

**Report of May Meeting  
Royal Society  
Southern Highlands Branch**

**Speakers: Professor Patricia Vickers-Rich  
Personal Chair, Palaeontology,  
Monash University,  
Melbourne.**

**Dr Tom Rich,  
Senior Curator,  
Museum Victoria.**

The Southern Highlands Branch meeting of 20 May 2010 was held at 6.30pm in the Drama Theatre, Frensham School, Mittagong. An audience of 50 welcomed the husband and wife palaeontologists who arrived from Melbourne to deliver the lecture.

In May 2009, Thomas Rich delivered a fascinating lecture to the Southern Highlands Branch. It was entitled *Mammals from the Age of the Dinosaurs: An Australian Perspective*. During that address, he referred to the work that was being undertaken by his wife, Patricia Vickers-Rich. The pair had collaborated on numerous projects, and had co-authored at least 10 books, three of which have won major science publishing awards. The committee subsequently decided to issue an invitation to both scientists to deliver the Southern Highlands Branch May 2010 lecture. The shared address was very well received by the audience, whose only complaint was that the lecture time of one hour was far too short!

Patricia Vickers-Rich's research centres on understanding the changes in the biota of Earth during the late Proterozoic, at a time when complex animals first appeared and the major animal phyla were differentiating. Her studies look for correlations between such biotic change, ocean chemistry, climate and plate tectonic effects on continental relationships and ocean basin geography. She commented during her lecture that, quite independently of the current world interest in climate change, she had in fact been conducting highly relevant studies into historical climate change as her teams investigated their correlation data.

Much of Patricia Vicker-Rich's research is being done overseas. Her field areas include south-west Africa (particularly Namibia in a joint program with the Namibian Geological Survey), the Eastern European Platform including the White Sea and Siberia (in

conjunction with the Paleontological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences), north-west Argentina, and the Flinders Range of South Australia (with the South Australian Museum). She also works with Tom Rich (Museum Victoria) on the polar biotas of southern Australia of the Early Cretaceous age. Recently she has edited the Geological Society special publication, the book entitled *The Rise and Fall of the Ediacaran Biota*.

Thomas Rich's presentation concerned a time when Australia was joined to Antarctica, which was located close to where we find it today. Thus, south-eastern Australia was well within the Antarctic Circle of the day. Thomas Rich's research is conducted over an area of approximately four square kilometers of the Victorian coast, where he continues to locate and identify polar dinosaurs between 106 million and 120 million years old. The fact that these creatures had to survive in a frigid climate adds significantly to the evidence that some dinosaurs at least were warm blooded.

As more is learned about the Victorian polar dinosaurs, it is becoming clearer that, unlike the present fauna of Australia, the dinosaurs were not as uniquely Australian. That is, dinosaurs in Australia are members of a group of dinosaurs known from elsewhere. There is no equivalent of the uniquely Australian koala among them.

One particular dinosaur that will be forever remembered by members of the audience is *Timimus*, a small coelurosaurian theropod known only from two fossilized upper leg bones. Tom and Patricia named this particular discovery after their son Tim, and also in honour of Tim Flannery. The pair have recently collaborated with David Attenborough for a documentary sure to intrigue a world audience.

The vote of thanks was given by Anne Wood

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