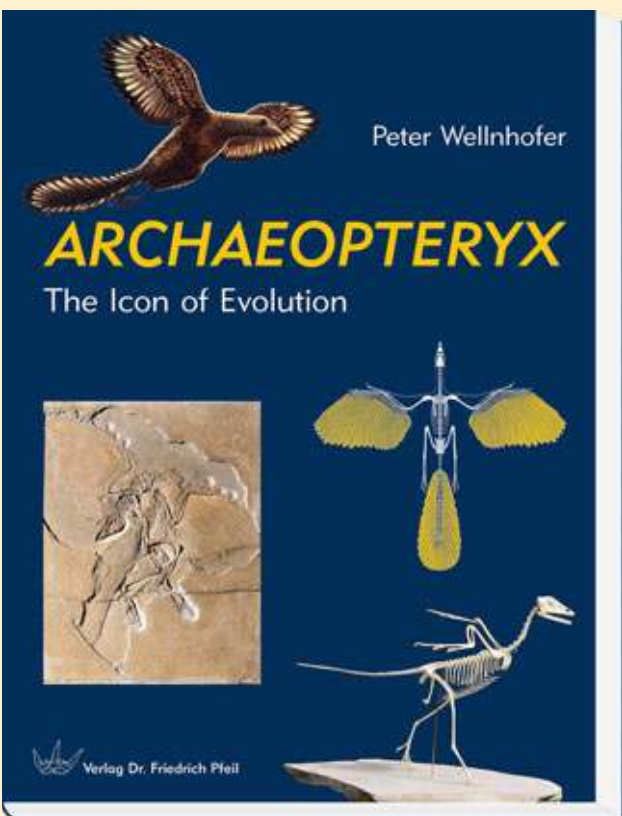


ARCHAEOPTERYX

The Icon of Evolution

by

Peter Wellnhofer



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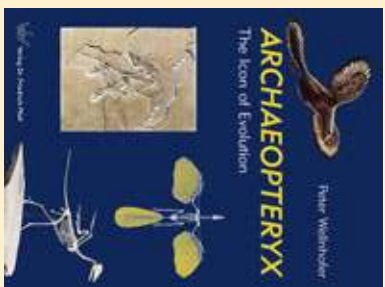
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2009

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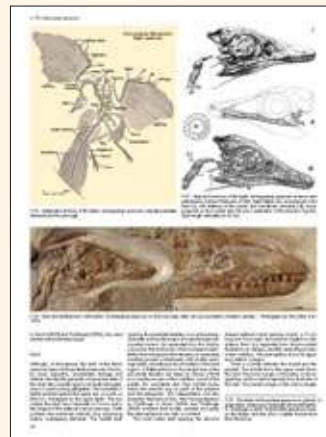
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As Charles Darwin's friend, Hugh Falconer, put it upon examination of the London specimen, *Archaeopteryx* is the ultimate "missing link", the cornerstone of a remarkable evolutionary transition – today witnessed by a multitude of fossils on both sides of an increasingly hazy dinosaur-bird divide – and **Peter Wellnhofer** is the Urvogel's modern architect. He is the world's authority on the celebrated 150-million-year-old bird and he has been so for over 30 years. No one else could have written a book about *Archaeopteryx* with the same insider's perspective and knowledge. Remarkably for someone so deeply involved in the subject, Wellnhofer's approach to the universe of opinions about the natural history of the Urvogels betrays his magnanimous attitude; this even-handedness assures a fair coverage of the multitude of ideas that have been proposed about the life of *Archaeopteryx*.

Known by only ten skeletal specimens and a single feather imprint discovered during the last 150 years, the priceless fossils of *Archaeopteryx* have

had tremendous significance for our understanding of evolution, and their impact has gone way beyond science and into the social realm. Drawing from his immense familiarity with the fossils from the world-famous Solnhofen limestone, Wellnhofer narrates the history of discovery of *Archaeopteryx*, and the stories of the villages, collectors, and scholars whose fortunes became entangled with these discoveries. This book includes chapters



on the geology and special preservation of the Solnhofen limestone, and interpretations of the environment inhabited by *Archaeopteryx*. The core of this book provides detailed descriptions and exquisite illustrations of each specimen. These and other chapters discuss the various interpretations regarding the size, growth and life history, plumage, physiology, life style, and other aspects of the paleobiology of this most ancient bird. Because *Archaeopteryx* has played a key role in discussions about bird origins, this book also addresses the rise of birds, highlighting the evidence in support of their dinosaurian ancestry, and the less settled issue of the beginning of avian flight. It closes with a summary of the early history of birds, which has been recently illuminated by countless new fossils from throughout the Cretaceous period.

There may never be another book on *Archaeopteryx* as detailed and comprehensive as this. Readers will undoubtedly find it to be a tour de force of one of the most significant fossils in the history of paleontology. On the 150th anniversary of the publication of 'The Origin of Species', I cannot think of a timelier book on paleontology than one about the legendary fossil bird that made such a grand case for Darwinism.



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