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99-million-year-old amphibian with slingshot-style tongue found

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STEPHANIE ABRAMOWICZ/DAZA ET AL/SCIENCE/PA WIRE

Illustration of a 99-million-year-old amphibian with slingshot-style tongue

Get a load of this guy's tongue! But what on earth is it? Is it a frog? A chameleon? A salamander? Nope - it's a "weird" 99 million-year-old amphibian called a albanerpetontid! Now that's a mouthful!

Scientists have discovered fossils of the pre-historic creature in Myanmar and believe it is the oldest evidence of a slingshot-style tongue.

They say these armoured animals were "sit-and-wait predators" that snatched prey with a projectile firing of their "ballistic tongues".

Although they had lizard-like claws, scales and tails, the researchers believe albanerpetontids were not reptiles, but instead part of the amphibian family, like frogs and newts.

The findings, published in the journal Science, changes how scientists thought the tiny animals fed, as albanerpetontids had previously been thought to have been underground burrowers.

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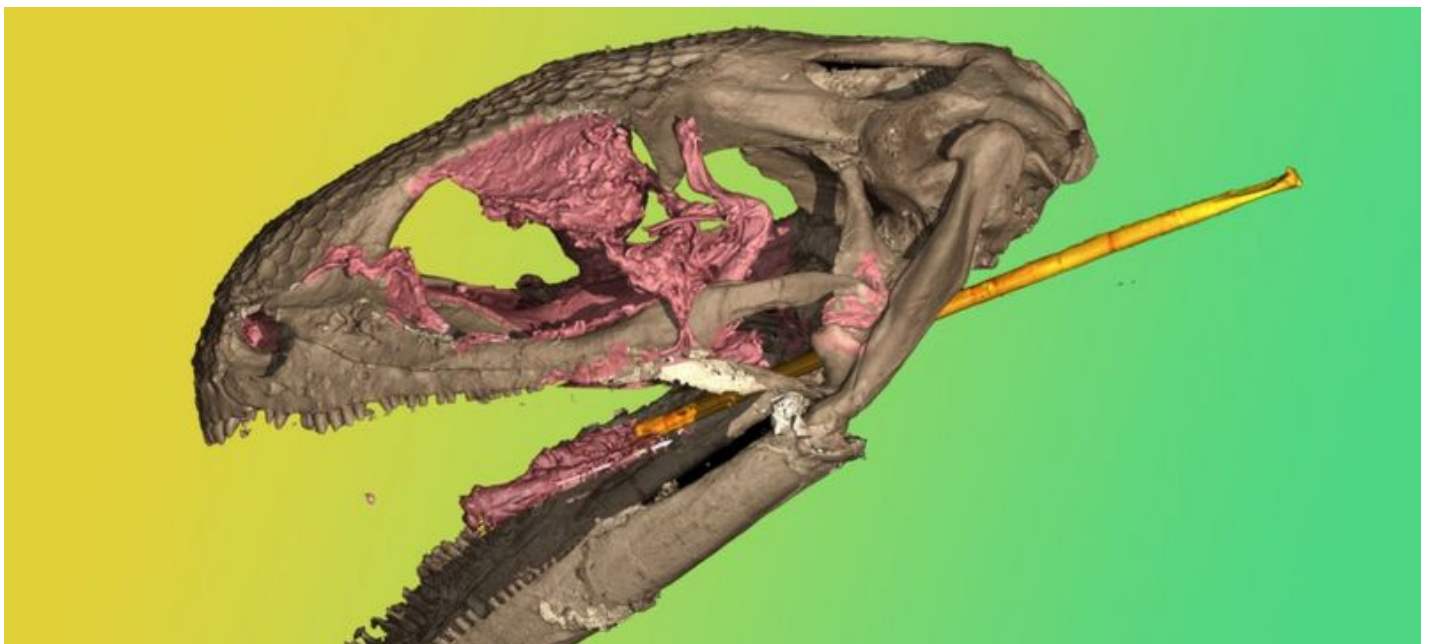
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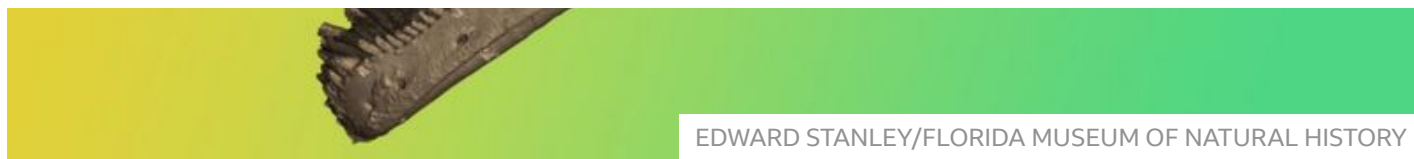
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This discovery adds a super-cool piece to the puzzle of this obscure group of weird little animals

Edward Stanley, Study co-author





EDWARD STANLEY/FLORIDA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

How cool is this scan of the albanerpetontid fossil skull?!

"Knowing they had this ballistic tongue gives us a whole new understanding of this entire lineage." said Edward Stanley, director of the Florida Museum of Natural History's Digital Discovery and Dissemination Laboratory.

Modern-day amphibians are represented by three distinct lineages - frogs, salamanders and limbless caecilians. A lineage means a sequence of species which is considered to have evolved from the one that came before it, think of it as an amphibian family tree.

Researchers say that until two million years ago, there was a fourth - albanerpetontids - whose lineage dates back at least 165 million years.

However, study co-author Susan Evans, professor of vertebrate morphology and palaeontology at University College London, believes their lineage may be much more ancient, possibly originating more than a staggering 250 million years ago! Now, that's OLD!

She said: "If the earliest albanerpetontids also had ballistic tongues, the feature has been around for longer than the earliest chameleons, which likely date back to 120 million years ago."



ADOLF PERETTI/DAZA ET AL/SCIENCE/PA WIRE

Albanerpetontid fossils trapped in amber. This meant the specimen was in "mint condition" which gave researchers an opportunity to study it in detail

Researchers say the fossil represents a new species of albanerpetontids, named *Yaksha perettii*, which is about 5cm long without the tail.

Another fossil also had features that resembled albanerpetontids such as claws, scales, massive eye sockets and a projectile tongue.

Prof Evans said the discovery that albanerpetontids had projectile tongues helps explain some of their "weird and wonderful" characteristics, such as unusual jaw and neck joints and large, forward-looking eyes - a common characteristic of predators.

They may also have breathed entirely through their skin, as some salamanders do, she added.

Despite the findings, how albanerpetontids fit in the amphibian family tree remains a mystery.

Prof Evans said: "In theory, albanerpetontids could give us a clue as to what the ancestors of modern amphibians looked like.

"Unfortunately, they're so specialised and so weird in their own way that they're not helping us all that much."

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5 Nov 2020

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P **PurpleGiraffe2009**
12:00 7 Nov 2020

whoah cool! isn't that a bit like jurassic park the bit about the fossilised amber?

1

Removed comment

D **daania**
18:47 6 Nov 2020

this is SOOO cool ! it is great that this animal can help scientists i find there long tongue very unique. 😁 😁 😁 😁

0

G **Glittery_BangtanARMY**
17:45 6 Nov 2020

ummm....gross and very wierd but fascinating

0

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P

Purple Panda

16:47 6 Nov 2020

Weird but fascinating


Purple Panda

1  

M

MysticTortoiseBunny

16:37 6 Nov 2020

Strange... 1  

R

Rainbowgymnast123

15:04 6 Nov 2020

Ok...

1  

F

Fayaz

14:11 6 Nov 2020

How interesting.

1  

G

Giraffe145

12:12 6 Nov 2020

Wow...


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S

Shimmering Mini Butterfly

09:51 6 Nov 2020

Weird!

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