

Goofy dinosaur blends Barney and Jar Jar Binks (w/ Video)

October 22 2014, by Seth Borenstein



Deinocheirus mirificus Credit: Michael Skrepnick

Nearly 50 years ago, scientists found bones of two large, powerful dinosaur arms in Mongolia and figured they had discovered a fearsome critter with killer claws.

Now scientists have found the rest of the dinosaur and have new descriptions for it: goofy and weird.

The beast probably lumbered along on two legs like a cross between TV dinosaur Barney and Jar Jar Binks of Star Wars fame. It was 16 feet (5 meters) tall and 36 feet (11 meters) long, weighing seven tons, with a duckbill on its head and a hump-like sail on its back. Throw in those killer claws, tufts of feathers here and there, and no teeth—and try not to snicker.

And if that's not enough, it ate like a giant vacuum cleaner.

That's *Deinocheirus mirificus*, which means "terrible hands that look peculiar." It is newly reimagined after a full skeleton was found in Mongolia and described in a paper released Wednesday by the journal *Nature*. Some 70 million years old, it's an ancestral relative of the modern ostrich and belongs to the dinosaur family often called ostrich [dinosaurs](#).

"Deinocheirus turned out to be one the weirdest dinosaurs beyond our imagination," study lead author Yuong-Nam Lee, director of the Geological Museum in Daejeon, South Korea, said in an email.

When scientists in 1965 found the first forearm bones—nearly 8 feet long—many of them envisioned "a creature that would strike terror in people," said University of Maryland dinosaur expert Thomas Holtz Jr, who wasn't part of the study. "Now it's a creature that would strike bemusement, amazement."

And yes, he said, "it's pretty goofy."

The find is tremendous but is a cautionary tale about jumping to conclusions without enough evidence, said University of Chicago

dinosaur expert Paul Sereno, who wasn't part of the discovery.

It also reminds us that evolution isn't always what we think, Sereno said.



Reconstruction of *Deinocheirus mirificus* Credit: Yuong-Nam Lee (KIGAM)

"This is evolution in a dinosaur—not a mammal—world," Sereno said in email. "The starting point is a two-legged animal looking somewhat like a fuzzy-feathered ostrich. Now you want to get really big and suck up lots of soft vegetation. In the end you look like a goofy Michelin ostrich with fuzz and a tail—not a cow."

Lee figures the tilted wide hips and massive feet show that *Deinocheirus* was a slow mover and probably grew so big to escape from being regularly feasted on by bigger dinosaurs.

It had a beak that could eat plants, but it also had a massive tongue that created suction for vacuuming up food from the bottoms of streams,

lakes and ponds, Lee wrote.

Originally Lee's team couldn't find the dinosaur's skull, but a tip from another researcher led them to recover it from the private market in Germany.

Some kids will soon adopt this dinosaur as their favorite, Holtz said, "and those are kids with a sense of humor."

More information: *Nature*, [dx.doi.org/10.1038/nature13874](https://doi.org/10.1038/nature13874)

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