

# Giant prehistoric crocodile ;shieldcroc; identified

November 10 2011, by Bob Yirka

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Image: Henry Tsai, University of Missouri

(PhysOrg.com) -- A scientist working in Canada studying a part of a head of a dinosaur found some ten years ago in Morocco, has uncovered what may be the great granddaddy of all modern crocs. The ancient beast, believed to have been wandering around during the Cretaceous period is estimated to have been nearly the length of a school bus and had a strange shield type crown covering the top of his head that researchers believe might have been more for showing off than fighting.

Discovered in Morocco and subsequently carted off to the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada, the head sat ignored for nearly a decade before Casey Holliday, a [paleontologist](#) at the University of Missouri decided to look a little deeper. After analysis the head piece turned out to be from

an animal that belonged to the family crocodyliforms, which of course is where modern crocodiles, alligators, caimans and others come from.

Interestingly, despite its massive size, the old croc appears to have been rather weak jawed, and thus was more likely to eat fish swimming by (such as the car-length coelacanth) than grabbing animals off the shore and twisting them down into the water to drown them as modern [crocs](#) do.

Holliday believes the shield was used to help cool the animal, due to the presence of skin and blood vessels similar to those in the frill of [triceratops](#). Thus it would have been too soft to serve as protection, which makes Holliday believe it was likely mostly used to either frighten off other males, or to attract females.

Also, because the head fragment was found in Morocco, new fuel has been added to fire in the ongoing debate among paleontologists regarding the origins of [crocodyliforms](#). This new evidence points to North Africa of course, near the Mediterranean, though many still believe the original location was much farther north. But since we're talking about animals that lived around a hundred million years ago; so far back that land masses were configured differently from today, it's likely the arguments will go on without ever being proved one way or the other.

Holliday says the shieldcroc likely had an extra long face that was sort of flat with a roundish nose and small teeth. Its head alone was likely the size of a full-grown man. He also believes the giant beast's feeding habits were more like modern pelicans than crocodiles and alligators.

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