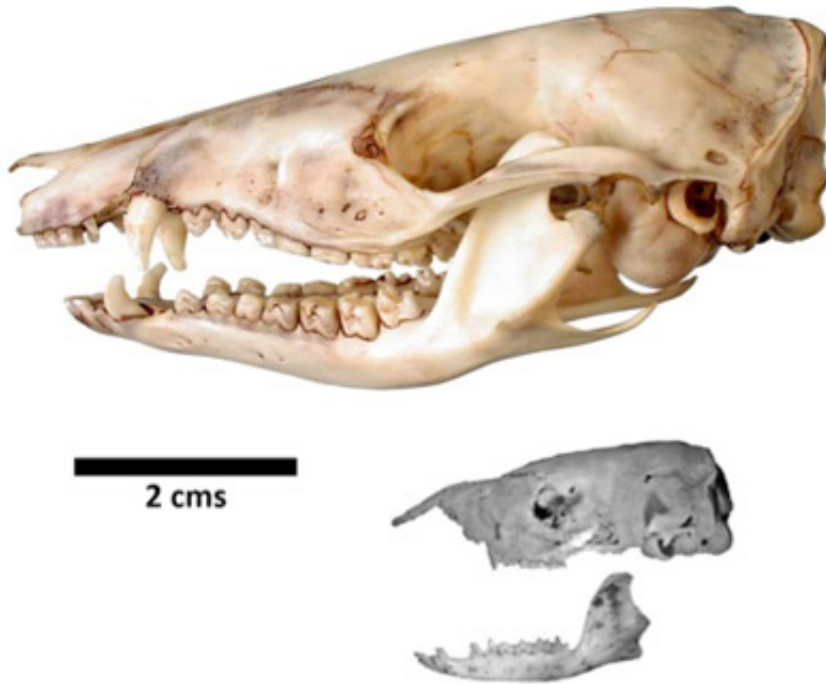


Tiny ancient bandicoot shines light on future

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The 20 million-year-old skull of the extinct Bulungu palara (bottom) is much smaller than the skulls of the modern bandicoots, such as the Southern Brown Bandicoot (above).

(Phys.org) —A 20 million-year-old fossil skull identified as a 'pocket-sized' ancestor of the bandicoot will give insights into the future of Australia's modern endangered animals.

Paleontologists from The University of Queensland (UQ) and University of New South Wales identified the skull as belonging to Bulungu palara.

The skull was found a decade ago by a team of paleontologists from UNSW lead by Professor Michael Archer.

UQ researcher Dr Kenny Travouillon said this fossil shows how bandicoots have evolved over time to adapt to large changes in the Australian environment.

"We can see from the teeth that the diet of these animals changed from carnivorous to omnivorous and that the body size was much smaller than modern bandicoots," says Dr Travouillon.

Dr Travouillon said the smallest of today's bandicoots weigh as little as 200 grams and Bulungu palara weighed just 50-150 grams.

"It was closer in size to today's native Australian marsupial mice of the Antechinus [genus](#)," Dr Travouillon said.

The well-preserved skull of Bulungu palara joins a list of extinct Australian [animal fossils](#) found at the Riversleigh site, which includes carnivorous kangaroos, the predecessors of Tasmanian Tigers, and tree-climbing [crocodiles](#).

Dr Travouillon said the Bulungu palara skull was among the oldest bandicoot fossils identified, along with two related species from 25 million-year-old-sediments of the Etadunna Formation in central Australia.

"This finding (Bulungu palara's [skull](#)) provides insight into the future of modern [endangered animals](#)," he said.

"As we find more fossils we can create a more complete record and see these animals changing over time."

This information can be used to plan the conservation of modern species.

The finding was published in the *Journal of Systematic Paleontology*, yesterday and available at www.tandfonline.com/toc/tjsp20/current .

Riversleigh has provided thousands of well-preserved fossil specimens from between 10 and 25 million-years-ago.

Provided by University of Queensland

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