

## Parrot Fossil Found In Denmark

**Parrot Fossil is believed to be 55-million-years old**

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Photo Courtesy David Waterhouse

The discovered bone's position in the body.

Photo Courtesy David Waterhouse

An artist rendering of what *M.tanta* may have looked like

Photo Courtesy David Waterhouse

The bone that Waterhouse determined was *M.tanta*

Fossil remains, discovered in 2003 in Denmark, are that of a parrot that lived in Scandinavia 55-million-years-ago. The fossil was determined to be a parrot by Dr. David Waterhouse, the assistant curator of Natural History at Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.

The fossil was found in the open-cast mines and quarries in Denmark, an area where workers dig out soft rock that is used for cat litter. Fossils are frequently discovered in the soft rock, but while there is no official team doing excavations on the site, there is a group who finds the fossils and delivers them to the museum. This was how Waterhouse first had the chance to look at the fossil remains and, after careful study, found it was the humerus of a bird's wing.

Since then, the parrot has been named *Mopsitta tanta* (pronounced with a silent "p"), and nicknamed the Danish blue, after the famous Monty Python "Dead Parrot" sketch. Waterhouse is a fan of the infamous sketch, which was first screened in 1969. In the sketch, an irritated customer argues with a pet shop owner the parrot he bought earlier was dead. After insisting it isn't dead, the pet shop owner said "Remarkable bird, the Norwegian Blue, idn't it, ay? Beautiful plumage!"

"Of course," said Waterhouse, "We have no idea if the parrot was blue. It could have been any array of colors. But the reference to the dead parrot stuck and the media loved it."

Waterhouse believes *M. tanta* lived 55-million-years ago, and it is the first time a parrot fossil has been discovered so far north. Geologists had dated the rocks at the mine by the use of Argon dating, which is similar to carbon dating, but used for minerals and igneous rocks.

It is believed the Scandinavia area was once covered in lush tropical forests until the climate changed. Now, there are few wild parrots that live in the European area, aside from introduced species such as the Indian ring-necked parakeets, and there are no known native parrot species.

There are not going to be any further investigations of the site to see if they can find more of the parrot fossil, but Waterhouse thinks it would be wonderful if they found a skull. "They're digging in the quarry all the time, so there's a chance another fossil might show up," said Waterhouse.