporting the view of their common origin on that continent and dispersal without flying.

The bones come from Quaternary (probably Recent) brecciated coral reef and are older than the phase of brecciation which they themselves have suffered. The locality is an elevated barrier reef on the south of the Ile de Pins, Bay of Kanumera, a spot called Ure. The spongy ends of the bones have been lost and the diaphyses broken and dislocated. Geologists may be curious, as I was, about the cause of the brecciation.

The bones give substance to the local legend of the "Du," described as having on its head an ornament like a cassowary's. Archaeology in these regions has already shown that the oral tradition could apply to events several centuries ago. *Sylviornis* was able to persist into our own millennium, especially on the main island, more favourable for its survival. Undoubtedly, the author believes, it was exterminated by human beings who had been on New Caledonia for several millennia.

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*Fossil Counterparts of Giant Penguins from the North Pacific*, by Storrs L. Olson & Yoshikazu Hasegawa. 1979. *Science* 206, 9 November.

The extinct family Plotopteridae (Pelecaniformes) includes at least three genera of flightless penguin-like birds known as Oligocene and early Miocene fossils from Japan and Washington State. They most resemble Anhingidae in hindlimb and pelvic morphology but have paddle-like wings, convergent with those of penguins and flightless auks. The largest Japanese species probably exceeded 2 metres in length and may have been larger than the largest fossil penguin. Giant penguins and Plotopterids may have gone under to competition from seals and porpoises when they diversified to occupy similar pelagic niches, as first suggested by G. G. Simpson for the former.

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