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Science

# 'Weird' Albies: These Extinct Amphibians Had Slingshot-Style Tongues

By Athena Chan

11/05/20 AT 9:58 PM



### KEY POINTS

- Albies are amphibians that went extinct some two million years ago



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When we think of "ballistic feeders," the first thing that comes to mind are reptiles such as crocodiles and snakes. But what if I told you that a lizard-like amphibian from 99 million years ago was cable of capturing its prey simply with a slingshot-style tongue?

The ancestors in question were a group of amphibians that thrived for more than 165 million years about two million years ago. Called Albanerpetontids, or "albies," these creatures were distinct from frogs, salamanders and caecilians.

In their study, published in the journal Science, the researchers revealed that albies relied on their lightning-quick tongue strikes, contrary to earlier suggestions that albies were underground burrowers, Florida Museum in Gainesville reported in a news release on its website.

Most of the albie fossils that have been found really show their age. "We know little about this group because amphibian fossils are poorly preserved, and previous specimens from this group are both rare and mostly badly damaged," the researchers wrote.

But the albie species that was recently discovered came from fossils found in Myanmar actually were "in mint condition," study co-author Edward Stanley of the Florida Museum said in the release. "Everything was where it was supposed to be."

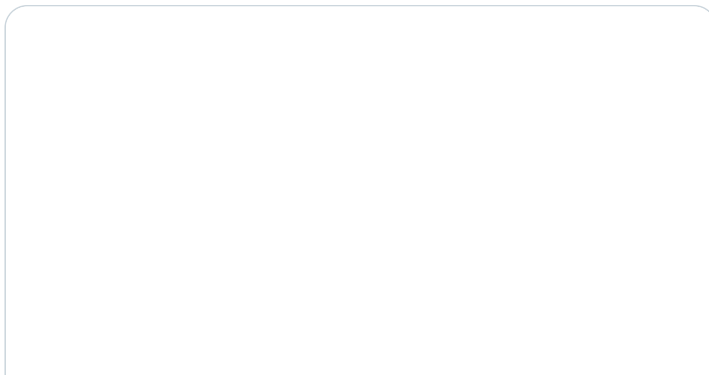


Florida Museum @FloridaMuseum · Nov 6, 2020



A speed-eating surprise! The oldest example of a rapid-fire tongue belongs to a bizarre, extinct amphibian known as an albanerpetontid, or "albie."

New @ScienceMagazine study by @Juan\_Gecko, @DrScanley, Susan Evans et al.  
Art: Stephanie Abramowicz



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Exquisitely preserved 99-million-year-old amber fossils redefine albies as tiny predators, picking off prey with lightning-quick tongue strikes. Albies almost made it to today, vanishing about 2 million years ago.

The findings publish Friday.



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2:04 AM · Nov 6, 2020 (i)

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8 See Florida Museum's other Tweets

The researchers identify the new genus and species as *Yaksha perettii*, named after the treasure-guiding spirits in Hindu literature, and Adolf Peretti, the person who unearthed the fossils.

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But even after finding fossils that exhibit so little wear and tear, albies still remain rather mysterious.

“In theory, albies could give us a clue as to what the ancestors of modern amphibians looked like,” albie expert and study co-author Susan Evans of the University College London said in the release. “Unfortunately, they’re so specialized and so weird in their own way that they’re not helping us all that much.”

As the news release explained, their exact place in the amphibian family is still unknown, and so is the reason why they went extinct while other amphibians persisted.

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Nevertheless, the study makes a significant contribution to the limited knowledge we have about these creatures.

“This discovery adds a super-cool piece to the puzzle of this obscure group of weird little animals,” Stanley said. “Knowing they had this ballistic tongue gives us a whole new understanding of this entire lineage.”



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Pictured: Representative image of a frog (an amphibian) with its head out of the water. (Photo: S. Hermann & F. Richter/Pixabay)

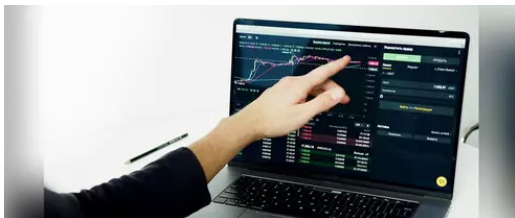
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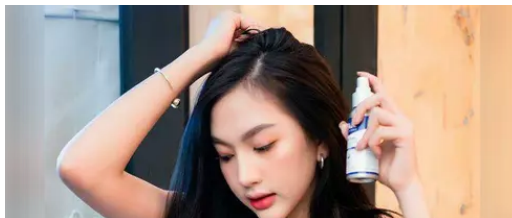
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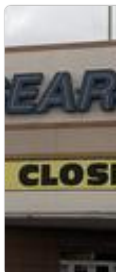
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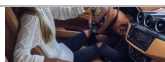
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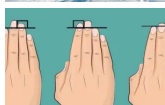
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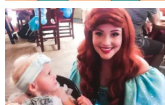
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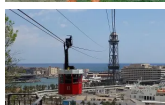
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