AHR Rpt 3082

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Faunal Remains Project
Department of Archaeology
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3.1.80

Additional Notes on Computer-Recorded Bird Bones from West Stow, Suffolk

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The bird bones were identified at the Faunal Remains Project except for a few problem bones which were taken to the Sub-Department of Ornithology, British Museum(Natural History) , Tring where Mr Graham Cowles kindly allowed me to use the collections.

All information was entered onto punched tape using the A.M.Lab bone coding methods.

Most of the bone was from domestic fowl, in many ways comparable to the Hamwih material already coded. The comments on those are relevant here. There were some big capons,especially 4214, a tarsometatarsus.

There was also a large quantity of goose, presumed domestic and coded GOO. These goose bones were sturdy and large and compared well with large Anser anser (greylag goose) and presumed domestic geese from Hamwih. The cranial areas adjoining the upper beak were preserved in two skulls (624 and 133) and were distinctive and slightly inflated. No skulls were preserved at Hamwih. Most Anser anser material available (there is very little) does not show this apart from one immature skeleton at Tring (female) which was similar but not exactly the same. One specimen of Anser cygnoides, chinese goose, at Tring was exactly similar but this species of domestic goose usually has this area considerably inflated. I suggest that this feature is one of domestication and it may serve to identify these rather distinctive Saxon geese in other collections.

If a well-preserved sternum of goose in 815 is typical the depth of keel in these birds was considerable compared with the wild birds, greylags in captivity, and later medieval material from Wessex. This would suggest selection for meat production as we should expect.

Ribs and similarly undiagnostic bones which were goose-sized and fowl-sized were labelled goose and fowl in the computer coding if they were anatomically acceptable.As there is such a strong likelihood that they belonged to these species it seemed pointless to label them UNB (unknown bird) as this does not give a hint of size. Perhaps a category for fowl-size and one for goose-size would overcome this.

There were a number of goose bones which obviously did not fit A. anser or domestic goose because of their small size. Some of these were coded AVZ as they were a very good match for Anser albifrons but this identification is ecological rather than anatomical as there is no available A. brachyrhynchus material. Anser fabalis material is on the whole larger. All that can be said it that a wild goose is represented by a few bones. It may be the white-fronted goose. It is possible that some of the bones coded GOO could be of this species but this can only be picked up when all the measurements are viewed together.

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There was a small collection of crane bones , coded AYU. The suggested classification of these is Grus sp as they are not exactly like the specimens of common crane, Grus grus, examined. In some ways the specimens compared better with Grus antigone, especially in the structure of the tarso-metatarsus. I think the reason for this may be the limitations of the available comparative material, obviously this genus has shown a pretty rapid decline and extinction in some areas (it bred in East Anglia until 1600 according to Snow (1971)) and these populations may have had anatomical differences from those available to us now. In view of the interest of this material I allowed Mr Cowles to measure the bones and have asked Mr Stanley West for further information of the dating of the relevant layers.

The remainder of the collection was of wild birds from the heron downwards, many of them waders, and acceptable food. All the bones mentioned above and a few pathological specimens have been kept out and are in the archaeological comparative collection at the Faunal Remains Project along with other bones kept out by Mrs Crabtree.

Specimen Numbers Recorded in Field 12

9999 bones probably all from the same domestic fowl
9998 ancient jone on a goose ulna

Reference

Snow, D W (1971) The status of birds in Britain and Ireland, Blackwell.