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MEET A PALEONTOLOGIST

While on a fossil dig in Africa, paleontologist Paul Sereno uncovered the skeleton of a very old, very large crocodile. In this interview, he talks about this important discovery.

Interviewer, Peter Laufer: This is National Geographic World Talk. I'm Peter Laufer, along with paleontologist Paul Sereno. Is there any kid, anywhere, who's not fascinated by dinosaurs? Why is it so important that we learn where dinosaurs came from, when the first dinosaurs appeared, and why they died out?

Paleontologist, Paul Sereno: We're curious about our history. We're curious about deep time. Dinosaurs speak about a time that we can only dream about and think about scientifically.

Peter Laufer: Tell us about SuperCroc, who he was, and how you found him.

Paul Sereno: Well, [in Africa] we came upon an incredibly huge skull—six feet long. It was just astonishing that it was a crocodile with a skull that long. Then we found enough of the skeleton to get a good idea of what it looked like. You're talking about an animal 40 feet long, twice as long as the largest living crocodiles today and many times as heavy.

Peter Laufer: You are finding things that have never been seen before. They are related to animals that live with us today.

Paul Sereno: That's the great thrill of working in paleontology.

Peter Laufer: Despite the fact that you're studying these [animals] who lived so long ago, there's constantly new material. Isn't that correct?

Paul Sereno: Yes. That's my great understanding of science. In college, I started out as an artist. Science seemed like a pile of facts that I could never remember. As I got interested in paleontology, I began to understand that it's about discovery and creativity. It's about thinking of a question or trying to answer a question that nobody else has before you.

That's what I love. We're always going to be finding out new things.

Peter Laufer: Paleontologist Paul Sereno, thanks so much for joining us today on National Geographic World Talk. I'm Peter Laufer.