

That's not a dinosaur: Tiny fossil discovered in 2020 actually belongs to a lizard

[Jordan Mendoza](#) USA TODAY

A small skull found inside a piece of 99-million-year-old amber had scientists believing in 2020 that they had discovered the smallest dinosaur to date. But new research has concluded the fossil belongs to a strange-looking lizard.

In early 2020, the *Oculudentavis khaungraae* was presented as a flying dinosaur given its round, birdlike skull. The creature, roughly the size of a hummingbird, was found in Myanmar and believed to have existed about 100 million years ago.

But some researchers weren't sure whether it was actually a dinosaur or a bird, and the research that had declared it a dinosaur was redacted. Another group of researchers examined a similar fossil found in the area, and their findings published on Monday determined it belonged to a never-before-seen lizard.

"The specimen puzzled everyone involved at first, because if it was a lizard, it was a highly unusual one," said lead researcher Arnau Bolet of the Institut Català de Paleontologia Miquel Crusafont in Barcelona, Spain.

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A CT scan was used to analyze the two species, and although similar, they weren't exactly the same. Both had characteristics that are common in lizards, including teeth fused to the jaw rather than nestled into sockets as in most dinosaurs.

"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 said.

The differences in specimens led the team from the most recent study to name the creature *Oculudentavis naga* in honor of the Naga people in Myanmar where the artifact was found.

Though this *Oculudentavis* species resembles a lizard, researchers note it doesn't look like anything seen in today's world.

"It's a really weird animal. It's unlike any other lizard we have today," herpetologist Juan Diego Daza of Sam Houston State University said in Florida Museum.

Daza also gave credit to the workers who "who risk their lives to recover these amazing amber fossils." Acquiring Burmese amber, the type of amber where this fossil was found, has become difficult in Myanmar after the country's mines were taken over by the military in 2017.

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