

## Section III: **The Birdstone Enigma**

What is a Birdstone? What is its purpose? What it is, can be explained. But, its purpose continues to elude both the scientific and collector community. Birdstones are small carved and ground stone effigies of a fowl or animal form. Birdstones are found from New York to Wisconsin and Minnesota to Georgia. They are dated from the Mid Archaic to Late Archaic period (5000-2500 BP\*) BP means "before period-today".

A majority of these diminutive sculptures were made in the likeness of a sitting duck or bird; some with raised, nodular or stalk eyes. Others have raised cylinder eyes attached to the head by triangular stalks. The majority are made of banded slate with a few rare forms fashioned from hardstone such as quartzite or porphyritic rock.

Many birdstones are difficult to identify as to the type of animal, reptile or fowl that was depicted. Birdstones are rare artifact forms and have been found in extremely limited numbers. All birdstones found since the very first discovery probably will not exceed five thousand. This includes those unfinished and discarded, those finished and damaged, and those repaired. Of all the unusual artifacts of ancient North American prehistory, fortunate is any collector who might possess a single example of an authentic birdstone. Compared to flint artifacts discovered there is

about one birdstone for every 2 million flint projectiles.

While the majority of this information relates to the full bodied birdstones of the Archaic period, another type of Birdstone was manufactured in the Early Woodland period. This is known as a "Bust" type birdstone; (whereby only the head and shoulders are portrayed). Bust birdstone effigies are identified with the Adena culture who inhabited the midwest extending their influence as far west as Iowa and east to Maryland. The Adena people selected hardstones such as fine granites and quartzites for manufacturing their bust type effigies.

All Birdstones, including Archaic and Early Woodland types were perforated for the purpose of attachment. This technology has kept replicators confused for nearly 100 years, as they have never reproduced the perforations correctly! And we still don't have an answer as to the purpose or application of these artistic artifacts.

It is extremely difficult to identify the difference between genuine and reproduction because so few genuine birdstones are available for study and many collectors have never seen an authentic example.

## Bad Birds



Fig.BB#1: We start with this banded slate replica because it is one of the better attempts. Unfortunately the combination of the low slung body, fat head, and scanty tail, plus bad finish put it out of luck. Sold @ \$750-925

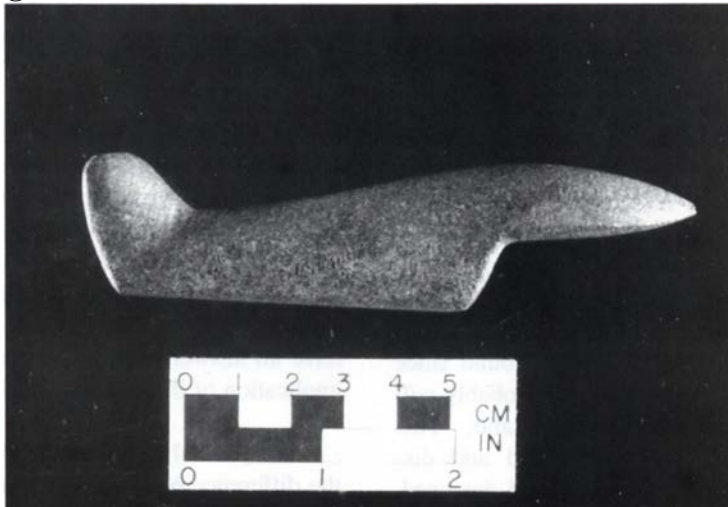


Fig. BB#2: This old "Gulley" made in the late 20's or 30's is typical of the antique types seen at auctions. Made of fossiliferous limestone then aged with stain and machine oil, thousands were made and sold before the deceit was discovered. Nothing is correct. Sold @\$600-700

## Bad Birds



Fig.BB#3: This replica tries to imitate the Greene County, Ohio bird of legendary 1800's fame. Fake peck marks on the side of this banded slate example and the notches on the lower neck are incorrect. Sold @ \$1250-1500

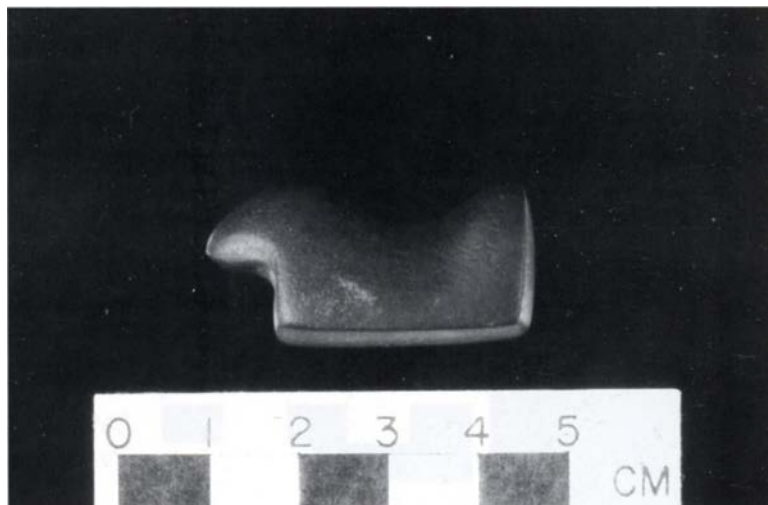


Fig.BB#4: This little stubby fellow is without perforations, simplifying the effort of a maker who probably wasn't at ease with stone drilling; also made it an easy sale for a low price, as it wasn't finished. Sold @ \$400

## Bad Birds

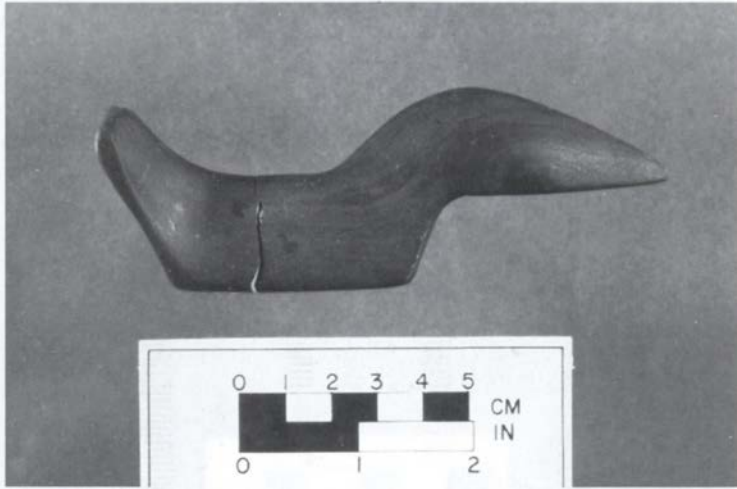


Fig.BB#5: Even a broken reproduction will sell, especially to one who is not familiar with real, authentic birds. This particular one has little going for it as the body, tail and head are not in proportion. Sold @ \$850-1250



Fig.BB#6: A splendid example of reverse thinking. This attempt to duplicate the long body Glacial Kame type was immersed into a solution of ferric oxide which simulated "red ochre" often found on the authentic Kame birds. But the wrong lines kept it from authenticity. Sold @ \$1275-1450

## Bad Birds



Fig.BB#7: While the "animal" type Birdstones are less frequent, it seemed an ideal type to copy. In this instance, with rounded head, strange body and indented eyes. The finish was crude too. Sold @ \$850-950

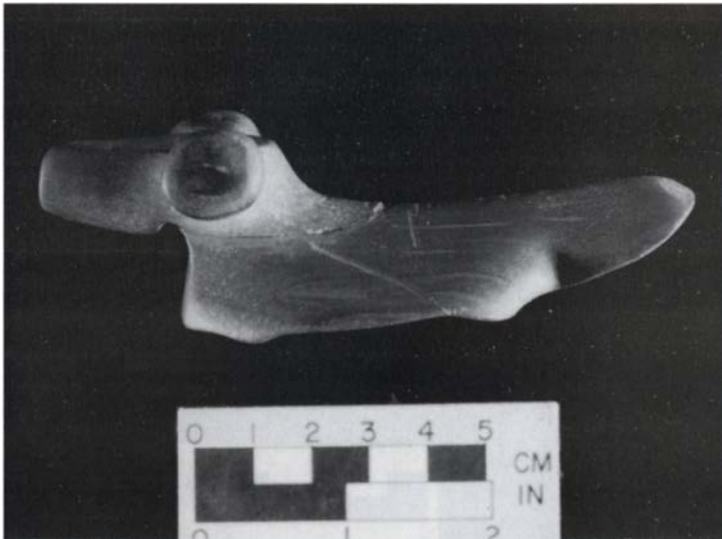


Fig.BB#8: This Bird replica has a little of everything, box head, popeyes, queer tail design, multiple scratch lines and a two stage anterior ridge for the perforation. It probably broke during manufacture. Sold @ \$2275

## Bad Birds

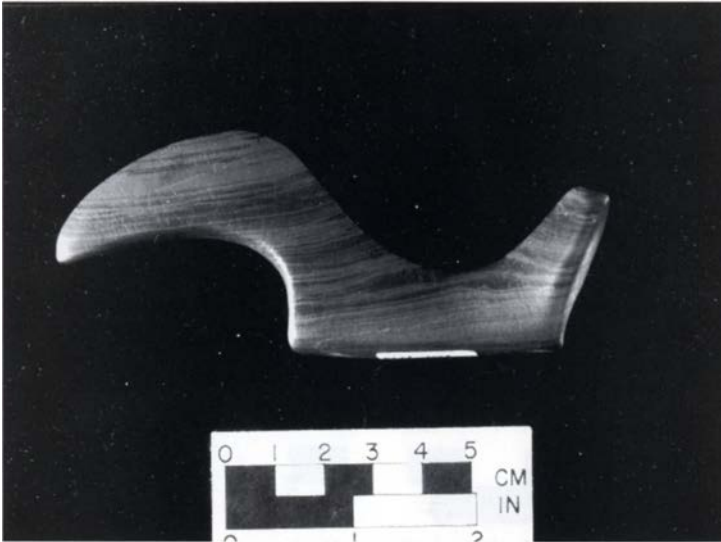


Fig.BB#9: The use of good banded slate was a shame for this head was way too big for the body. A large hooked beak head would never work on this body, but the maker thought so, and it sold! Sold @ \$1800-2000



Fig.BB#10: Talk about a little of everything, here we have a big fat body, nostrils, popeyes, little tail, side drilling and a useless anterior and posterior ridge, for what? And it's made of steatite! Guess what, sold @ \$685

## Bad Birds

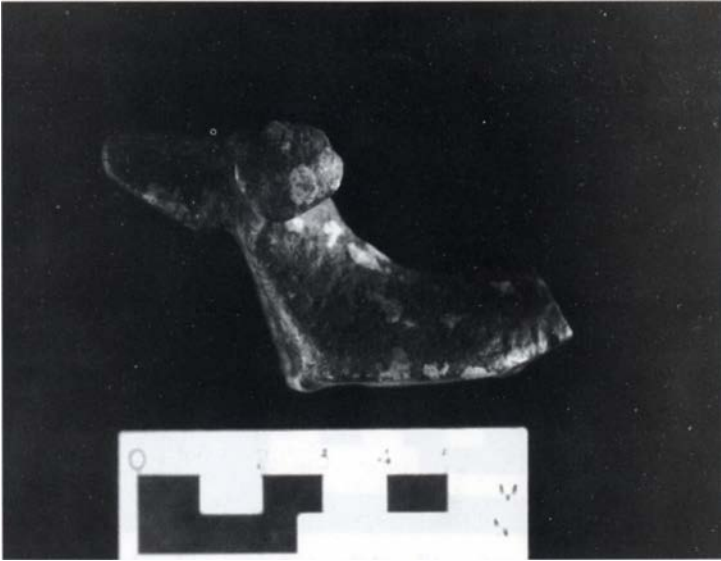


Fig.BB#11: What do you do if an accident happens? Go right on and make the best of it. This bird broke at the tail in finishing, so the maker grooved a salvage line and sold it as such. The heavy acid etching ruined the finish and saved most from its wrath. Sold @ \$1600-1800

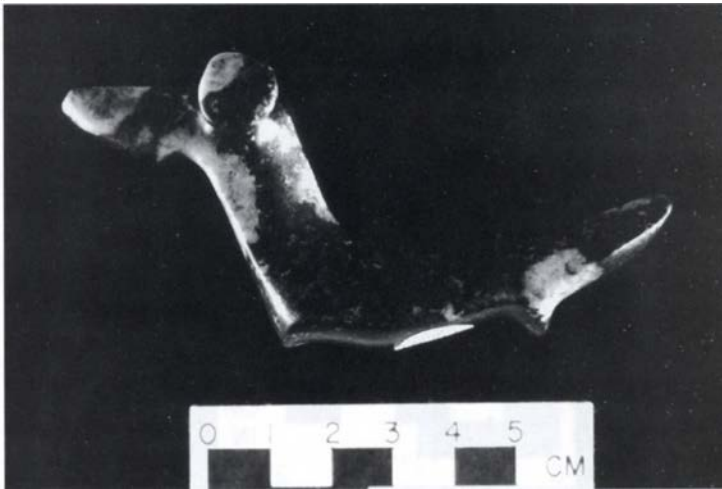


Fig.BB#12: This porphyry popeye has a giraffe like neck and the tail of a bird dog, it has the wrong type of ridges for the perforation, but the finish is slick and highly polished so it's showy! Sold@ \$3450

## Bad Birds

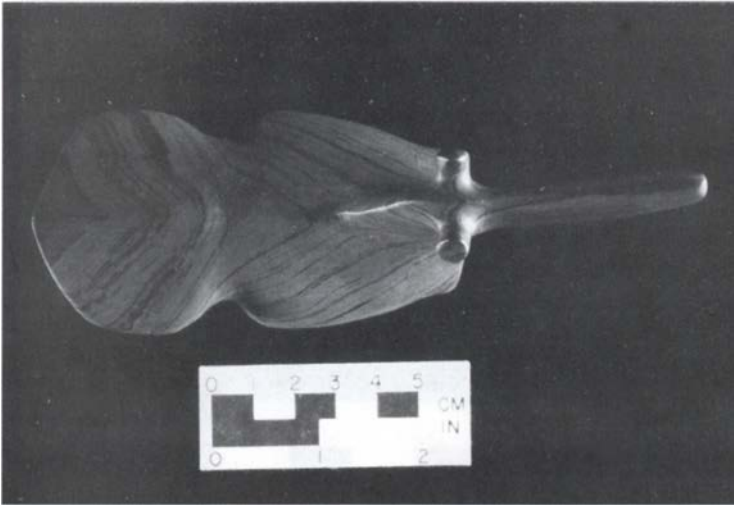


Fig.BB#13: The great fan tail and the stalk eyes on banded slate has attracted several serious collectors, but the obnoxious long beak should have said " stay away from me", but bigger is better! Sold @ \$1430

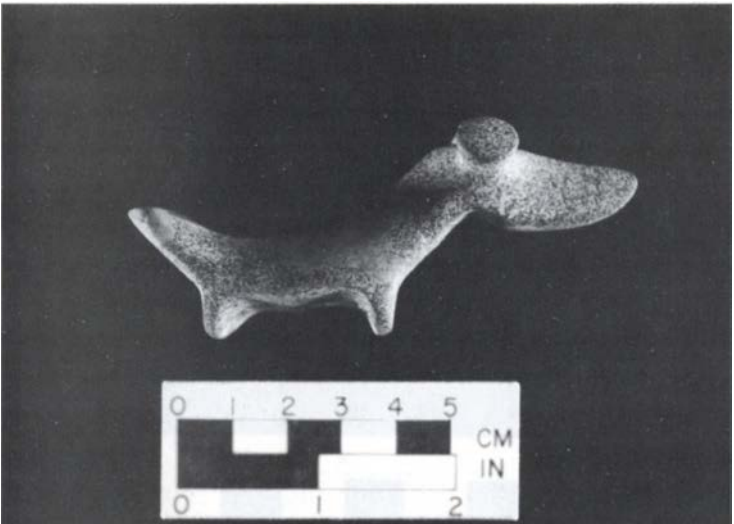


Fig.BB#14: Some have been called "dog stones", now you needn't wonder why; this one's on the point. The ridges are oversize and the eyes sit too high on the head, among other things that are incorrect! Sold @ \$3250



## Bad Birds

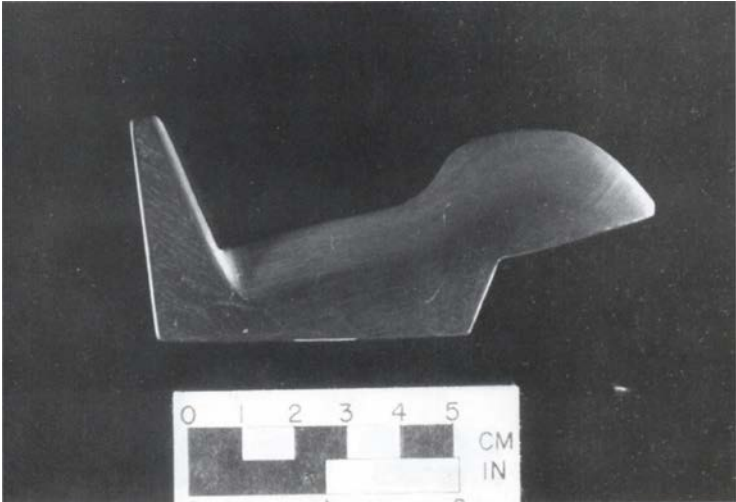


Fig. BB#15: Authentic, real artifacts of North American prehistory have grace and design; this gross replica is mechanical, obvious the work of a maker who never studied the genuine pieces. Sold @ \$400

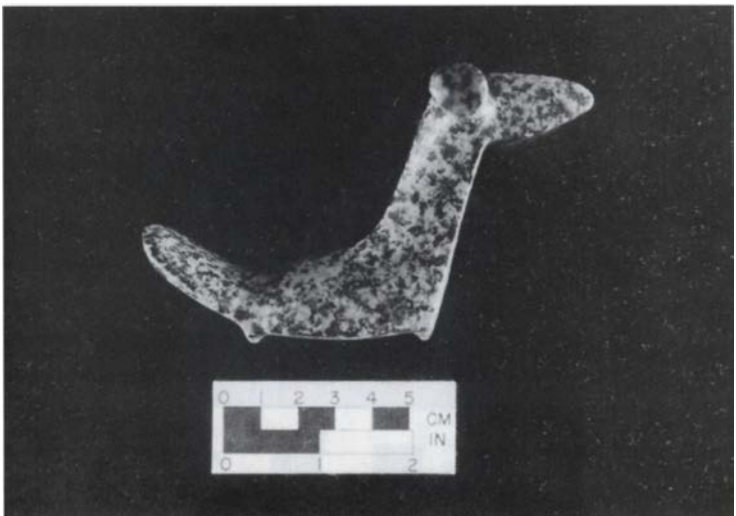


Fig. BB#16: We talk about something having the big head, this one's got the big neck and big head, all too big for the body. It looks as though it's ready to browse the leaves on a tree! Sold @ \$1800

## Bad Birds

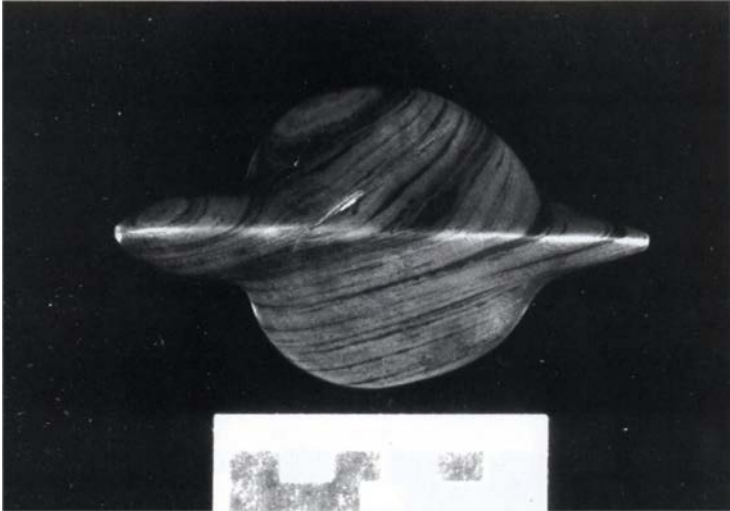


Fig.BB#17: The aquatic type of **birdstones exist**, some which look something like swimming otters, turtles, etc, but this head and tail ridged across a circle of slate was not one of them; the tiny indented eyes helped make it somewhat believable! Sold @ \$1200



Fig.BB#18: We couldn't overlook these efforts in producing replicas of the Bust type Birds. Some were popeyes, some were not, none stood up like this "Cat" mummy of Egyptology. The rounded base is truly absurd as well as the ridiculous beak, and acid etched surface. Sold @ \$1500

## Bad Birds

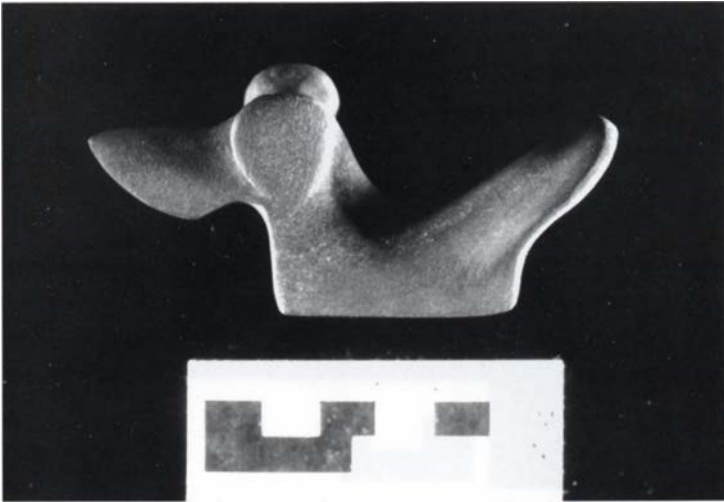


Fig.BB#19: Upturned beak, huge popeyes, slanted tail, flat base, what more could we complain about; this bird won't make it anyway. The finish is matte, like smooth sandblasting might do! Sold @\$800-1000



Fig.BB#20: Fancy stone; especially spotted granites always appeal to buyers, that's why this one entered several collections in its lifetime. But the finish was wrong as was the style, so it's a big No! Sold @ \$2850-\$3500

## Bad Birds

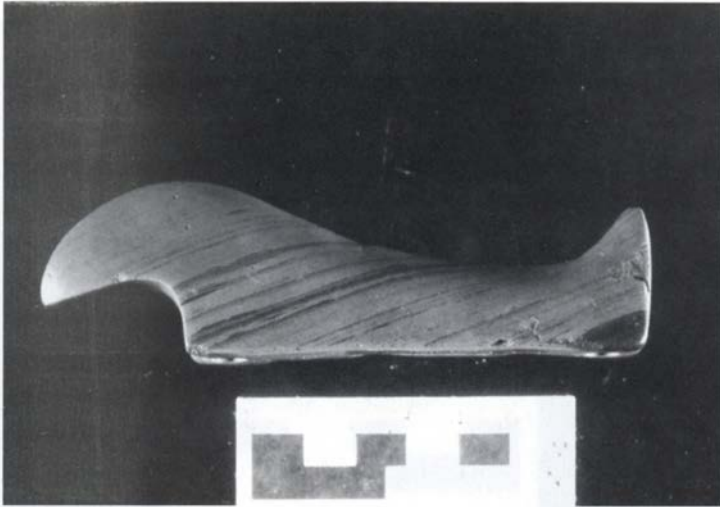


Fig.BB#21: This effort apparently was copied from "Townsend's Birdstones of N.A." from a similar bird of Wood County, Ohio; it looked something like this with stubby eyes. But it was made right! Sold @ \$2100

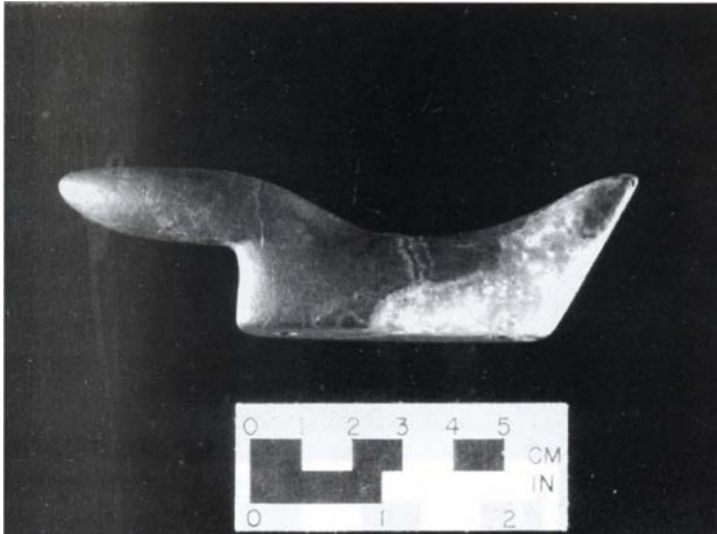
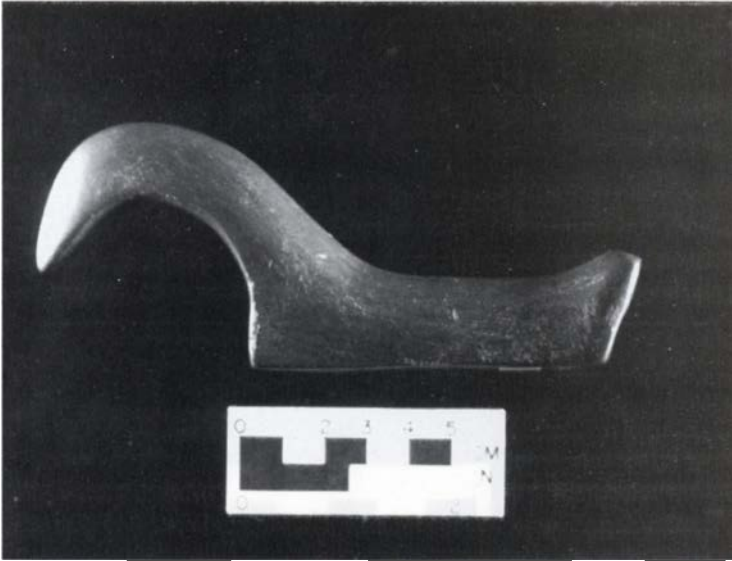


Fig.BB#22: As the saying goes, this Bird won't fly. Made of a ferruginous quartzite, it is pretty, but the shape is wrong. The rounded head is silly, the base is flat, and the finish is artificial. Sold @ \$350

## Bad Birds



**Fig.BB#23:** This goose neck monstrosity does not have much to say for itself with the short tail, angling neck and tons of tiny scratches overall. The gray slate is aged brown to look old, the perforations are atrocious. Sold @ \$1675-1850



**Fig.BB#24:** The material is nice, green with yellow matrix, but the workmanship and style prevents it from joining the flock of great and authentic birds. The undercut of the neck and head is wrong and the head itself is awkward and strange. Sold @\$1850

## Bad Birds

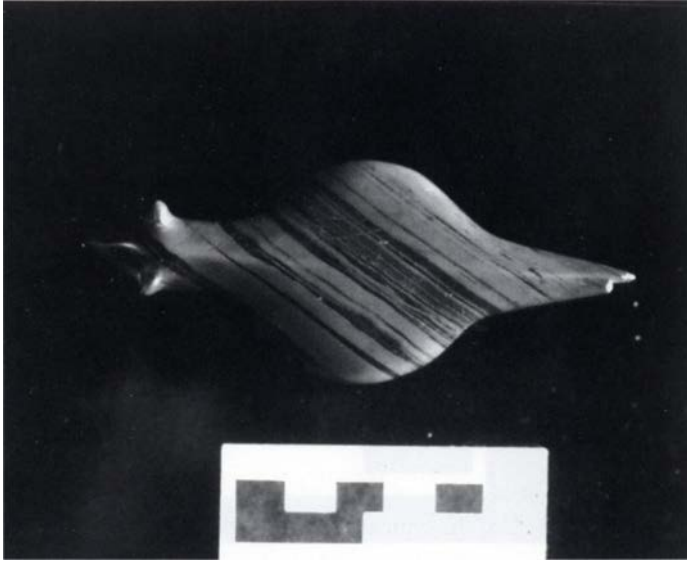
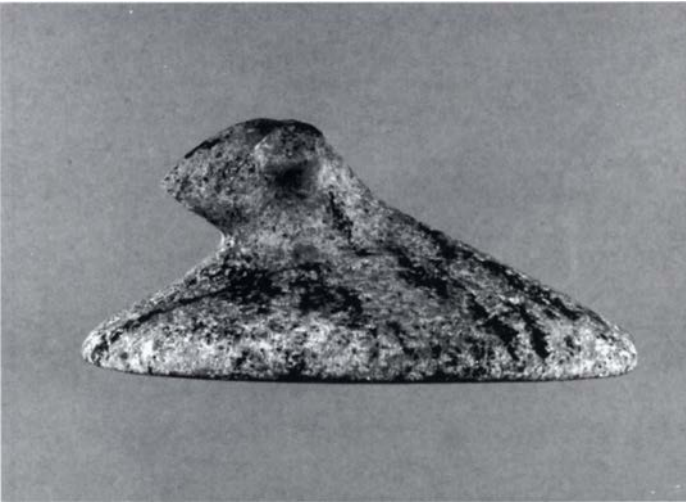


Fig.BB#25: The most obvious problem with this aquatic/animal type bird is the grain of the slate, real ones would not have been at such an angle, even the break on the tail looks good. Sold @ \$1200-1450



Fig.BB#26: Bust type birds are always perforated from bottom upward, this one is not. Seems as though the platform broke in manufacturing, but then it should not have been sandblasted as that is not a procedure of ancient archaic. Stories on this item abound in many journals. Sold @ \$2500

## Authentic Prehistoric Birdstones



**Fig.AP/B#1:** This is the typical "Bust" type Birdstone with only a head and neck fashioned on a tapering platform. The perforations are from the base on this Gneiss black & white artifact. Value range \$3500-5000



**Fig.AP/B#2:** This is an atypical Pop-eyed Hardstone Birdstone manufactured of Green porphyry with yellowish phenocrysts, weathered tan. Original #2 in the Ringeisen collection this fine specimen was found about 1902 in Wisconsin. Value range \$14500 - 16500

## Authentic Prehistoric Birdstones

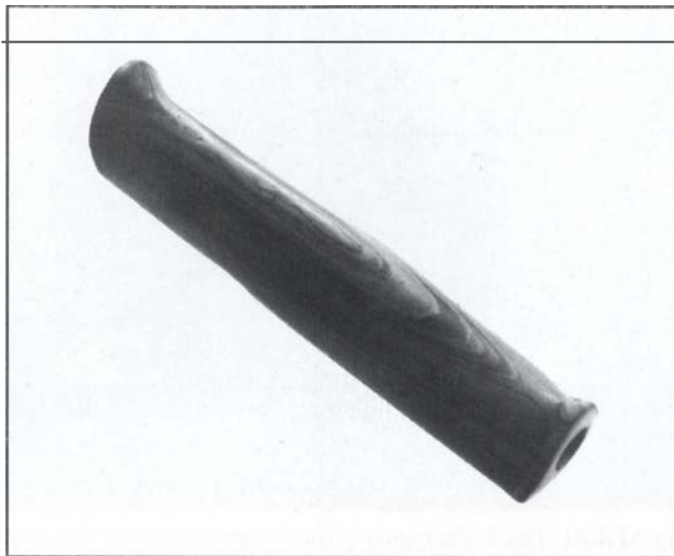


Fig.AP/B3: We've included a few Bar Amulets as they are likened to Birds, especially the posterior section with a raised tail and the birdstone like biconical perforations. Highly developed. Value range \$875-2000



Fig.AP/B4: This wonderfully sculpted Pop-eyed specimen of Porphyritic stone is well known. With its forward ridge and large beak, the Felke Bird has been pictured many times. Value range \$8500- 10000



## Authentic Prehistoric Birdstones

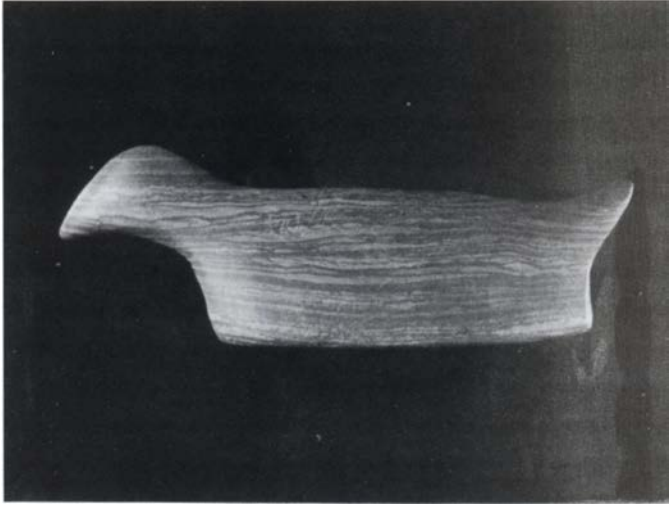


Fig.AP/B5: Dubbed the "Chicken" because of its posture, this close grained banded slate Birdstone features an "illusory" eye atop its head. Formerly residing in the Con Foster museum, it went to Sorgenfrei, Yokums, Koup, Berner. From Clinton County, Ohio. Value range \$4500-5000

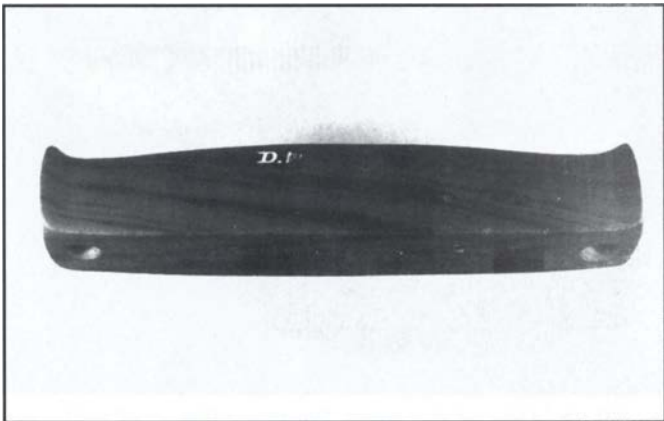


Fig.AP/B6: Another "Bar Amulet" with Birdstone like terminal ends and biconical perforations. This large slate amulet is from Hardin County, Ohio and formerly Driskill and Shirley. Value range \$1500-2500

## Authentic Prehistoric Birdstones



Fig.AP/B7: This sprite looking little Birdstone is unusual in that it features large Pop-eyes on the perky beak, an anterior and posterior ridge with biconical perforation and great banding. Value range \$6500-9000



Fig.AP/B8: One of the finest Porphyry Pop-eyed birdstones known with its large eyes, nearly covered by a yellow phenocryst, the undercut beak pointing upwards and the raised perforated ridges. The history is longer than this page and the fine artifact resides in the Caldwell collection. Value range \$18000-25000

## Authentic Prehistoric Birdstones



Fig.AP/B9: Dubbed the "Trojan Horse" Birdstone, it's easy to see why the title. This large fine banded late Birdstone features a large body, incised mouth and indented eyes. Presently in the Koup collection of fine birds. Value range \$5000-7500

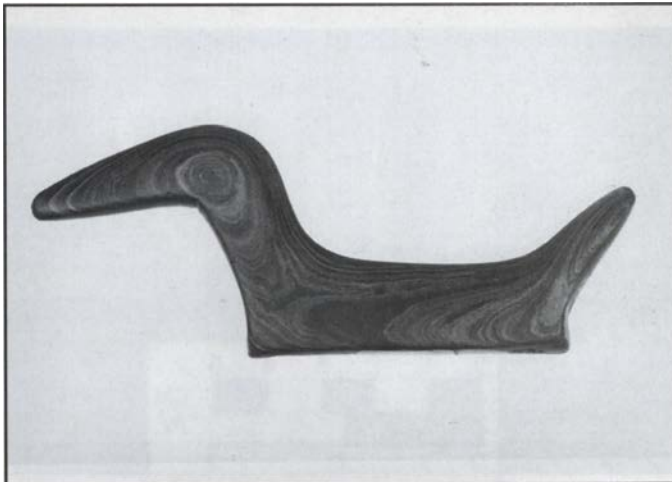


Fig. AP/B10: This long body, long beak banded slate Birdstone has a graceful shape and the illusory eye in the stone. It is as fine as they get, housed in the Fuller collection. Value range \$8500-12500

## Authentic Prehistoric Birdstones



**Fig. AP/B 11:** This Bird is one of the more simply styled types with upturned tail, short neck and small head. Made of banded slate and repaired by side drilling, this artifact came from Lambton County, Ontario and found by a ditcher in 1902. Formerly collected by Hart, Berner, Townsend. Value range \$3500-4500



**Fig AP/B12:** The most unusual authentic Birdstone pictured, this one is made of a nugget of pure native copper and was found in Allegan County, Wisconsin. Collected by Stilp. Value range \$2500-3500

## Authentic Prehistoric Birdstones



Fig.AP/B13: A simple little Birdstone of diagonal hewn banded slate, gray & green, found at the Calvary cemetery south of Dayton, Ohio. Formerly in the McNeal, Berner collection. Acquired by Dayton Museum of Natural History. Value range \$1800-2500



Fig.AP/B14: Forward upturned tail, long angling neck, heavy body, this banded slate Birdstone was found by a grave digger in Versailles, Ohio. Formerly in the Mumaw, Berner collection. Presently in the Townsend collection. Value range \$4500-5000

## Authentic Prehistoric Birdstones



Fig.AP/B15: Very large hardstone angling neck Birdstone of Green quartzite, found in Darke County, Ohio and imperforate at the anterior hole. Formerly Wachtel, Berner, Baldwin. Value range \$4500-6000

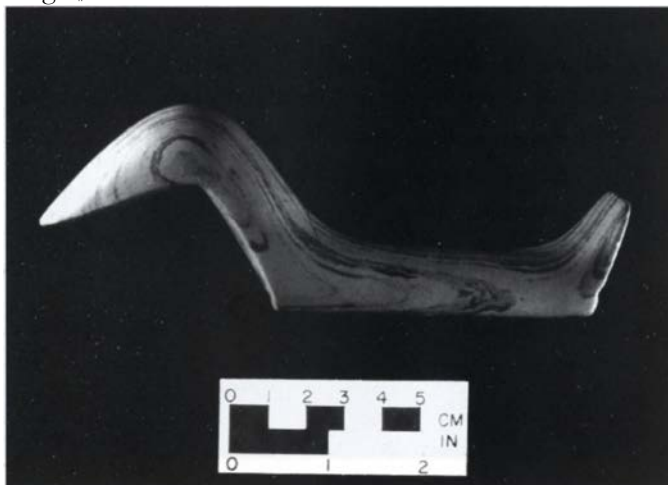


Fig.AP/B16: One of the finest Glacial Kame banded slate Birdstones, formerly in the Whaley collection, Fuller and now the Beutell collection. The long neck and head are very fine. Value range \$10000-12000