

Fossil shows mammals diversified earlier

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A fossil from 164 million years ago, found in China, shows that mammals diversified much earlier than thought, even in an age dominated by dinosaurs.

The discovery, published in Friday's Science, says that the *Castorocauda* was a furry, fish-eating swimmer and burrower a bit bigger than a tree squirrel, with an otter-like body, teeth like a seal, webbed hind feet and a flat tail like a beaver, The Washington Post reported Friday.

"This guy swam like a beaver or a modern-day platypus; he was mostly a carnivore, but certainly capable of eating plants," said Zhe-Xi Luo, a paleontologist at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum of Natural History.

"What kind of modern animal is he most like? Your guess is as good as mine."

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