

US gives dinosaur skeleton back to Mongolia

May 6 2013



Mongolian Minister of Culture, Sport and Tourism Oyungerel Tsedevdamba poses with part of a 70 million-year-old, nearly complete Tyrannosaurus Bataar skeleton that will be repatriated to the government of Mongolia during an announcement by US Attorney, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Mongolian officials on May 6, 2013 in New York.

The United States on Monday gave back to Mongolia the remains of a 70-million-year-old Tyrannosaurus skeleton stolen from the Gobi desert and sold at auction in New York.

The nearly complete skeleton of the Tyrannosaurus bataar, a cousin of the fearsome [Tyrannosaurus rex](#), had been put up for sale and went for \$1.05 million last year before US authorities intervened at Mongolia's request.

Top New York [federal prosecutor](#) Preet Bharara said at a handing-over ceremony near the United Nations that the United States had stopped a "criminal scheme and now, one year later, we are very pleased to have played a [pivotal role](#) in returning Mongolia's million dollar baby."

The bones will find a welcoming home on return.

"We never had dinosaurs' museum before, so we'll set up for the first time a new museum called Central Dinosaur Museum of Mongolia. T bataar is going to be the first item, first exhibit of the museum," said the Mongolian minister of culture, sport and tourism, Oyungerel Tsedevdamba.

She said it was the first cultural repatriation ever to Mongolia.

Collector Eric Prokopi pleaded guilty last December to smuggling the bones. He faces up to 17 years in jail at sentencing on August 30, as well as a \$250,000 fine.

Prokopi, who has denied trafficking, spent a year restoring and remounting what had been a loose collection of bones to recreate the skeleton, according to Heritage Auctions, which had attempted to sell the dinosaur on his behalf.

The Florida dealer was also accused of illegally importing from Mongolia a second, nearly complete Tyrannosaurus bataar skeleton, two Saurolophus skeletons and two Oviraptor skeletons.

He was also accused of smuggling a Microraptor [skeleton](#) from China.

US customs director John Morton said the case had resulted in something "extraordinary."

"This [dinosaur skeleton](#) belongs in Mongolia, not on the black market," he said.

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