

## LATE CRETACEOUS VERTEBRATE FAUNA FROM ANTARCTICA

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A unique collection of latest Cretaceous terrestrial and marine vertebrates has been recovered from Vega Island, Antarctic Peninsula. The upper Campanian - lower Maestrichtian Cape Lamb Member, had previously produced a hypsilophodontid dinosaur, now added to that taxon is the oldest known occurrence of a representative of a modern bird order from Antarctica (and possibly elsewhere as well). Partial skeletons and isolated tibiotarsal and tarsometatarsal elements of avian specimens can be assigned to the Order Charadriiformes, or shore birds. The Maestrichtian Sandwich Bluff Member has produced a tooth and phalanges of a hadrosaur dinosaur and a variety of bird material representing charadriiform, gaviid (loon) and anseriform (presbyornithid) taxa. The avifauna consists entirely of representatives of modern bird orders, which is absolutely unique compared to avian faunas from elsewhere in Gondwana.

Four genera of mosasaurs, *Leiodon*, *Mosasaurus*, *Hainosaurus* and *Plioplatecarpus*, and at least two different taxa of plesiosaurs represent marine reptiles from these two units. The plesiosaurs appear to be endemic to this region, whereas the mosasaurs are cosmopolitan in their distribution. Additionally, for both the mosasaurs and plesiosaurs there has been recovered a large number of specimens indicating a significant population of juvenile animals, which suggests that this area of Antarctica was a breeding ground for these marine reptiles.