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99-Million-year-old Fossil Thought to be 'Small Dinosaur' is Actually New Species of Lizard



Recreation of the fossil. Credits: Institut Català de Paleontologia Miquel Crusafont/Press Release.

After the palaeontologists performed CT scans and analysed the data, they found that the mystery animal had scales -- teeth directly attached to the jawbone, unlike dinosaurs whose teeth are connected to a socket.

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Scientists have discovered a new species of lizard from two 99-million-year-old fossils found in Myanmar. The new species, named *Oculudentavis naga* (*O. naga*) after Naga people, belong to the same group of species as *Oculudentavis khaungraae* - a species previously thought to be of the smallest known bird or dinosaur. The two new specimens, which had visible teeth attached to jawbones and soft tissue preserved in amber, uncovered some key physical characteristics that led scientists to identify them as lizards. “The specimen puzzled everyone involved at first because if it was a lizard, it was a highly unusual one,” says Arnau Bolet, the lead researcher of the study said in a [press release](#) by Institut Català de Paleontologia Miquel Crusafont, Spain. After the palaeontologists performed CT scans and analysed the data, they found that the mystery animal had scales — teeth directly attached to the jawbone, unlike dinosaurs whose teeth are connected to a socket and not to the jawbone. Other properties included eye structure and shoulder bones resembling lizards and a hockey stick-shaped skull bone, common among reptiles with jawbone-connected teeth.

“We concluded that both specimens were similar enough to belong to the same genus, *Oculudentavis*, but a number of differences suggest that they represent separate species”, Bolet added. The latest research was published in *Current Biology* on June 14.

In a research published in *Nature* in March 2020, scientists had identified *O. khaungraae* as hummingbird-sized dinosaurs, but they retracted the paper later in May 2020.

The team of scientists also found out that both specimens were deformed during the preservation. The palaeontologists had first noticed the specimen while they were studying the fossil collection purchased in Myanmar by the gemologist Adolf Peretti. Since mining and sale of amber in Myanmar are linked with human rights abuses in the country, the Florida Museum Of Natural History clarified in a [news release](#) that the purchase was done following ethical guidelines set by the Society for Vertebrate Paleontology.

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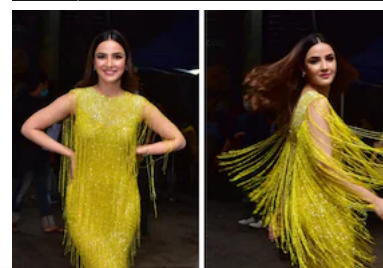
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