

Ancient Chinese lampreys are studied

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The fossilized remains of two tiny freshwater lampreys have been found in Inner Mongolia, China, each about 125 million years old.

Scientists say the newly described specimens, members of the jawless vertebrates, offer a welcome glimpse into the lampreys' elusive evolutionary history.

Mee-mann Chang and colleagues at Beijing's Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology say their study suggests lampreys have changed little during the last 100 million years. The three-inch-long eel-shaped creatures have long snouts and well-developed oral suckers -- features that make them similar to modern-day sea lampreys.

The lamprey fossil record is meager because the creatures lack mineralized tissues, such as bone or calcified cartilage. So the new finds also help bridge a gap in lamprey history between modern-day lampreys and the 300-million-year-old specimens found in North America.

The discovery is detailed in the journal *Nature*.

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