

Photo
MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

Pterodactyl Fossil

Fast facts about the flying reptile

For the complete photos with media resources, visit:
<http://education.nationalgeographic.com/media/pterodactyl-fossil/>

FAST FACTS

- Pterodactyls were winged reptiles who lived in the Jurassic period (about 150 million years ago.)
- Many pterodactyl fossils are preserved in Bavaria, Germany. During the Jurassic, the region was a swampy wetland at the edge of an ancient sea. Organisms that fell or washed into the wetland became buried in soft mud. This mud slowly hardened into limestone, turning the organisms' bodies into fossils.
- "Pterodactyl" combines the Greek words for "wing" (*ptero*) and "finger" (*dactyl*). Pterodactyls flew using wings formed by a tough membrane stretching from their bodies to their elongated fourth finger. (The fourth fingers on this pterodactyl stretch all the way past the animal's tailbone!)
- A pterodactyl's wingspan was about 1 meter (3 feet).
- Pterodactyls had long beaks filled with about 90 teeth. They used these teeth to prey on fish, the main source of food in their diet.
- Pterodactyls were *not* dinosaurs! Dinosaurs are generally considered to walk upright, on either two legs (like T.Rex) or four legs (like stegosaurus). Pterodactyls usually didn't walk at all (they flew), and when they did walk, they waddled on their back legs and pointed wings. Animals like pterodactyls are called *pterosaurs*.

VOCABULARY

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
ancient	<i>adjective</i>	very old.
diet	<i>noun</i>	foods eaten by a specific group of people or other organisms.
dinosaur	<i>noun</i>	very large, extinct reptile chiefly from the Mesozoic Era, 251 million to 65 million years ago.
fossil	<i>noun</i>	remnant, impression, or trace of an ancient organism.
limestone	<i>noun</i>	type of sedimentary rock mostly made of calcium carbonate from shells and skeletons of marine organisms.
membrane	<i>noun</i>	thin coating of material that certain substances, such as water, can pass through.

mud	<i>noun</i>	wet soil.
prey	<i>noun</i>	animal that is hunted and eaten by other animals.
pterosaur	<i>noun</i>	extinct order of flying reptiles that flourished from 220 million-65 million years ago.
region	<i>noun</i>	any area on the Earth with one or more common characteristics. Regions are the basic units of geography.
reptile	<i>noun</i>	animal that breathes air and usually has scales.
swamp	<i>noun</i>	land permanently saturated with water and sometimes covered with it.
wetland	<i>noun</i>	area of land covered by shallow water or saturated by water.

For Further Exploration

Articles & Profiles

- National Geographic News: Giant Pterosaurs Couldn't Fly, Study Suggests
- National Geographic News: Giant Pterosaurs Could Fly 10,000 Miles Nonstop

Images

- National Geographic News: Mini-Pterodactyl Found in China

Websites

- National Geographic Magazine: Pterosaurs: Lords of the Ancient Skies
- National Geographic Entertainment: Flying Monsters 3D
- National Geographic Education: Flying Monsters 3D Education



© 1996–2015 National Geographic Society. All rights reserved.