

Dinosaurs, day-care and diluvium

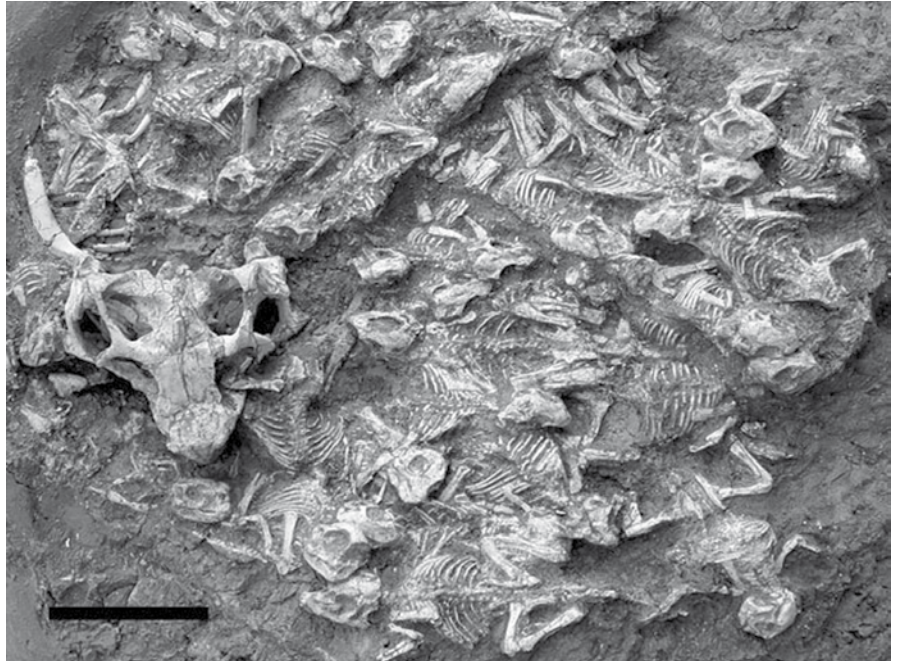
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The seemingly bottomless pit of fossil discoveries from the Liaoning Province in north-eastern China has produced another surprise: dinosaurs (psittacosaurus) allegedly displaying communal parenting.^{1,2}

34 juvenile psittacosaurus were buried suddenly with one adult individual who is believed to have acted as a ‘day care supervisor’ (figure 1). As for the way they were buried, National Geographic says, ‘Nobody knows what buried them so quickly. Their den might have collapsed or flooded or drifts of volcanic ash could have suffocated them [emphasis added].’ Such an admitted ignorance is a little disconcerting coming from a respected and widely read source! To start with, the possible causes of death listed are mutually exclusive: if they were killed by a flood they could have not been suffocated by volcanic ash—and vice versa. Also, flood sediments and volcanic ash are quite different and relatively easy to distinguish.

In any case, here is yet another example where even a staunchly evolutionary source does not rule out flooding as a possible cause of fossilization. It has been pointed out many times that many of the fossil dinosaurs strongly support the Noahic Flood.³⁻⁵ Even the largest of these amazing creatures were not spared the effects of God’s wrath and punishment on mankind.

The discoverers of the psittacosaurus claim that so many juveniles would be most unlikely to have been from a single brood and therefore the adult buried with them may have been the ‘day care supervisor’. The psittacosaurus were small, no bigger than 2 m as adults and in this case they seemed to have been using a den. With respect to speculation about animal behaviour, the words of Dr Lawrence Witmer of the Ohio University are worth recalling:



Meng et al., 2004

Figure 1. 34 *Psittacosaurus* fossils buried together in Liaoning province, China showing one adult with 33 juveniles.² Unlike most fossils from the area, these have not been flattened between the sedimentary layers. Scale bar represents 10 cm.

‘Imagine an upside-down pyramid with, at the pointed bottom, the word “bones”. Bones are the known commodity, the solid evidence. They are aged; they may be broken, cracked, ambiguous. But you can at least hold them in your hand. Above bones on the inverted pyramid are soft tissues. There aren’t many of those because they rarely fossilize. Above that—so very far from the hard evidence of bones—is behavior. Above that is environmental interaction. The dream would be to know the behaviors of many different dinosaurs and to be able to put them in context so you’d know what dinosaurs ate and where they slept and what they feared and how they prowled the landscape. And at the very top of the inverted pyramid, as far from science as you can get, is ... well, probably the purple dinosaur known as Barney.’⁶

The modern media tends to ignore the opinions of such specialists. Documentaries like the Discovery Channel’s ‘Walking with Dinosaurs’ and the Hollywood’s series ‘Jurassic Park’ are almost obsessive in their

depiction of this great unknown—behaviour (ethology). We live in a time of powerful visual icons, and whatever such motion pictures depict automatically becomes ‘standard knowledge’, no matter how hypothetical or erroneous!

The division between inference and speculation is rarely defined in the media and as a consequence such visual representations are accepted, uncritically, as factual representations.

References

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