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## Turkey DNA sleuth wins gold

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An archaeologist whose research is shedding light on how early indigenous animals were domesticated has received SFU's highest graduate student honour, the Governor General's gold medal.

Camilla Speller's innovative work on the domestication of turkeys, carried out with archaeology professor Dongya Yang, was published earlier this year in the prestigious Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Working with colleagues at Washington State University, they found that the ubiquitous dinner-table fowl was domesticated twice. Both the Mesoamericans of south-central Mexico and ancestors of the Pueblo Indians in the southwestern U.S. were raising domestic turkeys by 200 B.C.

Speller's role involved extensive DNA testing on nearly 200 ancient turkey bones as well as contemporary domestic turkeys.

The bird's domestic roots date back to the pre-Aztec world some 2,000 years ago.

DNA tests suggest that while the ancestral Puebloans also introduced wild turkeys into their stocks there is no genetic evidence that these breeds survived to the present day.

Speller says it appears that only the pre-Aztec breed survived, from which today's turkeys are derived. Following the Spaniards' conquest of the Aztecs, turkeys were taken back to Europe and bred in different varieties before being re-introduced to North America.

Speller was recently awarded a two-year post-doctorate fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and will continue her studies at the University of Calgary's new ancient DNA laboratory beginning in June.

Says Speller: 'I hope that in combination with my doctoral work on turkey domestication in the Southwest U.S., we will gain a clearer picture of how indigenous animal domestication took place on a continental level.'

For a listing of students graduating from communities throughout B.C. see:  
<http://at.sfu.ca/LJEIFo>

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