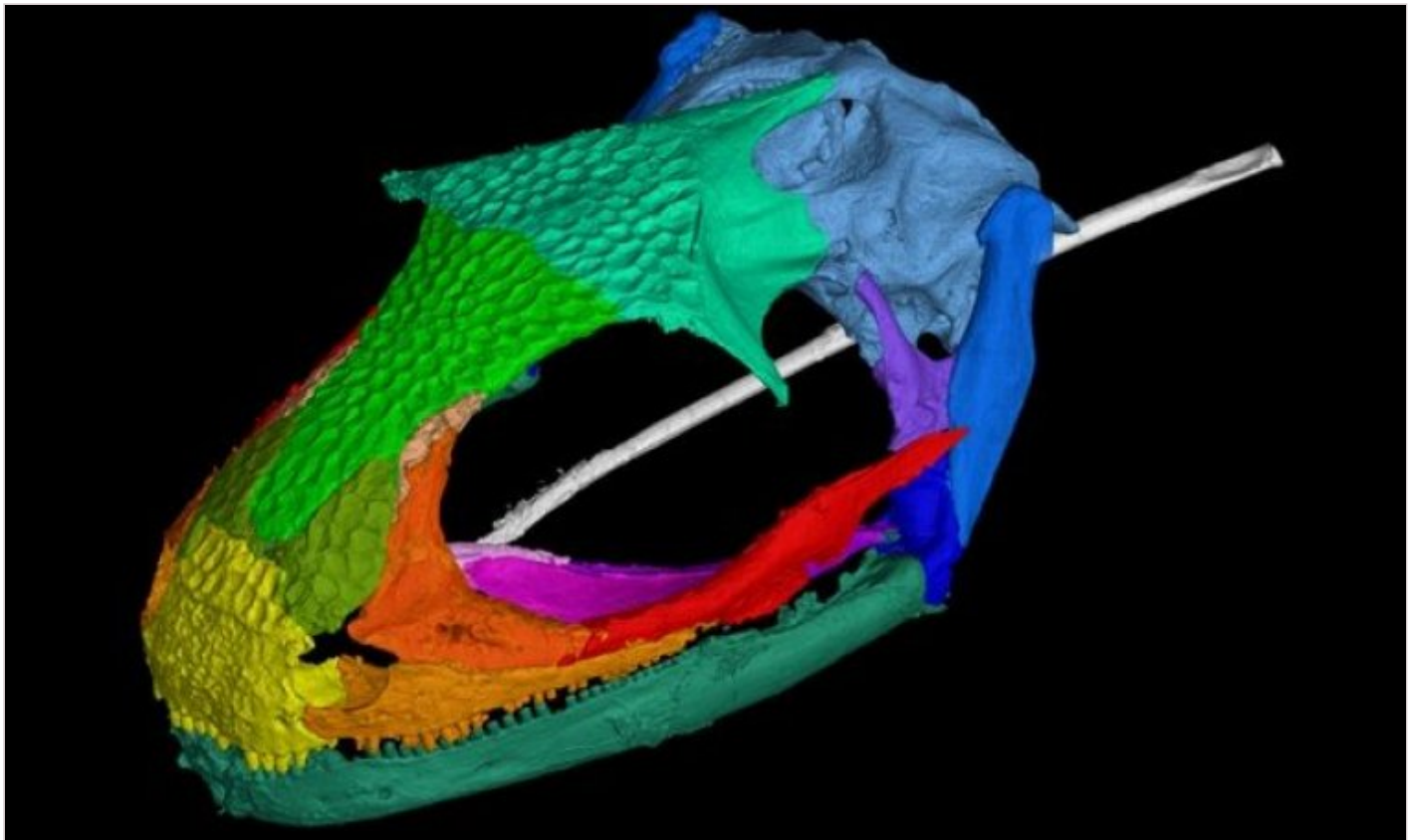


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News / Science

Earliest example of a rapid-fire tongue found in 'weird and wonderful' extinct amphibians

Fossils of bizarre, armored amphibians known as albanerpetontids provide the oldest evidence of a slingshot-style tongue, a study shows.



This CT image shows an adult albanerpetontid skull. Photo: Edward Stanley/Florida Museum of Natural History/VGStudioMax3.4

Despite having lizardlike claws, scales and tails, albanerpetontids -- called "albies" **for short** -- were amphibians, not reptiles. Their lineage was distinct from today's

frogs, [salamanders](#) and [caecilians](#) and dates back at least 165 million years, dying out only about 2 million years ago.

Now, a set of 99-million-year-old fossils [redefines](#) these tiny animals -- they were not, as once thought, underground burrowers, but rather sit-and-wait [predators](#) that snatched prey with a [projectile](#) firing of their tongue.

The fossils, one previously misidentified as an early [chameleon](#), are the first albies discovered in modern-day [Myanmar](#).

They also represent a new [genus](#) and [species](#): *Yaksha perettii*, named after treasure-guarding spirits known as yakshas in [Hindu](#) literature and Adolf Peretti, the [discoverer](#) of two of the fossils.

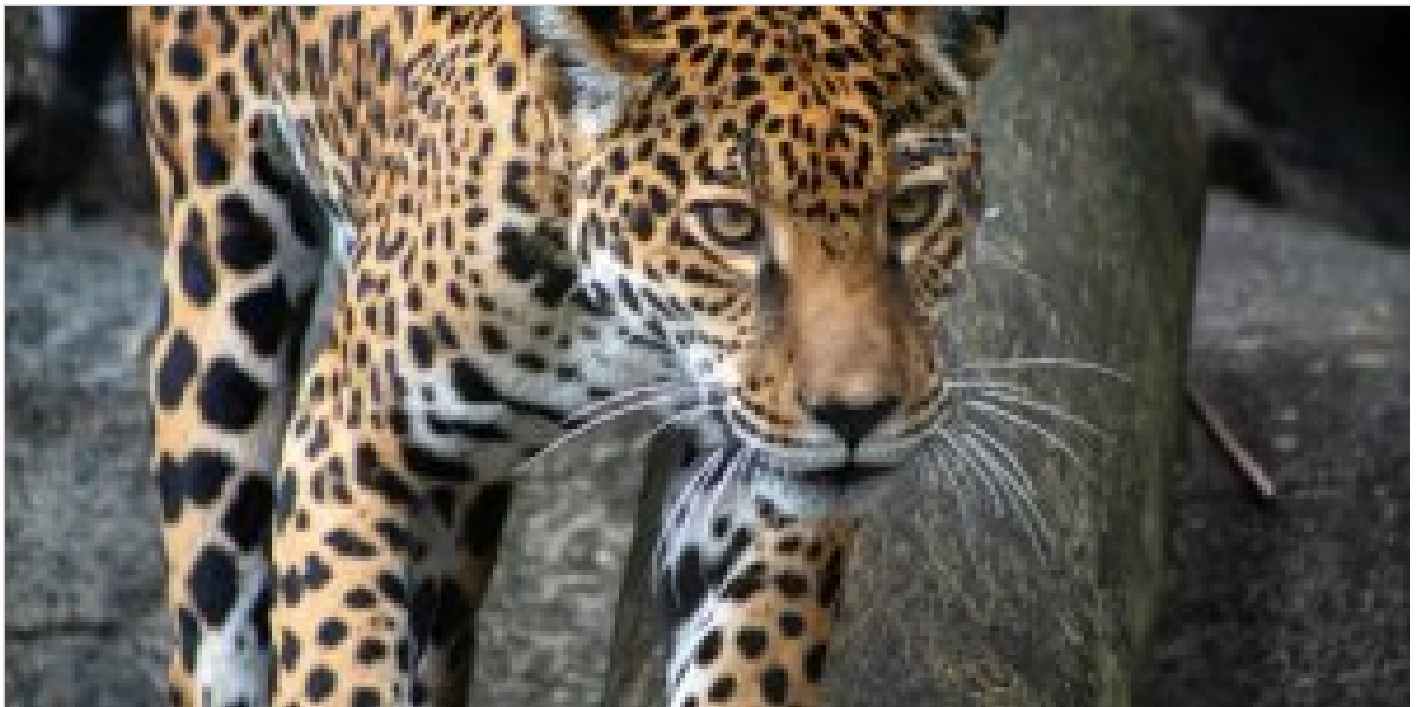
"This research adds a piece to the puzzle of this obscure group of weird little animals," said study co-author Edward Stanley, director of the [Florida Museum of Natural History](#)'s Digital Discovery and [Dissemination](#) Laboratory. "Knowing they had this [ballistic](#) tongue gives us a whole new understanding of this entire lineage."

Once classified as salamanders, albies' skulls -- [reinforced](#) and [stippled](#) -- led many scientists to [hypothesize](#) that they were [diggers](#). No one imagined them as having chameleonlike [lifestyles](#), Stanley said. But, he added, "If you're going to [misidentify](#) an albie as any kind of lizard, a chameleon is absolutely what you would land on."

Even though one is an amphibian and the other a reptile, they share several features, including claws, scales, massive [eye sockets](#) and, as we now know, a projectile feeding mechanism. (*National Science Foundation*)

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