

Rhamphorhynchoïd Pterosaurs and Ropens

The pterosaur suborder of *Rhamphorhynchoidea*, those long-tailed featherless flying creatures—they're also called *basal pterosaurs*. For generations, many scientists have assumed that they became extinct, at least for most of their species, before the last of the *Pterodactyloid* pterosaurs dominated the skies, many millions of years ago. At least that has been the assumption.

In other words, according to orthodox evolutionary ideas, a typical species of *Rhamphorhynchoïd* pterosaur either became extinct or it evolved into another form before the short-tailed pterosaurs became the dominant type, long ago. That line of thinking also includes the idea that all species, of both suborders, had become extinct by about 65 million years ago. All of those ideas, to me (Jonathan Whitcomb) and to my associates, are like fairy tales. Both of those suborders are still living, represented by at least a few species worldwide.

Modern *Rhamphorhynchoïds* we call *ropens*. Two differences emerge with some of the modern versions of this featherless flying creature:

1. Some ropens can be much larger than a typical fossil
2. Some of them have a prominent horn-like head crest

Sighting in Wetlands of Central California in 1994

From a report in *Cryptozoology News*, we learn of an encounter in California in which a mother and daughter saw an apparent pterosaur, one with a long tail.

A few miles south of Sacramento, California, thousands of acres of the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge are managed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. On a clear

spring day in 1994, the two eyewitnesses there saw a flying creature, apparently featherless, with long thin tail and a “pterodactyl-like head.” They were sure that it was living, not a kite. It circled overhead and then departed the area in its flight.

The eyewitness who reported the sighting said, “It had a long neck, long head and long pointed beak area. It had a large wingspan, bigger than a blue heron. It was gliding very high up, with very little flapping movement of its wings.” That woman, who is a avid bird watcher, also said, “What we saw was neither a crane nor a heron. We saw a real living animal that was not familiar to us and looked like it was straight out of Jurassic Park.”

Scott Norman’s Sighting in Central California

According to the cryptozoologist Chad Arment, Scott Norman had reported to him a sighting of an apparent pterosaur one night in mid-2007 in Central California (much further to the south of Sacramento):

. . . this animal came gliding just over the [nearby] shed . . . [It] had an 8-10 foot wingspan, the wings were bat-like in shape . . . The body was about 5-6 feet in length, the neck about 1-2 feet in length, the head was about four feet in length . . .

The flying creature had a head crest that the eyewitness estimated was about two feet long. Norman did not see a tail that night, but he told Arment that another eyewitness had seen an apparent pterosaur in that area in daylight, and the other man reported a long tail.

Sighting in Southern California

Moving further south, the 1994 sighting in wetlands near Sacramento brings to mind another sighting in wetlands, this

one in Orange County in 2007, over a hundred miles south of Scott Norman's sighting but in the same year. It was just northwest of the University of California, Irvine.

From the nonfiction cryptozoology book *Live Pterosaurs in America* (third edition), we read about this apparent ropen:

[The eyewitness] had no view of any feet and no good view of the head. He noticed that during the creature's flight the tail was straight, as if it was "stretched out to be measured." A flange, close to the end of the tail, he described as "triangle-shaped."

The anonymous eyewitness saw the featherless creature fly just above Campus Drive, which separates two marshy areas, and the length of that road tells us about the size of the apparent ropen. The flying creature was about as long as the width of that road, which is thirty feet. Half of that thirty feet was the approximate length of the tail.

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Eyewitness sketch of a featherless flying creature seen in
Cuba in 1965

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Gitmo Rhamphorhynchoid

I have also learned that Carson, later in childhood or adolescence, was inquisitive and sharp and recognized one or

more images of pterosaurs at the Smithsonian, when her father worked in Washington D.C.

Ropen Observed in Alberta, Canada

A family saw an apparent pterosaur flying over the city of Edmonton (Alberta, Canada) recently, and the flying creature appeared to have been a ropen.

Rhamphorhynchoid Suborder of Pterosaurs

Before scientists created words like Rhamphorhynchoid for long-tailed pterosaurs, common folk used the word dragon for large destructive creatures, including those with long tails and wings but no feathers.

Recent Ropen Sightings

I'm not positive about what [I] and my 16 year old son saw flying across a major road in Richmond, Virginia . . . Its wing span was massive! It looked to be about 10 feet across and its tail was long with a triangle point! We were so flabbergasted looking at it that I nearly crashed!

Long Tails of Rhamphorhynchoid Pterosaurs

How common is a long tail on a modern pterosaur! Of the 128 more-credible sighting reports compiled at the end of 2012, 41% reported a long tail.

Universal Pterosaur Extinction?

To be plain, extinction has two meanings, or distinct usages, so beware of anyone—even a paleontologist—who uses the word in a general sense but with an air, and only an air, of sounding specific.

Strange Flying Creatures in the United States

When I led a brief expedition in Papua New Guinea in 2004, I had no idea that many Americans had encountered, in the forty-eight contiguous states of the USA, flying creatures like the ropen.

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