

# Amber reveals new lizard species dating back 99 million years

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In March 2020, scientists and we announced the discovery of one of the smallest fossil birds ever discovered, the size of which did not exceed five centimeters in length. It is a skull, preserved in Burmese amber 99 million years old, which allowed the identification of this new species called *Oculudentavis khaungraae*. But the story is ultimately not so simple ...

## New skull confirms doubts

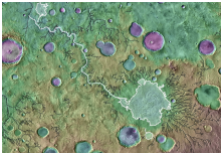
Just after the publication of the study on this bird, some specialists expressed doubts about this identification. So that the review *Nature* withdrew its publication a few months later. Today, a team from the Florida Museum of Natural History announces the discovery of a new skull, again trapped in amber, with characteristics similar to the other. His analysis, published in the journal *Current Biology*, determined that it belonged to the same genus but that it was a new species named *Oculudentavis naga*.



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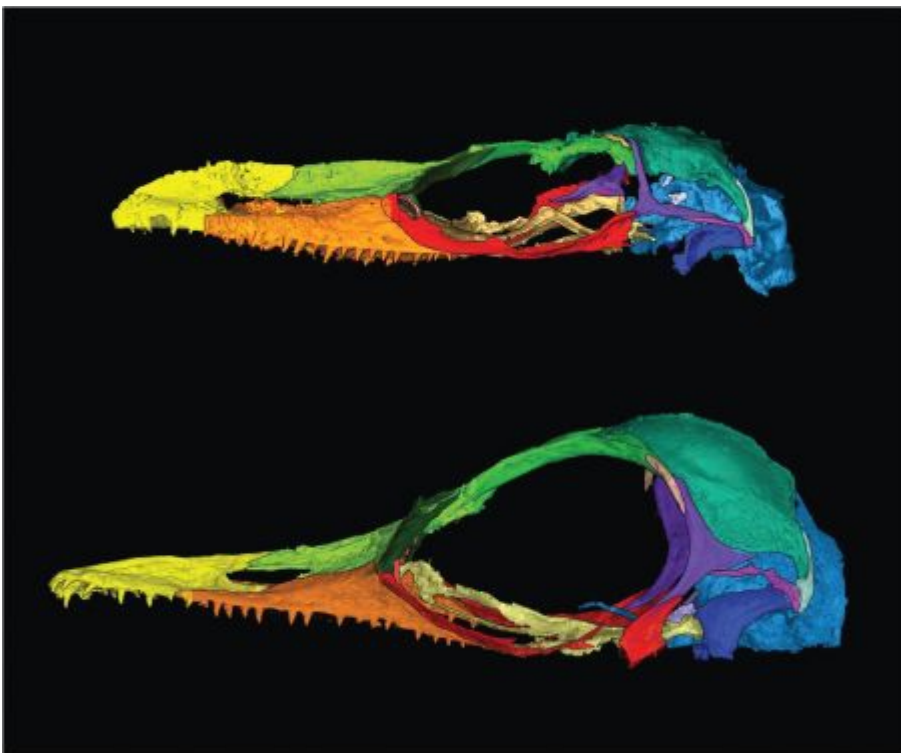


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*Fossil preserved in amber from an *Oculudentavis naga*. Credit: Adolf Peretti / Peretti Museum Foundation / Current Biology.*

And above all, the researchers confirm that it is not a bird but a lizard with very unusual characteristics. To settle the debate, they studied the two skulls and the small pieces of spine attached to them on the scanner and digitally reconstructed each of their bones. Certain details such as the presence of scales and a skull bone in the shape of a hockey bat which is universally shared by all squamates have made it possible to determine that these were indeed the remains of two lizards and not of birds.



*Reconstruction of the skull of *Oculudentavis naga* (top) and that of *Oculudentavis khaungraae* (bottom). Credit: Edward Stanley of the Florida Museum of Natural History / Peretti Museum Foundation / Current Biology.*

**False beak**

The team also determined that the skulls of both species had deformed during preservation. Muzzle *Oculudentavis khaungrae* was compressed, giving it the appearance of a beak and misleading its early discoverers. On the other hand, if they are positive about the identification of squamates, they have not succeeded in determining the place of these lizards in the evolutionary tree. It could be a new group, unknown until now. The Cretaceous period, 145.5 to 66 million years ago, gave birth to numerous groups of lizards and snakes but tracing the history of fossils from this time to their closest living relatives does nothing easy.

**#Amber**

**#dating**

**#lizard**

**#million**

**#reveals**

**#species**

**#years**