

Extinct sea cow fossil found in Philippines

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(L-R) Puerto Princesa City Mayor Edward Hegedorn, Philippine President Benigno Aquino, New 7 Wonders of Nature Organization President Bernard Weber, and Johnpaul De La Fuente pose for photos at Malacañang palace in Manila. The bones of a likely extinct sea cow that lived about 20 million years ago have been discovered in an underground cave, a rare find in the Far East, the expedition head said.

The bones of an extinct sea cow species that lived about 20 million years ago have been discovered in a cave in the Philippines by a team of Italian scientists, the expedition head said Monday.

Several ribs and spine parts of the aquatic mammal were found in February and March in limestone rock above the waters of an underground river on the island of Palawan, said University of Florence geologist Leonardo Piccini.

"The [fossil](#) is in the rock, in the cave. We cannot remove it and we don't

want to extract it. We would like to wait (for) when the technology will allow us to study the fossil without extracting it," Piccini told AFP.

Speaking on the sidelines of a symposium at the Philippine presidential palace where the find was announced, Piccini said it was a rare discovery in the region from the Miocene era -- 20 million years ago.

"It's the first remains of this kind of animal in the area, so it is important in reconstructing the habitat and the diffusions of this animal in the Miocene," he added.

Initial comparisons with fossil specimens suggest it belongs to one of two [extinct species](#) of plant-eating sirenia, also known as sea cows, according to research by Federico Panti and Paolo Forti, a member of the Palawan expedition.

They said the animal would have been about 180 centimetres (about six feet) long.

Two sea cow species live to this day, the dugong of the Indo-Pacific region and [manatees](#) of the [Atlantic basin](#).

The paper said such fossil finds in the East had been limited to India along with some fragmentary finds in Madagascar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the [Indonesian island](#) of Java.

"The specimens (found) in the Palawan Island represent the first from the Philippines and the easternmost occurrence in the region," it added.

It called on the government to protect the area of the find in the Puerto Princesa subterranean river, which is being heavily promoted as a major tourist destination.

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