

Researchers find new giant amphibian fossils in Africa

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Two new 250-million-year-old species of large, meat-eating amphibians have been discovered by researchers, including investigators from McGill University. Their findings, published in the last issue of *Nature*, describe the first and oldest amphibious carnivores from the Republic of Niger in West Africa.

"This the first evidence of carnivores in this area," says McGill paleontologist, and co-author, Hans Larsson. "This find is particularly interesting because the animals we found are not present anywhere else in the world at that time. These animals seemed to be restricted to this one region of Africa that had one of the driest climates on the planet. Animal communities found in other parts of the world are similar to each other, but completely different from those in Niger. We think the shared temperate climates of these other communities may have forced them to evolve independently and in relative isolation from the Niger fauna."

The two species of amphibians discovered are similar to crocodiles in shape. *Nigerpeton ricglesii* had rounded noses, with small eyes and both small and large fang-like teeth. *Saharastega moradiensis* had curved "horns" on the back of its head and an array of small teeth.

"Our findings show that climate change more than 250 million years ago had a dramatic effect on species survival and evolution," says Larsson. "Something to keep in mind when evaluating similar changes in today's world."

Source: McGill University

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