

Small furry animal lived with dinosaurs

January 12 2006

The fossil of a small, furry insect-eating animal that walked like a platypus has been found in China.

Researchers say the find provides important new clues to the evolution of early mammals, National Geographic News reported.

The well-preserved fossil, found in the province of Liaoning in northeast China, is a previously unknown species of insect-eating mammal that lived alongside dinosaurs some 125 million years ago, National Geographic said.

In a report published in the journal *Nature*, paleontologists Gang Li and Zhe-Xi Luo said the animal reveals some unexpectedly primitive features, and that it strengthens Asia's claim as the site where the main mammal groups originated.

The animal, named *Akidolestes*, had jaws, teeth, and forelimbs that identify it as a close relative of modern placental and marsupial mammals. But the researchers said it has a highly unusual back-half to its skeleton similar to that of primitive, egg-laying mammals known as monotremes.

National Geographic said the only living descendants of monotremes are the duck-billed platypus of Australia and two species of spiny anteaters.

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