

Australian scientists unearth sabre-toothed cat

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The skull of a scimitar cat - of the saber-toothed cat genus - is pictured in 2008 at the Venezuelan Institute of Scientific Research (IVIC) in Caracas. Australian scientists Thursday said they have unearthed the remains of a bizarre, prehistoric, sabre-tooth "cat" in an ancient former rainforest, where specimens stretch back 25 million years.

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Lead paleontologist Henk Godthelp said it was the first time the

carnivore, with fangs half the length of its skull, had been seen in Australia, calling it an exciting and unique discovery.

"It's sort of like a native cat with a broad flattish head with large canines," Godthelp told AFP. "It's an animal we don't think we've seen before up at Riversleigh so it was quite a nice find for us."

Riversleigh, in the north-eastern state of Queensland, was a prehistoric rainforest which is now a rich hunting ground for fossils and ancient remains, after creatures were trapped and ossified in its lime-rich pools.

Carnivorous kangaroos, gigantic [flightless birds](#) and ancient platypus species are among the more unusual finds over the past 35 years, along with tree-dwelling [crocodiles](#) and primitive ancestors of the koala and wombat.

Many of its thousands of species have "never been seen anywhere else in Australia let alone the world", Godthelp said, adding that the skull of the newly found "cat" was small enough to fit in the palm of your hand.

"It wasn't a voracious carnivore leaping around chewing the heads off things or anything of that nature," he said.

The World Heritage site also has one of the globe's richest [mammal](#) deposits from the Oligo-Miocene era, between 15 and 25 million years ago.

There are deposits from about 200 separate pools spread over an 80 square kilometre area (30 square miles).

Scientists will now use acid to dissolve a huge chunk of rock which contained the skull, in the hope of finding the remains of its body.

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