

Tracking the True Tale of Turkeys

ScienceDaily (June 10, 2010) — The turkey dinner is a staple part of Christmas Day, but new research at the University of Leicester reveals that the history of the much loved poultry is in fact rather varied and unexpected.

Brooklynne Fothergill, from the University's School of Archaeology and Ancient History, has found that the turkey was not always used as a meat product. It was initially domesticated as a source of feathers, as well as being used for symbolic purposes by the indigenous peoples of North America.

Brooklynne Fothergill's research investigates the archaeology and history of the turkey through the interpretation of signs of disease present in turkey bones from archaeological sites. She also uses archival sources in order to place the turkey and human populations within the appropriate social and historical contexts. Her study spans a period of 1,000 years, from c. 750 to 1750, and identifies long-term patterns of disease and injury in the species and examines changes over time in animal husbandry practices.

The results of the study will be used to explore research questions concerning the health of turkey populations and the connections between the health of domestic animals and human behaviour.

Brooklynne commented: "My project will be the first systematic analysis of signs of disease and injury in a North American species, and the first to explore the socio-economic context and health impact of the transatlantic movement of animals."

· This research is being presented to the public at the University of Leicester on June 24. The Festival of Postgraduate Research introduces employers and the public to the next generation of innovators and cutting-edge researchers, and gives postgraduate researchers the opportunity to explain the real world implications of their research to a wide ranging audience.