

Africa's oldest dinosaur found in Zimbabwe

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The skeleton of Africa's oldest dinosaur was found during two expeditions in 2017 and 2019.

Scientists in Zimbabwe have discovered the remains of Africa's oldest dinosaur, which roamed the earth around 230 million years ago.

The dinosaur, named *Mbiresaurus raathi*, was only about one meter (3.2

feet) tall, with a long tail, and weighed up to 30 kilograms (66 pounds), according to the international team of paleontologists that made the discovery.

"It ran around on two legs and had a fairly small head," Christopher Griffin, the scientist who unearthed the first bone, told AFP on Thursday.

Probably an omnivore that ate plants, small animals and insects, the dinosaur belongs to the sauropodomorph species, the same lineage that would later include giant long-necked dinosaurs, said Griffin, a 31-year-old researcher at Yale University.

The skeleton was found during two expeditions in 2017 and 2019 by a team of researchers from Zimbabwe, Zambia, and the United States.

"I dug out the entire femur and I knew in that moment, that it was a dinosaur and I was holding Africa's oldest known dinosaur fossil," said Griffin, who at the time was a Ph.D. candidate at Virginia Tech University.

His team's findings were first published in journal *Nature* on Wednesday.



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The paleontologists selected the Zimbabwe site for digging after calculating that when all continents were connected in a single land mass known as Pangea, it laid roughly at the same latitude of earlier findings in modern day South America.

"Mbiresaurus raathi is remarkably similar to some dinosaurs of the same age found in Brazil and Argentina, reinforcing that South America and Africa were part of continuous landmass during the Late Triassic," said Max Langer of the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil.

The dinosaur is named after the Mbire district, northeast of Zimbabwe, where the skeleton was found, and paleontologist Michael Raath, who first reported fossils in this region.

"What this (discovery) does is it broadens the range that we knew the very first dinosaurs lived in," Griffin said.

Other specimens were discovered in the area, and all are repositied in the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe, in the second largest city, Bulawayo.

"The discovery of the Mbiresaurus is an exciting and special find for Zimbabwe and the entire palaeontological field," said museum curator Michel Zondo.

"The fact that the Mbiresaurus skeleton is almost complete, makes it a perfect reference material for further finds."

More information: Christopher Griffin, Africa's oldest dinosaurs reveal early suppression of dinosaur distribution, *Nature* (2022). [DOI: 10.1038/s41586-022-05133-x](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-022-05133-x).
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