

New 'missing link' dinosaur discovered in Argentina

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Handout picture released by the Museo Paleontologico Trelew showing a real-size replica of the fossil of a Taquetrensis Leonerasaurus dinosaur being exhibited at the museum, in Neuquen, Argentina. Scientists in southern Argentina discovered fossils from this previously unknown species of dinosaur, a herbivore of about three metres long precursor of the great herbivores.

Fossils of a recently discovered dinosaur species in Argentina is a "missing link" in the evolution of the long-necked giants that roamed the earth millions of years ago, paleontologists said.

Long-neck, long-tail plant-eaters like Diplodocus, [Brachiosaurus](#) and Brontomerus -- the largest land creatures ever to walk on earth -- are [dinosaurs](#) known as sauropods. They lived some 170 million years ago.

Paleontologists see the recently discovered Leonerasaurus Taquetransis as the connection between the smaller prosauropods -- also known as near-sauropods -- like Sellosaurus and Plateosaurus from the [Triassic period](#) (248-205 million years ago) to their much larger descendants, the sauropods.

Leonerasaurus lived some 10 million years before the sauropods and measured a mere three meters (yards) long, said Diego Pol with the Egidio Feruglio Museum of Paleontology.

"The importance of this find is that it is a new species. It gives us information on the origin of the sauropods," Pol told AFP.

Leonerasaurus is "a very primitive species... that helps us understand the [evolutionary tree](#) of the giants that appeared later," Pol said.

Pol said he made the find along with a geologist and a student in the southern Patagonian mountains of Taquetran at a site with fossil remains from the [Jurassic period](#) (206-144 million years ago).

The team however did not find a complete Leonerasaurus. "Parts of the skull and the tail are missing. But the backbone, the hips, front and back legs are there," Pol said.

Argentina earned fame as a prime site for dinosaur fossil hunters starting in the 1980s with several discoveries, including the Argentinosaurus Huinculensis, a giant herbivore measuring more than 40 meters (131 feet) long that lived 98 million years ago.

Later, in 1993, scientists found remains of the Giganotosaurus Carolinii, a T-Rex type creature that is the largest known carnivorous dinosaur ever found.

Pol is the co-author of an article announcing the Leonerasaurus discovery that appeared January in the journal Plos One.

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