

Dinosaur species named for twin scientists who found skull

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Celina Suarez and her twin sister, Marina, had always hoped they'd find dinosaur bones in the backyard of their childhood home in San Antonio, Texas.

The pair never found any dinosaur bones behind their home. But they have found [dinosaur bones](#) - more than once. It was their find in Utah in 2004 that led to the naming of a new species of dinosaur after the sisters, both now 29-year-old geochemists doing post-doctoral research.

"We're very honored," said Celina Suarez, who is doing research at Boise State University. Her sister, Marina, is a researcher at Johns Hopkins University. The sisters are identical, mirror-image twins ("She's a leftie, and I'm a rightie," Celina said.)

At the time of their big find, they were both Temple University master's students working on a summer excavation project near Green River, Utah, with the Utah Geological Survey. While investigating the sediment near the site, they came across a gulley with rocks that had bones sticking out.

"There were toe bones and limb bones. We collected a few that were in danger of getting washed away. The next morning, we scoured the hillside for more limb bones," Celina Suarez said.

Later, after more excavation and study of the bones from the site, researchers determined that the bones came from at least three different

[dinosaur species](#), including skull bones from a raptor-like species considered to be the oldest known member of the family Troodontidae and the only one from the Early Cretaceous period ever found in North America (98 million to 145 million years ago).

"When we first found the Utah site we knew it was significant, but we had no idea we would become part of history," Celina Suarez said.

That newly discovered dinosaur needed a name, so the team of researchers who published the first paper describing it named it after the Suarez sisters: *Geminiraptor suarezorum* (Gemini is Latin for twins). It is one of about 700 named species of dinosaur.

Celina Suarez said she found out the dinosaur species would be named for her and her sister in November, after reading a draft paper by Jim Kirkland, John Bird, Phil Senter and Jeff Bartlett (later published in *Public Library Science Journal*).

Suarez said *Geminiraptor suarezorum* was close to the size of an ostrich. She estimates it at about 125 million years old.

"It wasn't super-big," she said. "Unfortunately, not a whole lot of the animal had been found - just the skull."

Celina Suarez now specializes in geochemical paleontology. She analyzes the chemical makeup of ancient bones as it relates to the original biology of an animal and the geology of the environment that became its tomb.

Her work is being funded by a two-year, \$170,000 National Science Foundation fellowship. Using bone specimens from Hagerman and the Idaho Museum of Natural History, she will examine the chemical and physical processes of fossilization.

Suarez is preparing for a summer trip to China, where she will examine dig sites with scientists from the Chinese Geological Academy of Sciences and the University of Pennsylvania.

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