

A specimen of *Rhamphorhynchus* with soft tissue preservation, stomach contents and a putative coprolite

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Despite being known for nearly two centuries, new specimens of the derived non-pterodactyloid pterosaur *Rhamphorhynchus* continue to be discovered and to reveal new information about their anatomy and palaeobiology. Here we describe a specimen held in the collections of the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology, Alberta, Canada that shows both preservation and impressions of soft tissues, and also preserves material interpreted as stomach contents of vertebrate remains and, uniquely, a putative coprolite. The specimen also preserves additional evidence for fibers in the uropatagium.

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2 **contents and a putative coprolite**

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16 **Abstract:**

17 Despite being known for nearly two centuries, new specimens of the derived non-
18 pterodactyloid pterosaur *Rhamphorhynchus* continue to be discovered and to reveal new
19 information about their anatomy and palaeobiology. Here we describe a specimen held in the
20 collections of the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology, Alberta, Canada that shows both
21 preservation and impressions of soft tissues, and also preserves material interpreted as stomach
22 contents of vertebrate remains and, uniquely, a putative coprolite. The specimen also preserves
23 additional evidence for fibers in the uropatagium.

24

25 **Keywords:** Pterosauria, rhamphorhynchoid, Rhamphorhynchinae, palaeoecology

26

27 **Introduction:**

28 *Rhamphorhynchus* is a derived non-pterodactyloid pterosaur known primarily from the Late
29 Jurassic ‘plattenkalk’ beds of the Solnhofen region in southern Germany. It is one of the best
30 known and most well represented of pterosaurs and is known from over 100 specimens, many of
31 which are complete and articulated. This includes specimens preserved in three dimensions, and
32 those that have extensive soft tissue preservation (see Wellnhofer, 1975; Frey et al., 2003; Hone
33 et al., 2013). The derived Cretaceous pterodactyloid *Pteranodon* is a rival for this title, being
34 known from many more specimens (in excess of 1000), many are only isolated elements or
35 fragmentary remains, and soft tissues are unknown (Bennett, 2001). Certainly *Rhamphorhynchus*
36 is the best known of the non-pterodactyloid pterosaurs, and as such presents a useful study model
37 for many aspects of pterosaur research and has been central to many studies of various aspect of
38 pterosaur biology (e.g. Bennett, 1995, 2007; Bonde & Christiansen, 2003; Claessens et al., 2009;
39 Henderson, 2010; Prondvai et al., 2012).

40 Pterosaur research is perhaps on the cusp of a revolution with a rapid growth in the number
41 of specimens recovered, research and understanding of the clade (Hone, 2012a). As a result,
42 rarely preserved features such as wing membranes or stomach contents are vital to reconstructing
43 the ecology and behavior of pterosaurs, even if they are present from otherwise well-studied taxa.
44 The diet of pterosaurs in particular is controversial and difficult to reconstruct (e.g. see

45 Humphries et al., 2007; Tütken & Hone, 2010; Ösi, 2012) and trophic interactions are key to our
46 understanding of the ecology and behavior of these animals. Despite a wealth of complete
47 specimens, and the often exceptional nature of the preservation, direct evidence of trophic
48 interactions based on stomach contents remains exceptionally rare for pterosaurs.
49 *Rhamphorhynchus* has commonly been interpreted as being piscivorous based on the long,
50 anteriorly directed and conical teeth, their presence in aquatic systems (Wellnhofer, 1975), and
51 most convincingly, several specimens seen to have consumed fish (Wellnhofer, 1975; Unwin,
52 2005; Frey & Tischlinger, 2012; Hone et al., 2013).

53 Despite a long history of research and discovery, new specimens of *Rhamphorhynchus*
54 continue to be discovered with specimens heralding from ongoing excavations (e.g. Frey &
55 Tischlinger, 2012), specimens in collections that had not previously been described (e.g. Hone,
56 2012b) or those which have been residing in private collections before becoming available to
57 researchers. Here we describe a new specimen of *Rhamphorhynchus* (TMP 2008.41.001 – Fig. 1)
58 that was recently acquired by the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology in Alberta, Canada.
59 This preserves extensive impressions of soft tissues, stomach contents of a vertebrate, and a
60 putative coprolite.

61

62 **Institutional Abbreviations:** BSP: Bayerische Staatssammlung für Paläontologie und Geologie,
63 Munich, Germany; CM, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.;
64 IVPP, Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology, Beijing, China; NMINH,
65 National Museum of Ireland, Natural

66 History, Dublin, Ireland; PIN, Palaeontological Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow,
 67 Russia; SMNK, Staatliches Museum für Naturkunde Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe, Germany; TMP:
 68 Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology, Drumheller, Canada; YPM: Yale Peabody Museum,
 69 New Haven, USA.

70

71

72 **Locality Information:**

73 Solnhofen, Schernfeld quarry, from Bavaria, Southern Germany. The Schernfeld quarry is
 74 identified as Ammonite zone Hybonotom, subzone, Riedense (Schweigert, 2007).

75

76 **Systematic Palaeontology:**

77 Pterosauria	Kaup, 1834
78 Rhamphorhynchidae	Seeley, 1870
79 <i>Rhamphorhynchus</i>	von Meyer, 1847
80 <i>R. muensteri</i>	Goldfuss, 1831

81

82 Here we follow Bennett (1995) in considering all Solnhofen specimens of
 83 *Rhamphorhynchus* to belong to a single species, *R. muensteri*. The genus has previously been
 84 split into a dozen or more species but these have convincingly been shown to consist of juveniles
 85 and subadults of a single species (see Bennett, 1995 for a review). Bennett (1995) provided a
 86 strong diagnosis for *R. muensteri* with numerous autapomorphies, though several of the

87 characters are also present in the recently named *Bellubrunnus* (Hone et al., 2012). TMP
88 2008.41.001 clearly belongs to *Rhamphorhynchus* as it possesses the following features defined
89 by Bennett (1995) not seen in *Bellubrunnus* (Hone et al., 2012): ten teeth in the upper jaw and
90 seven in the dentary, anterior teeth long and angled anteriorly and laterally, posterior teeth
91 shorter and more vertical, upper temporal fenestra rounded, femur shorter than humerus. Two
92 remaining characters used by Bennett (1995) to define the genus cannot be observed in the
93 specimen: lower temporal fenestra narrow and smaller than the upper, and fourth premaxillary
94 tooth larger and more lateral than other premaxillary teeth. The former cannot be observed owing
95 to the orientation of the skull, but given the size and shape of the upper temporal fenestra is
96 likely correct, and the latter may be the result of intraspecific variation or taphonomic distortion
97 or a temporary condition during tooth growth or replacement.

98

99 **Description:**

100 Specimen TMP 2008.41.001 was purchased from Pangea Fossils Ltd. and brought to the
101 Royal Tyrrell Museum in February of 2008. Notes in the TMP database for the specimen state
102 that it was originally discovered in the Schernfeld Quarry in 1965 and held in possession of the
103 family that owned quarries around the Eichstätt area. This is one of a number of quarries in the
104 Solnhofen basin to have yielded *Rhamphorhynchus* specimens, but these were not common in
105 Schernfeld, with only five having previously been recorded by Bennett (1995). Comparison of
106 TMP 2008.41.001 with measurements of material in Wellnhofer (1975) suggests that this is not
107 one of the privately held or lost specimens Wellnhofer had seen and so, aside from a single small

108 illustration of the specimen and a brief mention of the tail structure in Persons and Currie (2012),
109 all observations and measurements of this specimen should be new to the scientific literature.

110 *Rhamphorhynchus* is known from over 100 specimens and is thoroughly described and
111 illustrated in the literature (Wellnhofer, 1975, 1978). Therefore this description focuses on
112 details not commonly seen or preserved in other specimens of the genus.

113 The specimen (Fig. 1) is an animal approximately 990 mm in wingspan measured as the
114 total of the lengths of both humeri, radii, wing metacarpals and all wing phalanges. The bones
115 are of a rich, dark brown colour, though some form of glue or preservative has been added to
116 parts of the skeleton. The bone surface is generally well preserved, though some cortex is lost
117 and broken (e.g. left wing phalanges 2 and 3), and may be present in any counterplate that may
118 exist for the specimen, or were removed and / or destroyed during preparation. The matrix is a
119 very pale yellow-white colour, with occasionally flecks of darker sediment, and there are some
120 black dendrites around the bones and along cracks in the slab.

121 Overall the specimen is in very good condition, well-preserved and articulated with some
122 elements or parts of them preserved in three dimensions. The specimen is presented primarily in
123 ventral view as shown by the position of the sternum overlapping various elements and the lack
124 of visible neural spines and zygapophyses on the cervical and dorsal vertebrae. Some
125 disarticulation has occurred with the shoulder girdles and wings having moved slightly from
126 their natural positions and the ribs and gastralia having been somewhat scattered over the chest
127 of the specimen and part of the centre of the chest has much calcite crystal build up under the
128 preserved elements.

129 The specimen also preserves impressions of both brachiopatagia and a tail vane, and some
130 traces of the uropatagium (these membranes may also contain some fossilized soft tissues – see
131 below). The abdomen preserves gut contents of an indeterminate vertebrate and there is also a
132 pair of masses of material posterior to the pelvis interpreted as a coprolite.

133

134 *Skull and Mandible:*

135 The skull is presented in left dorsolateral view and is partially preserved in three dimensions,
136 though is also somewhat crushed and the left side appears a little distorted (Fig. 2). Some sutures
137 in the skull can be tentatively identified but these are mostly not clear, either because they are
138 being obliterated as a result of cranial fusion during ontogeny, or owing to crushing of elements.
139 All fenestrae of the skull on the left side except the lower temporal fenestra are clearly visible. A
140 fragment of bone is visible through the naris which likely represents a part of the palate. The
141 orbit also contains a T-shaped piece of bone ventral to the partial and poorly preserved sclerotic
142 ring, and this is mostly likely a separated ectopterygoid of the palate.

143 The left ramus of the mandible is seen in left lateral view and is articulated with the skull.
144 Twelve teeth are preserved in the upper jaw and ten in the mandible. In both cases one or two are
145 apparently only very small (left upper jaw alveoli 8 and 9, left dentary alveoli 3 and 5) and may
146 represent either incipient replacement teeth emerging, or are from the other side of the jaws and
147 so only the tips are visible. This would explain the rather higher count here than is normal for
148 *Rhamphorhynchus* (ten in the upper jaw and seven in the mandible – Bennett, 1995).

149

150 *Axial Skeleton:*

151 *Rhamphorhynchus* is known to have a numerous axial elements show pneumaticity based on
152 major cavities in bones coupled with pneumatopores that pierce the cortex (Bonde &
153 Christiansen, 2003). However here, as with many specimens of this genus, no external
154 pneumatopores are visible.

155 A ring of bone 5 mm in diameter, but only 2 mm in length is visible at the rear of the skull
156 which is interpreted as the separated atlas (Fig. 2). The axis is partially hidden behind the back of
157 the skull and is in left ventrolateral view such at the left lateral process of the neural arch is
158 visible. The rest of the cervical series is complete (six vertebrae) and articulated and seen in
159 ventral view, although the transition between the cervical and dorsal series is hard to identify.
160 The cervicals are approximately square in shape and the left cervical ribs can be seen in
161 articulation suggesting that the left side is marginally more exposed than the right as a result of
162 crushing.

163 The dorsal series is difficult to observe as this is partially covered by sternal elements, ribs,
164 and gastralia (Fig. 3). Approximately ten dorsals are preserved in an articulated series and are
165 seen in left ventrolateral view.

166 The sacrum is well preserved and consists of four vertebrae (Fig. 4). This is very slightly
167 displaced (clockwise in ventral view) relative to both the distal end of the dorsal series and the
168 proximal end of the caudal series. The sacral ribs are broad and fused to the ilium. The tail is
169 preserved in left ventrolateral view as shown by the presence of the transverse process being
170 obscured on the first two vertebrae and the asymmetric presentation of the elongate chevrons and

171 zygapophyses. The divisions between the vertebrae are difficult to distinguish along the majority
172 of the length of the tail and parts are covered by the left pes, so a vertebral count is not possible.
173 Proximally, several of the elongate vertebrae have disarticulated somewhat and are not closely
174 appressed to the caudal centra. The last six preserved caudals are very small (typically around
175 0.5 mm in length, though the terminal caudal appears to be just 0.05 mm long) and collectively
176 are the same length as the last unreduced caudal (4 mm in total). These tiny terminal caudals are
177 simple and lack the zygapophyses and chevrons of the other the caudal vertebrae, and nor are
178 they bounded by these extensions of the preceding vertebrae.

179 Numerous dorsal ribs and gastralia are preserved on the specimen but a count is not possible
180 given that many elements overlap one another. Many are disarticulated however, and their exact
181 original associations and positions cannot be fully determined. In particular, a number of
182 gastralia are displaced anteriorly and lie below the base of the cervical series (Fig. 3). One sternal
183 rib is preserved adjacent to the anteriormost dorsals and the left margin of the sternum, and
184 shows the typical form of these elements (see Claessens et al., 2009), which are rarely preserved.
185 Several other sternal ribs are preserved alongside the dorsal vertebral column, and two or three
186 further ones are positioned posterior to the sternum but none of these are well preserved.

187

188 *Pectoral girdle and forelimbs:*

189 The sternum is preserved and close to a natural position, with the left hand margin partly
190 overlapping the proximal dorsal centra. The entire right wing, including the right pectoral girdle,
191 has moved as an articulated unit to a position where it lies close to the pelvis. A part of the left

192 scapulacoracoid is preserved close to its natural position but is mostly hidden by the sternum.
193 The right scapula and coracoid are seen in ?anterior view and appear to be nearly fully fused
194 together into a single unit, the visible anterior edge of which has suffered some damage. The
195 distal part of the coracoid is partially buried in the matrix and is underneath a large calcite crystal.

196 Both wings are well preserved and are nearly completely articulated (Figs. 5, 6), although
197 the wing phalanges have rotated along their long axes relative to the proximal parts and the right
198 wing metacarpal has separated from the radius and ulna. Both humeri are preserved in medial
199 view, though the right is partially concealed below the femur. The right radius and ulna are better
200 preserved than the left, but the proximal and distal ends of the right are concealed beneath the
201 right humerus and proximal wing phalanx. The left carpals are present and apparently fused into
202 the proximal and distal syncarpal blocks seen in adult pterosaurs, but are poorly preserved and
203 neither pteroid can be seen. In the right wing, the distal parts of metacarpals 1 and 2 are seen
204 having separated slightly from the wing metacarpal and the other elements of the manus are all
205 preserved. In the left wing, only the penultimate phalanx of digit three and all three unguals are
206 visible.

207 Both wing fingers are present and articulated, although each wing finger has rotated about its
208 long axis and lies 180° out of the position relative to the proximal parts of their respective wings.
209 In the right wing, the extensor tendon process is fully fused to wing phalanx 1. Both the left and
210 right fourth wing phalanges are moderately posteriorly curved as seen in many pterosaur
211 specimens, including a number of ~~examples~~ of *Rhamphorhynchus* (Hone et al., 2013), and these
212 also terminate in a squared-off tip. In the right wing, the very tip of the fourth wing phalanx is

213 slightly broken, however, there is a clear impression of the tip and this, like the left, is clearly
214 blunt.

215

216 *Pelvic girdle and hindlimbs:*

217 The pelvis is partially disarticulated and some elements appear to have been lost. Both ilia
218 are articulated with the sacrum and appear to be fused to ~~this it~~. The anterior wings of the ilia are
219 well preserved, though the posterior wings are damaged and poorly preserved. The proximal part
220 of the right pubis is articulated with the right ilium, but only the articular end is visible and the
221 rest appears to be hidden below other elements. Only one ischium (?right) can be identified and
222 this is not articulated with, or fused to, the ilium or pubis, but instead has moved anteriorly and
223 lies close to the sternum. The left pubis cannot be seen and appears to be the only major element
224 lost from the specimen. Both prepubes are preserved but are in poor condition and covered by
225 other elements. They are in close association but are not articulated with one another and lie
226 posterior and ventral to the sacrum.

227 Both hindlimbs are complete and articulated though the right foot is partially hidden under
228 the right wing and the last phalanges of the left foot are hidden by the tail. The midshaft of the
229 right femur is also partially concealed by the right humerus, but the outline of the bone is visible.

230

231 *Soft-tissues:*

232 A number of soft tissues or their impressions are preserved in the specimen but in places it is
233 difficult to separate between the two possibilities. These are either impressed into the matrix or

234 raised above it, suggesting they are genuine features and not carved into the matrix artificially, or
235 are the remnants of preparation marks etc. Both brachiopatagia are present (Figs. 5, 6) and in a
236 relatively natural position (i.e. have not dissociated and moved as seen in some pterosaur
237 specimens cf. Elgin et al., 2011) and are preserved as very faint transparent outlines on the
238 matrix. Each wing has a more narrow chord along most of its length than seen in some
239 specimens of *Rhamphorhynchus* (e.g. BSPG 1938 I 503a, the ‘Dark Wing’ specimen – Frey et al.,
240 2003) suggesting some postmortem shrinkage of the membranes (Elgin et al., 2011). Both
241 brachiopatagia also appear to have a near 90° turn in them level with the distal end of the radius
242 and ulna, and then become narrower towards the elbow and body. This is likely because the
243 medial part of the wing (the tenopatagium) has fewer or no actinofibrils compared to the more
244 distal part (the actinopatagium) and thus has less support and a greater tendency to shrink or
245 decay after death. Proximal to the elbow, the right tenopatagium (Fig. 6) is rather less clearly
246 preserved than the left actinopatagium (Fig. 5), but does appear to meet the left ankle as is
247 considered common, or even ubiquitous, for pterosaur wing membranes (Elgin et al., 2011).

248 Under low angle lighting, both actinopatagia show evidence of actinofibrils, though these
249 are considered most likely to be impressions of the fibers, rather than actual preserved soft
250 tissues, since the preserved wings are all but identical in colour to the underlying matrix and are
251 not carbonized or darker than the matrix as in most Solnhofen pterosaurs that preserve soft
252 tissues of the wing (e.g. BSPG 1938 I 503a, the ‘Dark Wing’ specimen, YPM 1778), and are
253 more similar to other specimens considered to be preserved as impressions (e.g. BSPG 1880 II 8).

254

255 Identification of the actinofibrils in the matrix is difficult given the very shallow indentations
256 of their preservation, and this is compounded by the fact that the wing membranes have shrunk
257 from their original form. In addition, there must also be some folding to the membrane given the
258 rotation of the wing fingers and the fact that the distal membrane can be seen on both the leading
259 and trailing sides of the right wingtip. Furthermore, at least some parts of the wings have been
260 covered with some form of transparent preservative and brush marks (e.g. swirls) are clearly
261 visible in places on the matrix. Some actinofibrils are visible on the distal left wing and lie
262 subparallel to one another and the fourth wing phalanx as seen in other pterosaurs, including
263 *Rhamphorhynchus* (Bennett, 2000; Frey et al., 2003). The number and density of the actinofibrils
264 cannot be determined as they are too few and too poorly preserved (perhaps because they are
265 impressions). Lying at approximately 45° to the fibrils in the right wingtip are a series of short
266 apparent grooves (these are approximately 0.3 mm in diameter and 1 mm in length) which are
267 interpreted as small folds or wrinkles in the membrane because these are considerably larger than
268 the typical diameter of actinofibrils in this genus (0.05 mm – Bennett, 2000).

269 The tips of the wing membranes appear to meet the distal ends of the fourth wing phalanx at
270 an acute angle, and do not show the anteroposteriorly enlarged tips to the membranes as in other
271 pterosaurs (including BSPG 1880 II 8). This may be as a result of postmortem shrinkage, or in
272 the case of the right wing, a result of the folding of the membrane in conjunction with the
273 rotation of the wing finger. The right wing membrane appears on both sides of the fourth phalanx
274 as a result of the rotation of the wing along its long axis.

275 No part of the propatagium from either arm can be seen, but this is perhaps not surprising

276 given that the pteroids are hidden or lost, and the way the arms have folded might also conceal
277 these membranes even if preserved. Despite the poor preservation around the posterior part of
278 the sacrum and the overlapping elements of the tail and pes, part of the uropatagium, or an
279 impression of it, is preserved (Fig. 7). In the crux of the left hindlimb there is a series of very fine
280 parallel striations running anteroposteriorly and parallel to the tibia, that in gross form matches
281 those seen in the actinopatagia. However, there are unlikely to be stray actinofibrils from the
282 wings given that the wings overall are intact and the tenopatagium, which, although less well
283 preserved than the actinopatagium, would have few or no actinofibrils (Bennett, 2000).
284 Pycnofibers (body covering fibers, that may also be present on the wings – see Kellner et al.,
285 2009) are also not preserved elsewhere on the specimen, and the fibers seen ~~her~~^{here} in the
286 uropatagium are generally too long, thin and straight to be pycnofibers (e.f. Kellner et al., 2009).
287 There are also no stray fibers on other parts of the slab, further suggesting that these are genuine
288 and part of the uropatagium.

289 As with the actinofibrils, the fibers in the uropatagium are considered to be preserved
290 primarily as impressions in the matrix, rather than true soft tissue preservation (although this
291 alternative is not ruled out). The clearest part of the uropatagium is perhaps part of the trailing
292 edge because it lies at the very distal end of the tibia (Fig. 8), suggesting a termination close to
293 the ankle as seen in other pterosaurs (e.g. *Sordes* PIN 2585/3, *Pterodactylus*, BSPG 1937. I.18).
294 At the distal edge of the uropatagium, a high number of fibrils can be seen to be parallel to the
295 tibia and are associated with a pale yellow stain on the matrix. The individual fibers are
296 approximately 0.06-0.1 mm in diameter, and although their length is difficult to identify, one at

297 least is around 3 mm in length. These are densely packed, with around 12 fibers per mm of
298 membrane (Fig. 8).

299 Additional striations are visible on the lateral edges of the two tibiae and left metatarsals.
300 These might be scratch marks from preparation, but this seems unlikely as these are in places
301 soft tissues might be expected (decayed uropatagium, proximal tenopatagium, foot webbing) and
302 the marks are very fine and very closely packed and parallel which seems unlikely to be
303 generated by a preparator. Nor do they appear in areas around the skull or anterior to the leading
304 edges of the wing fingers where preparation might be similar to that around the hindlimbs, and
305 nor do they match marks made during preparation of the midsection to reveal the gut contents
306 (done by the TMP in April, 2013). Finally, some of the striations of the uropatagium track across
307 the uneven surface of the matrix (where the yellow staining lies – Fig. 8) suggesting these are not
308 preparation scratches, but impressions tracking the surface of the matrix, and they are not
309 associated with the preservative on the wings noted above, so are not brush marks. These then
310 are most likely fibers of some form but their origin is not clear. The uropatagium has become
311 displaced relative to the bones even in some exceptionally preserved specimens (e.g. *Sordes* PIN
312 2585-33). This may be a continuation of the uropatagium but displaced and visible lateral to the
313 tibia.

314 A diamond-shaped tail vane (or an impression) is also preserved as a near-transparent stain
315 on the specimen, though the dorsal side is preserved as a slight impression, and the ventral side is
316 slightly raised above the level of the matrix (Fig. 6). The vane in total is 61 mm long and has a
317 maximum height of 39 mm. The distal end of this corresponds almost exactly with the tip of the

318 very last reduced caudal of the tail. Very faint impressions of fibers are seen in the tail vane but
319 these are sparse and difficult to separate from the apparent preparation scratches on the surface
320 of the matrix. The fibers are of similar diameter to the impressions of actinofibrils in the distal
321 parts of the brachiopatagia, and are aligned dorsoventrally (i.e. perpendicular to the caudals) in
322 the vane.

323 The keratinous sheathes of several unguals are also preserved on the specimen as dark
324 orange stains. These are present on the unguals of the right manus and the unguual of digit 1 of the
325 left foot. The claw of manual digit 3 also includes a 'claw spike' that is approximately 1.5 mm in
326 length. This spike is a kind of very thin and needle-like extension of the very tip of an unguual.
327 Such a feature is seen on a number of Mesozoic ornithodirans (e.g. the azhdarchid SMNK PAL
328 3830, and the dromaeosaurid dinosaur *Microraptor*, IVPP V 1335) and extends off the tip of the
329 bony unguual and may form part of the unguual, or be an additional element. The lack of the
330 presence of claw sheathes and the keratinous ramphotheca may be the result of loss during
331 preparation.

332 Finally there are some orange stains around the body of the specimen, which may represent
333 decayed or modified soft tissues. Similar orange soft tissue stains are seen in other Solnhofen
334 *Rhamphorhynchus* specimens (e.g. CM 11429, NMINH F 10172) and this inference here is
335 supported by the orange colouration of the preserved claw sheathes (goethite stains). There are
336 however, some other orange stains on the matrix not directly associated with the bony parts of
337 the animal, but whether these may represent decayed and drifted organic tissues of the pterosaur,
338 other organic remains, or some geological artefact is not clear.

339

340 *Ingested material:*

341 Gut contents consisting of indeterminate vertebrate elements are preserved in the thoracic
342 cavity of the specimen (Fig. 3). These elements are bounded by the ribs and other thoracic parts
343 of the skeleton (i.e. the bones of the pterosaur lie both above and below the elements in question)
344 and they do not conform in size or shape to any of the elements of the *Rhamphorhynchus* (and
345 ~~only apparently~~ the pteroids and one part of the pelvis are missing from the specimen). Given the
346 overall articulated and well-preserved nature of the specimen it is unlikely these elements have
347 somehow drifted into this position from outside of the animal and are therefore considered to
348 have been consumed items. A number of these consumed elements are present in the thoracic
349 region which are likely ingested remains of food (i.e. gut contents), but most of these are
350 distorted and difficult to identify though their overall shape appears to be that of squat cylinders.
351 Their exact identity cannot be determined as they are incomplete and partially covered by other
352 elements, and much of the chest cavity has calcite crystal buildup.

353 A putative coprolite is also preserved in association with the specimen (Fig. 9). This lies
354 almost immediately posterior to the sacrum and thus in a position likely close to the cloaca in life.
355 This has split in two, but the terminal ends of the separated pieces are largely straight and they
356 are of the same size and shape, suggesting a single mass that split along a weak point, rather than
357 two separate pieces. The smaller part (that is closer to the pterosaur's pelvis) is poorly preserved
358 and shows calcite crystals and is 11 mm long and 3 mm across. The second mass is 8 mm long
359 and 4 mm across and consists of many tens of small and pale comma-shaped or spike-like

360 elements (Fig. 10). These are typically around 0.2-0.3 mm in length, though larger ones are 0.45
361 mm. Some tiny ones are around 0.05 mm, and are more simple in shape, but these may be
362 partially concealed under other elements as they only appear in the greatest concentration of
363 these pieces.

364

365 **Discussion:**

366 Based on the size of the animal and the fusion of various skeletal elements, the specimen
367 TMP 2008.41.001 is considered close to adult status, though there is a mixture of immature and
368 mature characteristics present. In terms of size, it is within the most common range of sizes of
369 elements seen in specimens of *Rhamphorhynchus*, and these are typically immature (Bennett,
370 1995) with few adults being known. A number of fused elements show that this animal is not a
371 young juvenile - the scapula is fused to the coracoid and the wing extensor tendon process is
372 fully fused to wing phalanx 1 with an obliterated suture (Figs. 3, 5, 6). However, the sutures of
373 the skull are still somewhat visible and have not been obliterated as in adults (Fig. 2) and
374 similarly, although the ilium appears well fused to the sacrum, the apparent separation of the
375 pubis and ischium suggest they were not fully fused to each other or the rest of the pelvis (Fig. 4).
376 The bone texture (where well preserved) is smooth and unlike those of very young pterosaurs
377 (Bennett, 1995). Of Bennett's (1995) year classes for *Rhamphorhynchus*, the shape of the
378 cranium of TMP 2008.41.001 is intermediate between year class 3 and 4 (and is probably closer
379 to 4), but the mandible matches class 3 well (Bennett, 1995 - his Fig 5). The shape of the tail
380 vane, being a diamond rather than closer to a triangle (as seen in mature specimens), also

381 suggests immaturity (Bennett, 1995, Fig. 6). Collectively then, the evidence suggests that this
382 specimen was not a young juvenile, nor an adult, but the fusion and even obliteration of some
383 sutures in the skeleton, combined with the wingspan and shape of the cranium suggest that it was
384 close to osteological maturity.

385 The somewhat unusual disarticulation pattern of the specimen is also worthy of comment.
386 The right wing has moved posteriorly, but the ischium has moved anteriorly, as have some of the
387 gastralia. Also the right scapulocoracoid has moved with the right wing, but the left wing is in a
388 natural position, though this has (as a unit), slightly separated from the left scapulocoracoid (Fig.
389 1). This implies that there was no consistent current or effects of dissociation during decay. The
390 animal presumably came to rest on the substrate on its back, and as the material decayed or was
391 compressed under sediment, collapsed in part to the right, leading to the displacement of the
392 sternum, sacrum and prepubes and perhaps the right wing, and the position of the left leg.
393 **Bloating of the carcass during decay may have occurred** and would explain the anterior
394 movement of the gastralia and the expulsion of the putative coprolite, although the preservation
395 of the wing membranes suggests that there was generally little decay here.

396

397 *Osteology:*

398 The tiny distal caudal vertebrae indicate that most *Rhamphorhynchus* tails were incomplete,
399 even when they appear to be complete, since the distalmost unreduced caudal may have a
400 rounded posterior face similar to the terminal caudals of many tetrapods. Wellnhofer (1991) had
401 illustrated these tiny vertebrae before, but these are rarely preserved (presumably in part because

402 they are not bounded by the chevrons and zygapophyses) and this feature was overlooked by Lü
403 and Hone (2012) on pterosaur tail lengths. However, as they here constitute less than 1.6% of the
404 total length of the tail, this is unlikely to have any real effect on the data presented to date by Lü
405 and Hone (2012). It does however suggest that similar ‘additional’ caudals may have been
406 present in other pterosaurs but are not often preserved, or may be lost due to careless preparation.

407

408 *Soft tissues:*

409 Despite large numbers of complete and articulated pterosaurs preserved in Konservät-
410 Lagerstätte-type deposits, soft tissues remain rare for pterosaurs, though increasing amounts of
411 material are being discovered and described (Sullivan et al., 2014). The brachiopatagia are
412 probably still the most commonly preserved parts, although some soft tissues that might expect
413 to be commonly preserved are still rare. For example, claw sheathes were first reported for
414 pterosaurs from the Solnhofen in 2003 (Frey et al., 2003) and beaks are also little known, even
415 though they were presumably present on edentulous pterosaurs as well as being known for
416 toothed forms including *Pterodactylus* and *Rhamphorhynchus* (Frey et al., 2003). Thus the
417 information preserved here (as preserved tissue and / or impressions) are of importance and do
418 provide corroboration of existing hypotheses.

419 The part of wing membranes preserved here (Figs. 5, 6) are most likely the remains of
420 impressions in the matrix, but some soft tissues may be preserved. This is difficult to determine
421 as the wings are seen primarily in ventral view and actinofibrils may be concentrated in the
422 ventral part of the wing (Padian & Rayner, 1993) and can be preserved as natural casts in some

423 specimens. We suggest that these are primarily casts, with the stains representing traces of soft
424 tissues, but this cannot currently be confirmed. The limited extent of the fibers seen in the
425 brachioptagium may be a result of poor preservation, or because most of the wing is preserved
426 and the fibers are buried within it. Examination under UV light did not reveal ~~are~~ additional
427 details that can be seen under normal natural and artificial lights. Future work with additional
428 lights and filters may reveal additional details.

429 The actinofibrils that are seen in the brachioptagia do conform to the size and shape
430 previously described for these structures in *Rhamphorhynchus* (and some other pterosaurs) being
431 approximately 0.05 mm in diameter (Padian & Rayner, 1993; Bennett, 2000; Frey et al., 2003)
432 and these conform most closely to the type A wing fibers as described by Kellner et al. (2009).

433 Confirmation of fibers being present in the uropatagium (Fig. 7) is more important. These
434 have been reported before for pterosaurs, being also present in the holotype of the anurognathid
435 *Jeholopterus* (Kellner et al., 2009) where fibers are seen to be both subparallel to the long axis of
436 the body and also perpendicular to the tibia as seen here, and fibers of some kind were also
437 suggested for the uropatagium of *Eudimorphodon* (Wild, 1994). Unwin and Bakhurina (1994)
438 also noted that the scaphognathine *Sordes* had a large uropatagium replete with fibers, but the
439 size, shape and orientation of these was not discussed. As described above, a series of sub-
440 parallel fibers are present implying the presence of the uropatagium towards the ankles of the
441 animal and imply a typically broad rhamphorhynchoid-type uropatagium (e.g. see Unwin, 2005).
442 These are subparallel to the long axis of the body and suggest that fibers did help support the
443 uropatagium in this taxon. Frey et al (2003) also noted the presence of fibers with the

444 uropatagium in the ‘Dark Wing’ specimen of *Rhamphorhynchus* but these were described as
445 being ‘bushy’ and their position on the lateral face of the tibia / fibula suggest these were in fact
446 pycnofibers associated with the body rather than actinofibril-like fibers in the uropatagium itself.

447 The claw sheathes seen here do seem to be genuinely preserved soft tissues given their clear
448 colour and texture differences to the surrounding matrix. The sheathes are smaller than many
449 described for pterosaurs (e.g. see Frey et al., 2003) as the apparent extent of the sheath extends
450 little beyond the claw-spike of the ungual. However, this may be a result of incomplete
451 preservation, or damage during preparation, and confirmation of short manual claws for
452 *Rhamphorhynchus* should be sought from additional specimens.

453

454 *The diet of Rhamphorhynchus:*

455 Stomach contents for pterosaurs are very rare, despite the prevalence of these taxa in areas
456 of exceptional preservation that often include soft tissues (e.g. Sullivan et al., 2014).
457 *Rhamphorhynchus* is perhaps already the genus with the most data in this regard, with several
458 specimens being shown to have elements of fish (Wellnhofer, 1975; Hone et al., 2013), or even
459 an entire fish having been consumed (Wellnhofer, 1975; Unwin, 2005; Frey & Tischlinger,
460 2012). There is little doubt then that, as commonly suggested in the literature (Wellnhofer, 1978,
461 1991; Unwin, 2003; Padian, 2008; Witton, 2013), *Rhamphorhynchus* was at least occasionally
462 piscivorous.

463 This interpretation is further supported by the fact that *Rhamphorhynchus* itself was the
464 victim of attacks by fish (Frey & Tischlinger, 2012) suggesting they were spending significant

465 amount of time over water, and isotope data supports their collecting food from marine systems
466 (Tütken & Hone, 2010), despite likely limitations when at rest on the surface of the water (Hone
467 & Henderson, 2014). The cranial morphology of *Rhamphorhynchus* and indeed other
468 rhamphorhynchines does appear well suited to taking food from the water with numerous,
469 anteriorly directed teeth and elongate jaws which extend further with a keratinous beak (Frey et
470 al., 2003) as is seen on some modern piscivorous fish and contemporaneous marine predators
471 including a number of plesiosaurs.

472 Although fish were clearly part of the diet, and *Rhamphorhynchus* was apparently
473 specialised for taking aquatic prey, this would not rule out other sources of food. Unidentified
474 remains in the stomach of a specimen of *Rhamphorhynchus* shows that diet was not exclusively
475 fish (Wellhofer, 1991 p 160). Carnivorous animals will take animalian food items from well
476 outside their 'typical' range if the food is available and there is no reason to think pterosaurs
477 would be different. The specimen here preserves two different traces that in part suggest this
478 genus may have had a diet beyond fish.

479 First, there are gut contents in the chest cavity of the specimen that are represented by
480 indeterminate vertebrate elements. These bones may represent fish or tetrapod elements, but are
481 not part of the pterosaur as they match none of the dissociated or missing material (ribs, gastralia,
482 sternal ribs, pteroids, pelvic elements) but instead are a subrectangular series and associated
483 subcircular elements that collectively may be vertebrae (Fig. 3). Possible identifications are the
484 opercula of a sizeable fish, or small vertebrae from sharks, though in the case of the former these
485 would be in the absence of all other elements, and the latter implies a more sizeable animal that a

486 small pterosaur may have been able to tackle. Although we cannot absolutely verify the identity
487 of these elements, it is possible that they are tetrapodan – for example in addition to the
488 possibility they represent tetrapodan centra, they also bear a resemblance to some carpals and
489 tarsals of marine crocodylians from the Solnhofen (e.g. *Geosaurus*). If so, this is the first case of
490 consumption of tetrapodan food items by a pterosaur. Small tetrapods (both aquatic and
491 terrestrial) are known from the Solnhofen (Barthel et al., 1990) and of course these would
492 produce still smaller juvenile animals, which would form potential consumed items.

493 The calcite crystal mass underlying the stomach contents, suggests some hard organic matter
494 was originally present because calcite crystals are commonly associated with cartilage in
495 Solnhofen pterosaurs **at least**, (Bennett, 2007). Thus while the only clearly identified remains are
496 the putative vertebrae, the other elements and the calcite mass suggest a sizeable meal was
497 originally present in the digestive tract of the pterosaur.

498 The part of the inferred coprolite closest to the pelvis of the animal (Fig. 9) is similarly
499 indistinct and apparently consists of a calcite crystal mass again suggesting the presence of
500 harder organic tissues as with the stomach contents. The second part is composed of tiny
501 elements that are simple spikes and hook-like shapes (Fig. 10). These we originally suggested
502 were hooklets from the arms or tentacles of a cephalopod (Hone et al., 2012) but we now
503 **tentatively reject this hypothesis**. A number of alternatives have also been assessed including the
504 **branchial apparatus of a small fish, and possible invertebrate origins such as spines from a small**
505 **echinoderm but none are confident referrals**. Examination of the **remains of various vertebrates**
506 **and invertebrates from the Solnhofen** do not reveal any compelling matches, but this may be as a

507 result of the unusual preservational situation.

508 These elements have passed through the digestive tract of an animal and thus will have been
509 affected by digestive processes. They have then been deposited alongside various chemicals and
510 in a fecal mass which would make for a very different local condition to specimens normally
511 preserved in the Solnhofen. Either of these two issues, or both in combination, may have affected
512 the preservational potential of the 'hooks' or their appearance and thus identifying them may
513 prove very difficult.

514 If the diagnosis is correct, this is the first recorded coprolite for any pterosaur. Coprolites are
515 rare for many vertebrate clades, and it is likely *Rhamphorhynchus* defecated over water causing
516 the breakup of the excreted matter. Preservation here is likely as a result of the material being
517 expelled postmortem and in a low energy system thus preventing the dissipation of the fecal
518 pellet. Data from the extant phylogenetic bracket for pterosaurs (crocodilians and birds) and from
519 the digestion and excretion by Mesozoic non-avian dinosaurs is variable. Birds typically produce
520 a near liquid mass, while crocodilians typically produce solid pellets, these can break down
521 quickly (Fisher, 1981). However, a more solid coprolite is known for some birds, and at least one
522 large Mesozoic theropod (Chin et al. 1998). The preservation here of even tiny elements suggests
523 a relatively low amount of acid in the stomach because these have not been destroyed or
524 damaged by their passage (cf Fisher, 1981; Andrews & Fernandez-Jalvo, 1998 on crocodilian
525 digestion and waste).

526 Although we no longer consider the putative coprolite evidence of direct feeding on
527 cephalopods by pterosaurs, this is a plausible hypothesis and worthy of further consideration.

528 Cuttlefish and especially squid match the general form of fish and prey capture would be similar
529 for both, as demonstrated in many modern birds and large predatory fish that may take fish or
530 squid. Although some authors may have considered the idea of cephalopods as part of the
531 pterosaur diet implicit in the term ‘piscivory’ it does not seem to have been explicit, even in
532 cases where cephalopods are mentioned. For example, Kemp (2001) noted that both fish and
533 cephalopods would have been in the upper waters of the Solnhofen and local crocodylians would
534 have fed there on both, but despite suggesting pterosaurs would also be limited to feeding in this
535 zone, he suggested they were piscivorous.

536 Clarification should therefore be made with regards to terms such as ‘piscivory’ to make it
537 explicit the possible prey range encompassed. Both data and analyses of pterosaur diets are
538 increasing (Humphries et al., 2007; Tütken & Hone, 2010; Ösi, 2011; Witton & Naish, in press)
539 but understanding will be hindered with ambiguous terminology. Even so, the new information
540 here does tentatively suggest a broader diet for pterosaurs than simply fish, and the rapid increase
541 in study in this area is likely to shed additional light on the foraging and feeding behaviour of
542 pterosaurs.

543

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554

555

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1

Figure 1

Figure 1: Specimen TMP 2008.41.001 of *Rhamphorhynchus muensteri*. Scale bar is 100 mm.



2

Figure 2

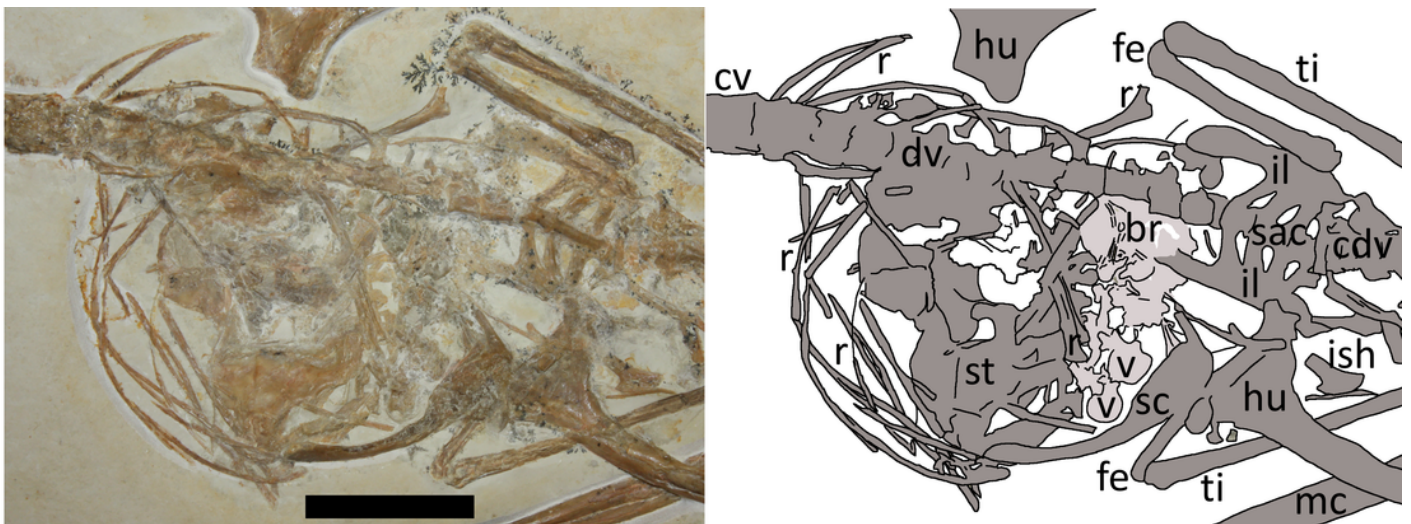
Figure 2: Photograph of skull showing the ring-like atlas at the rear of the skull and palatal element sitting inside the ventral part of the orbit. Scale bar is 50 mm.



3

Figure 3

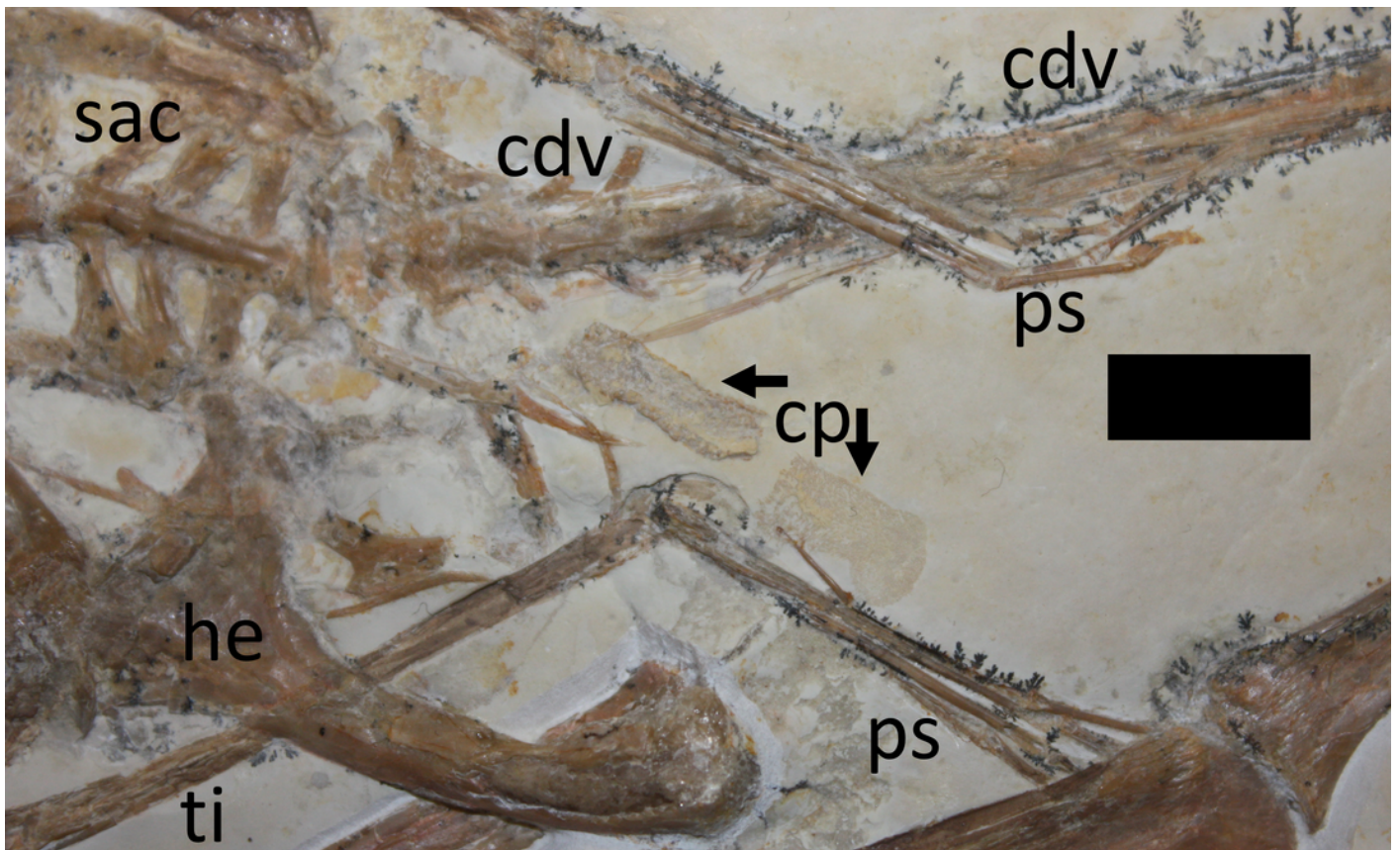
Figure 3: Left: Close-up of chest cavity and inferred gut contents in the abdominal region. Scale bar is 20 mm. Right: Map of the major elements seen in figure 3. Bony elements are in dark grey and abbreviations are as follows: cdv, caudal vertebrae; cv, cervical vertebrae; dr, dorsal rib; dv, dorsal vertebrae; fe, femur; hu, humerus; il, ilium; ish, ischium; mc, metacarpal; r, ribs; sc, scapulocoracoid; sac, sacrum; st, sternum; ti, tibia. Possible stomach contents are in light grey - note that the preservation in this area is poor and parts of the highlighted region consist primary of calcite. Key areas are the possible vertebrae (v) and the long, thin bony rods (br).



4

Figure 4.

Figure 4: Close-up of hindlimbs and associated region. Abbreviations as per figure 3, with the following additions: cp, coprolite; ps, pes. Scale bar is 10 mm.

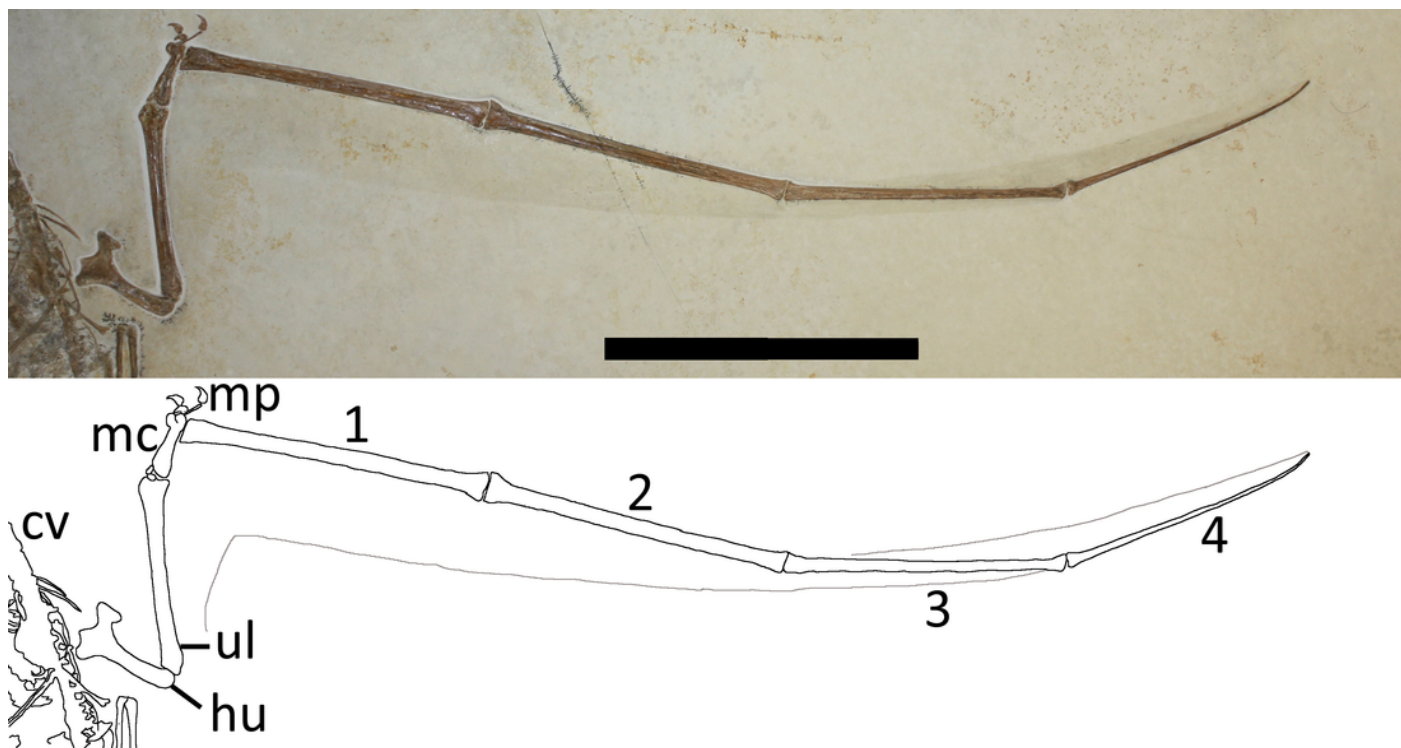


5

Figure 5

Figure 5: Above: Close-up of the left wing showing preserved membranes. Below: The wing membranes and tail vane are outlined in pale grey and the coprolites are in dark grey.

Abbreviations as above with the following additions: mp, manual phalanges of digits I-IV; ul, ulna, 1-4, wing phalanges 1-4. Scale bar is 100 mm.

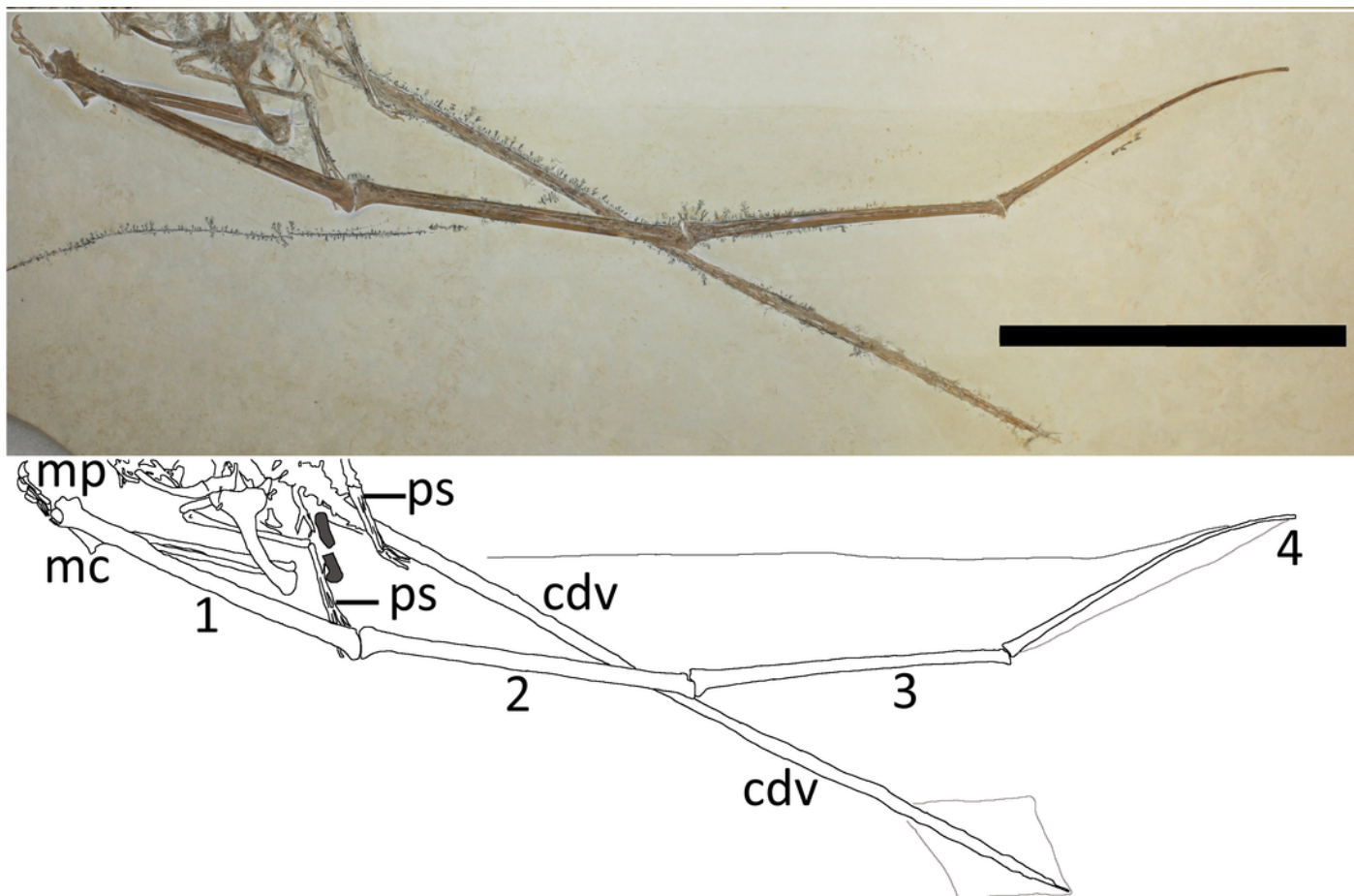


6

Figure 6

Figure 6: Above: Close-up of the right wing showing preserved membranes. Below: The wing membranes and tail vane are outlined in pale grey and the coprolites are in dark grey.

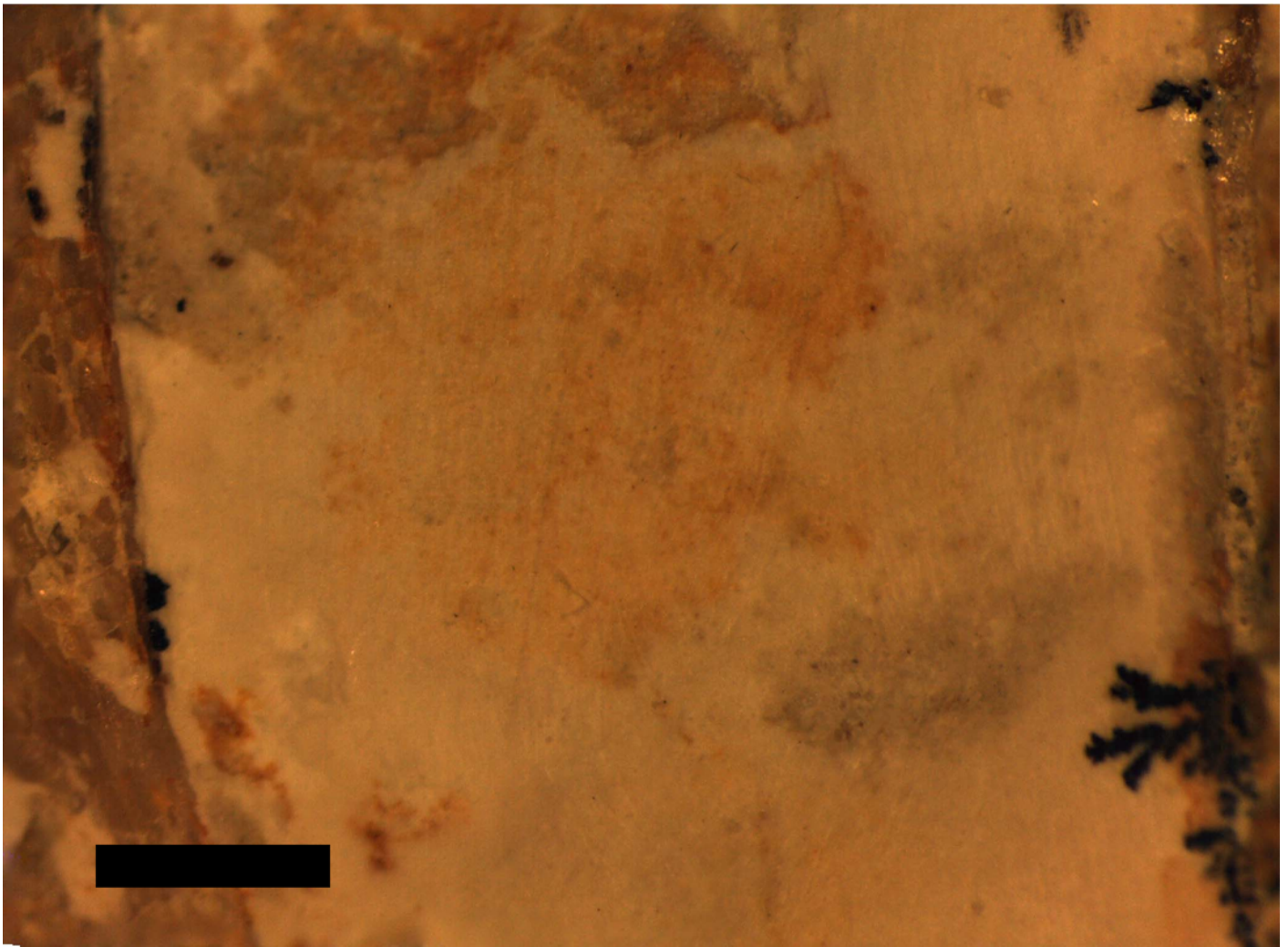
Abbreviations as above with the following additions: mp, manual phalanges of digits I-IV; ul, ulna, 1-4, wing phalanges 1-4. Scale bar is 100 mm.



7

Figure 7

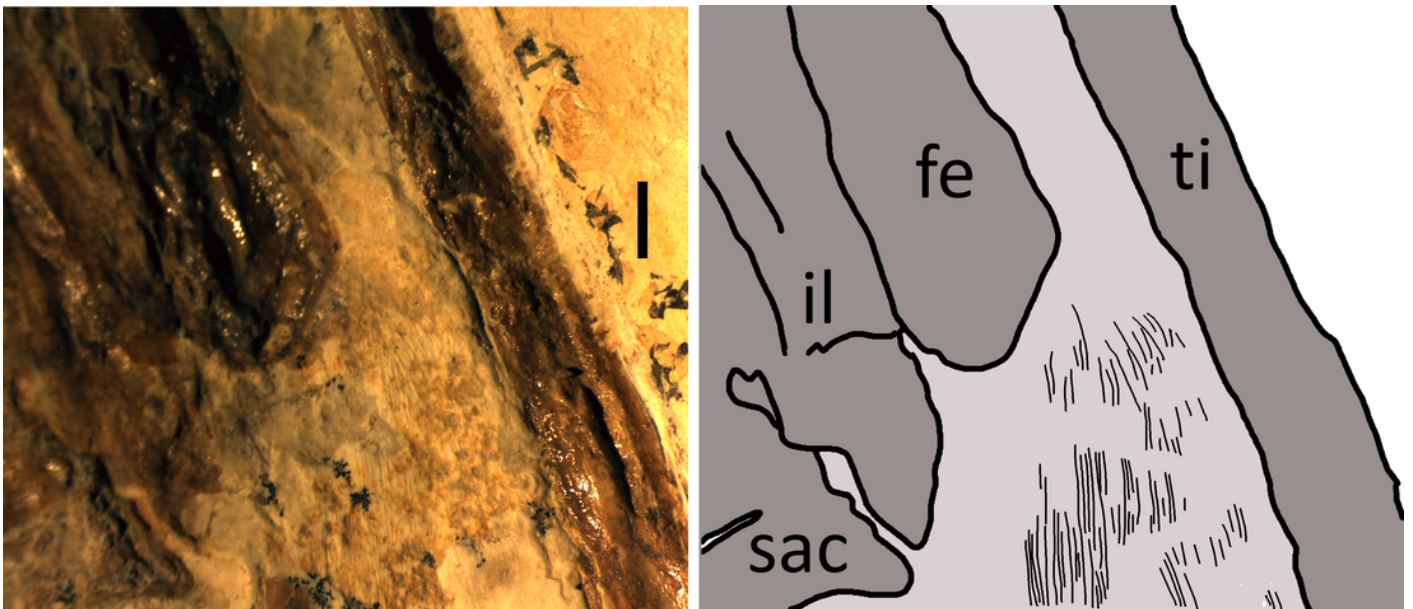
Figure 7. Photograph taken under binocular microscope of fibrils in the uropatagium. The large element on the right is the right tibia. Scale bar is 1 mm.



8

Figure 8

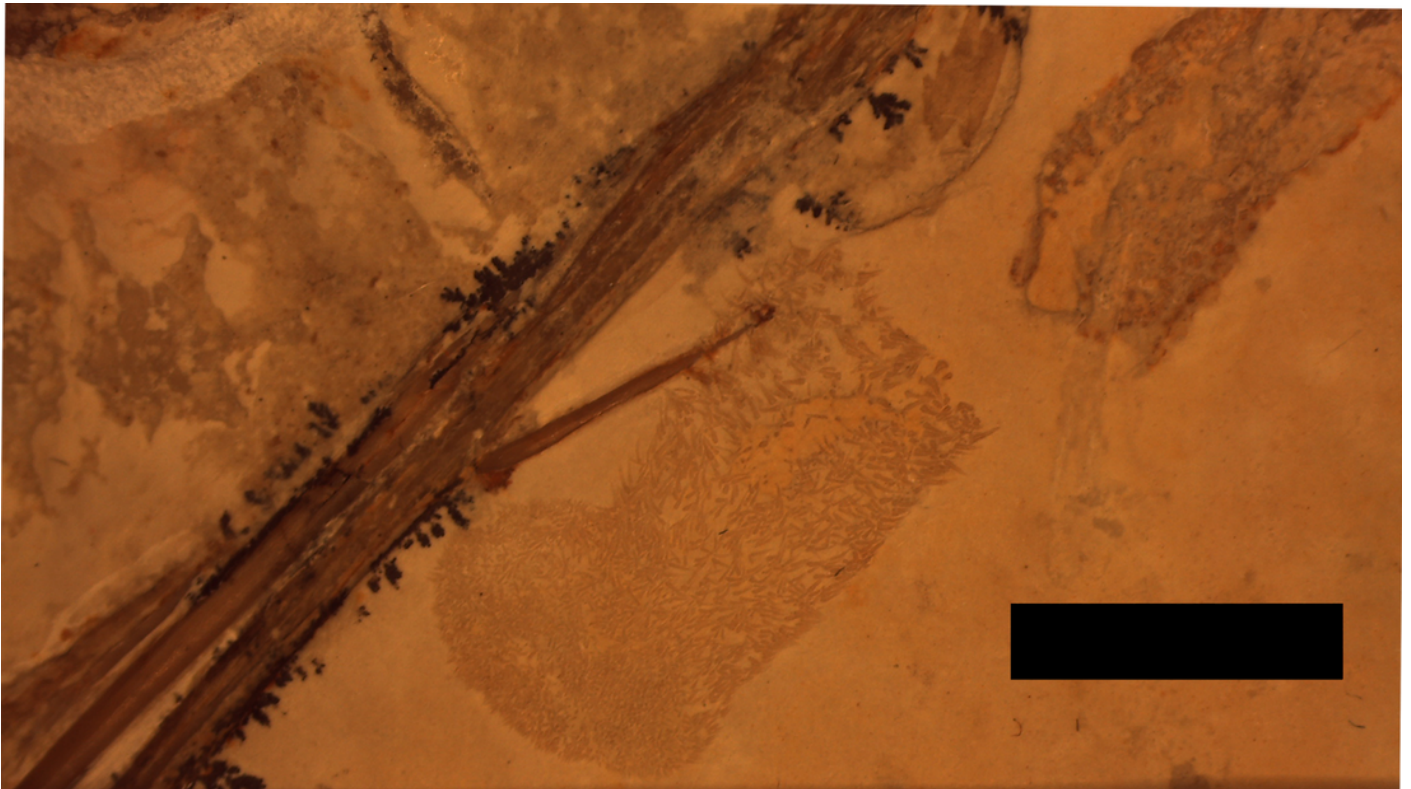
Figure 8. (L) Photograph taken under binocular microscope of fibrils in the uropatagium. (R) Interpretive drawing of the uropatagium (pale grey) and fibrils (black lines). Not all fibrils are illustrated and the width of the lines may not be representative. Scale bar is 2 mm.



9

Figure 9

Figure 9. Detail of the second part of the coprolite. The series of elements to the left are from the left pes. Scale bar is 5 mm.



10

Figure 10

Figure 10. Details of the 'hooklets' within the coprolites. Scale bar is 1 mm.

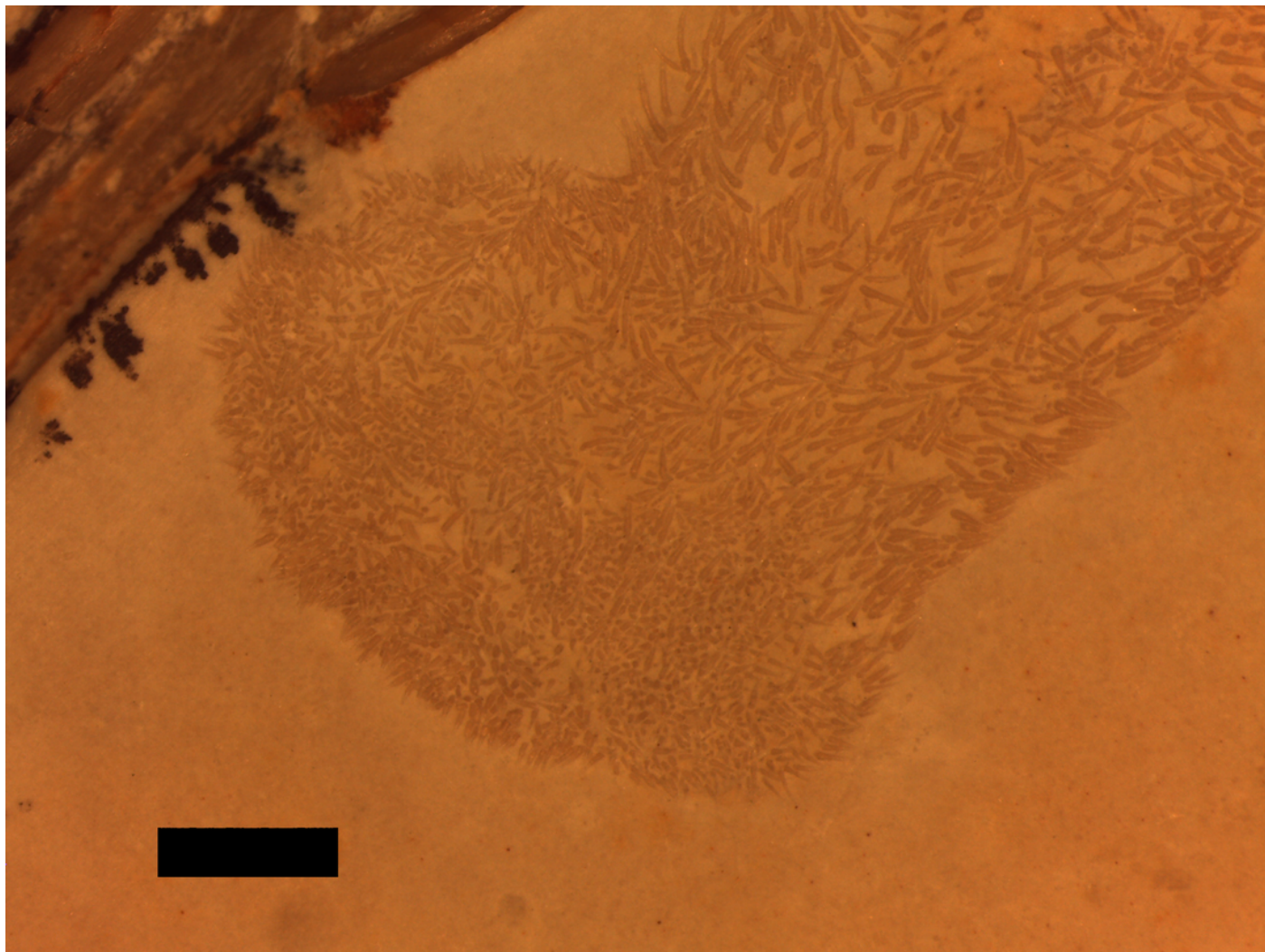


Table 1 (on next page)

Table 1

Measurements of the major elements of TMP 2008.41.001

1 Table 1: Measurements of the major elements of TMP 2008.41.001.

2

Element or series	Maximum length (to the nearest mm)
Skull	91
Cervical vertebrae	53
Dorsal vertebrae	52
Sacrum	13
Caudal vertebrae	259
Humerus	33
Radius	62
Wing metacarpal	19
Wing phalanx 1	96
Wing phalanx 2	98
Wing phalanx 3	93
Wing phalanx 4	94
Femur	26
Tibia	38

3

4