

# Tapeworm eggs discovered in 270 million year old fossil shark feces

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A cluster of tapeworm eggs discovered in 270-million-year-old fossilized shark feces suggests that intestinal parasites in vertebrates are much older than previously known, according to research published January 30 in the open access journal *PLOS ONE* by Paula Dentzien-Dias and colleagues from the Federal University of Rio Grande, Brazil.

Remains of such parasites in vertebrates from this era are rare- of 500 samples examined, only one revealed the tapeworm eggs.

This particular discovery helps establish a timeline for the evolution of present-day parasitic tapeworms that occur in foods like pork, fish and beef.

The fossilized eggs were found in a cluster very similar to those laid by modern tapeworms. Some of them are un-hatched and one contains what appears to be a developing larva.

According to the study, "This discovery shows that the fossil record of vertebrate [intestinal parasites](#) is much older than was previously known and occurred at least 270-300 million years ago."

The fossil described in this study is from Middle-Late Permian times, a period followed by the largest mass extinction known, when nearly 90% of marine species and 70% of [terrestrial species](#) died out.

**More information:** Dentzien-Dias PC, Poinar G Jr, de Figueiredo

AEQ, Pacheco ACL, Horn BLD, et al. (2013) Tapeworm Eggs in a 270 Million-Year-Old Shark Coprolite. PLoS ONE 8(1): e55007.

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