



Pascal Godefroit
Royal Belgian Institute of Natural History
Directorate 'Earth and History of Life'
Rue Vautier 29
1000 Brussels, Belgium
Pascal.Godefroit@naturalsciences.be

Brussels, November 14, 2014

To whom it may concern

I had the pleasure to visit, in October 2014, the fascinating fossil collection in the Tsirides Foundation. I was really impressed by the quality and the diversity of the displayed fossils. Those items are extremely interesting from scientific, pedagogical, and museological points of view. Angelos Tsirides explained me that he should like to share his passion for palaeontology and mineralogy and make his fantastic collections available for a public museum. I am of course quite enthusiastic about this generous project. Indeed, the fossils from the Tsirides Foundation cover the key-periods in the evolution of the biosphere and should constitute the ideal base for a natural history museum. And many great museums worldwide should be extremely interested in displaying several of the specimens from the Foundation!

The Cretaceous fish collection from the Tsirides Foundation is one of the most beautiful in the world, including new taxa that still need to be described in scientific papers. Together with the wonderful marine reptiles (ichthyosaurs, plesiosaurs, mosasaurs,...) and the pristine ammonites, they should constitute the ground for an interesting exhibit about the evolution of life in the sea during the Mesozoic.

Dinosaurs are particularly well represented and diversified in the Tsirides Formation, including horned dinosaurs (*Triceratops*, *Protoceratops*,...), hadrosaurs, sauropods, *Tarbosaurus* and other theropods from America, Mongolia, China, ... This is of course the most attractive part of the collection that will undoubtedly attract visitors, especially children.

But for the scientists, these are the flying tetrapods from the Tsirides Foundation that are particularly interesting. Wonderful pterosaur skeletons from the Early Cretaceous of Brazil are really unique in the world. One complete skeleton even contains fish remains within its throat: this poor animal died while eating its prey! In any case, it is a unique testimony of the diet of these fascinating animals and, therefore, a snapshot of the life some 108 million years ago.

One of the pearls of the Tsirides Formation is the complete skeleton of an *Anchiornis*-like bird, from the Middle-Late Jurassic of Liaoning Province, in China. *Anchiornis* was one of the oldest and more primitive birds. Around the fossilized skeleton, the plumage of this *Anchironis* specimen is incredibly preserved, showing that this early birds had four wings –two along the forelimbs and two along the hindlimbs, - unlike actual birds, characterized by only two wings. *Anchiornis* could likely like from tree to tree like a biplane! But local fossils from Cyprus are also well represented in the Tsirides collection, highlighting the evolution of this island through times. Particularly interesting and attractive is the sub-complete skeleton of a Pleistocene dwarf hippopotamus. This skeleton is quite instructive, because it reveals that large mammals were significantly smaller on island than on the continents. This is a proof of the on-going processes of evolution: the size of animals can easily be adapted according to the amount of the available food resources.

In conclusions, I hope that Angelos Tsirides will receive all the necessary support from the Cyprus authorities for promoting its incredible palaeontological collection – one of the richest in Europe – and that his treasures will be exhibited within an official institution. It will undoubtedly constitute a unique exhibition in Cyprus that will attract numerous local peoples, but also tourists.

I am entirely at your disposal should your require further information.

A handwritten signature in black ink is written over a blue circular stamp. The stamp contains the text 'INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE RECHERCHE EN ARCHÉOLOGIE ET PALÉONTOLOGIE' around the perimeter and a central emblem featuring a globe and a figure.

Pascal Godefroit, Operational Director 'Earth and History of Life'