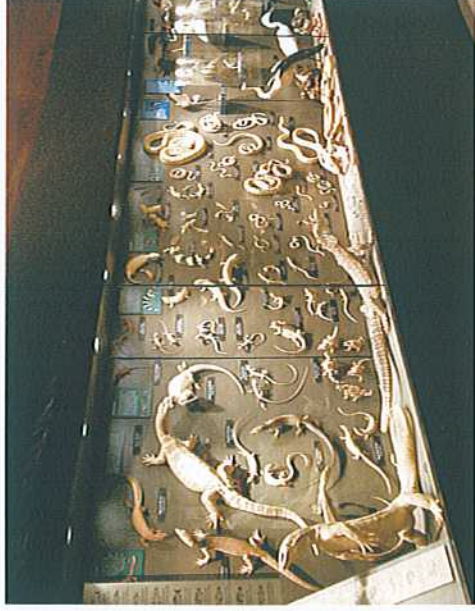


## Big Bird!

Come and see Big Bird, also known as *Dromornis stirtoni*, an eight-million-year-old giant flightless bird, the 'Mirirung Paringmal' of Aboriginal dreamtime mythology. Like emus, these birds were vegetarians, but they are not closely related. In fact, despite being flightless, they are more like ducks and geese. Both the emu and the cassowary evolved from a different group of flightless birds. The dromornithids were among the largest birds that ever lived, rivalling the Malagasy Elephant Bird and the largest of the Moa from New Zealand.

A number of other fossils from Alcoota are also on display at the Museum, including the skulls of huge ancient crocodiles and giant wombats.



## Museum of Central Australia Alice Springs

Corner Larapinta Drive and Memorial Avenue

### Opening hours

Monday to Friday 10am—4pm

Weekends and Public Holidays 11am—4pm

Phone: 08 8951 1121

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MUSEUM  
AND ART  
GALLERY  
NORTHERN  
TERRITORY



Museum of Central Australia Alice Springs

## Alcoota Fossil Site

### GENERAL INFORMATION



great  
Territory  
lifestyle  
A Territory Government initiative



## How old are the fossils at Alcoota?

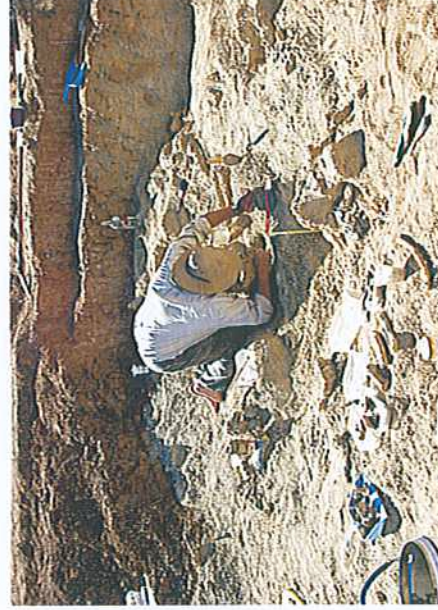
The fossils come from the Late Miocene Age which is the period around five to nine million years ago. The era was known as 'the age of mammals' and Alcoota is one of four known vertebrate fossil sites from that era in the Northern Territory.

## What is found at the Alcoota fossil site?

Alcoota Scientific Reserve is located 105 kilometres north east of Alice Springs. The remains of thousands of individual animals, known as megafauna, occur in a massive jumble of bone amidst the remains of an ancient waterhole. The Alcoota fossil beds have produced some of the best, most diverse, and complete examples of some of the larger extinct animals, such as:

- ▶ 'marsupial rhinos' *diprotodontids*
- ▶ 'marsupial tapirs' *palaorchestids*
- ▶ giant flightless 'geese' *dromornithids*
- ▶ crocodiles (including land crocodiles)
- ▶ 'marsupial wolves' *thylacines*
- ▶ 'marsupial lions' *thylacoleonids*
- ▶ kangaroos
- ▶ emus
- ▶ turtles
- ▶ goannas
- ▶ flamingos

## Fossil collecting at Alcoota



Fossils at Alcoota are difficult to remove because they occur in loose soil and are highly fractured due to the expansion and contraction of the ground over millions of years. The large number of fossils means that each bone has to be carefully removed from other bones around it without causing any damage. Every bone has to be consolidated while still in the ground before it can be moved. This is a very difficult and time-consuming process.



## Annual excavation at Alcoota

Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory conduct an annual excavation of between four and six weeks, in the cooler winter months when it isn't too hot to work in the pits. The excavations are led by a small team of scientific and technical staff, supported by a dedicated group of volunteers.

## Protecting Alcoota

Because of the unique nature of the site, the enormous number of finds, and the scientific importance of the specimens, the Alcoota fossil deposits are protected as a Heritage Place within a scientific reserve managed by Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory.

