

AVIAN FOOTPRINT OCCURRENCES FROM THE MESOZOIC OF WESTERN CANADA

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Fossil avian footprints were first described from western Canada in 1981. In the two decades since then, a variety of avian ichnites have been found in several formations in western Canada spanning the Cretaceous Period. The oldest footprints attributable to birds were recently found in the upper part of the Mist Mountain Formation (Berriasian) of southeastern British Columbia. *Aquatilavipes swiboldae* footprints occur in the Gething Formation (Aptian) of northwestern British Columbia and are also found in the equivalent Gladstone Formation of western Alberta. Large (>9 cm long) avian footprints and trackways (*Aquatilavipes* ichnosp.) dominate the vertebrate ichnofauna at some tracksites in the Gates Formation (Albian) of western Alberta, along with a variety of smaller avian footprints; all these are currently being described. The Dunvegan Formation (Cenomanian) of eastern British Columbia has recently yielded a partial trackway with large *Jindongornipes* -like footprints, and some smaller *Aquatilavipes* -like prints that were found in situ. Isolated blocks with small avian footprints have been collected from the Late Campanian-Maastrichtian St. Mary River and Horseshoe Canyon formations.

The avian bird footprint record of western Canada is diverse, containing the traces of a variety of large, long-legged shore-birds, as well as a number of smaller and presumably shorter-legged shore-birds. The discovery of avian footprints from so many formations serves to extend the geological range of fossil birds in western Canada, augmenting their sparse osteological record.