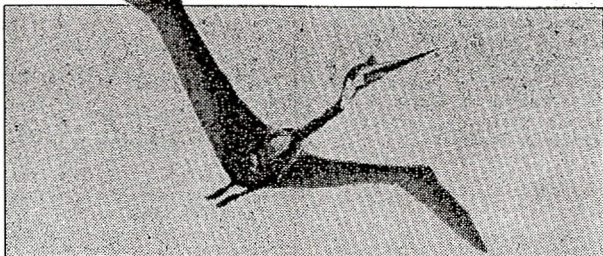


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A Flying Fiasco

So the head broke off the prehistoric bird replica at Andrews on 17 May—so what! The fact that a recognized international organization such as the Smithsonian Institution sponsored this farce is pathetic.

I cannot imagine a greater waste of money—\$700,000—than to construct a replica of a bird from prehistoric times, attempt to make it fly and publicize it. Since it costs nothing to visit the Smithsonian, my lack of patronage in the future will make little difference in this august organization's survival, but think what \$700,000 could do if spent

rationally. We could have made some significant improvements to Mitch Snyder's shelter; sent many folks to college; developed some work-training programs; or even bought some cars and an engine for the commuter service from Manassas to Washington. There are lots of ways to spend \$700,000 and help lots of people. We might even cure cancer. No one at all was helped by the bird, and the money was spent for nothing—absolutely nothing at all.

KARL D. SPENCE
Burke

Wash Post

May 31, 86

'A Flying Fiasco'? No Way

Under The Post's cutesy heading, "A Flying Fiasco," Karl D. Spence [letters, May 24] cannot imagine "a greater waste of money—\$700,000," which is what the Smithsonian paid for the model pterosaur.

He wrote, "the money was spent for nothing—absolutely nothing at all." Does he think its purpose was only to entertain him at a day's outing at the Andrews AFB open house? He has no conception of how many structural, biological, aerodynamic and other technical problems needed to be addressed and solved before the creature could be reconstructed.

Fortunately, the knowledge gained in the effort will stimulate greater minds than his to go on and meet other challenges and solve other problems. And eventually people will benefit in ways that now are unimaginable. Entire industries and technologies flowed from those few fertile minds that played with what some called "useless" ideas. From Fulton's Folly to transistors to lasers, our advances depend on striving to know, to solve, to achieve, not on the carping of shortsighted critics.

LEONARD COHEN
Greenbelt

I find the recent comments concerning the pterosaur *Quetzalcoatlus northropii* [Henry Mitchell, May 23; letters, May 24; Drawing Board, May 24] very misleading. The primary reason for creating this "replica of a bird" (note that a pterosaur is not a bird, but a reptile), was not for the demonstration flight at Andrews, but to be a principal character in the Air and Space Museum's new IMAX film, "On the Wing." And remember: much of the money for this project came not from the taxpayer, but from corporate donations.

Before Mr. Spence boycotts the Air and Space Museum, as he indi-

cated he would, perhaps he could stop by next month and see the reptile in the medium for which it was designed.

JAMES E. COX JR.
Bethesda

Being both a paleontologist involved in designing the Quetzalcoatlus flying model and a person of liberal sensibilities, I have been appalled by the reaction against the project's \$700,000 cost. The claim that the money could have been better spent elsewhere is nonsense.

The model was built with three goals in mind: the advancement of science (aerodynamic and paleontological), education of the public and entertainment. It succeeded in all respects. For the first time a large flapping aircraft has been flown, a goal that has eluded aerodynamicists for centuries. We know a lot more about pterosaurs—the creatures that once dominated the Earth's skies—than we did a couple of years ago. Millions have seen or will see the model fly on TV and in the motion pictures for which it was built. Undoubtedly some will be excited and inspired toward careers in science by the sight. And it was fun!

As for those who criticize the expense, I suspect that they happily attend motion pictures that cost millions to produce. Why do they do so when the same money could "more rationally" be spent on more "significant" things? For entertainment and education, of course! One could just as well ask Woody Allen to devote the monies spent on his movies toward curing social ills instead.

And how many people know that those air-to-air missiles on display at Andrews cost \$500,000 to \$2 million each? The Quetzalcoatlus money was better used.

GREGORY S. PAUL
Baltimore