

Extinction Island

Dinosaur Fun Facts

Dinosaurs were massive and tiny ... fearsome and motherly ... predator and prey. They existed in too many different varieties to name them all here, but this list covers some of their amazing qualities, at least the ones that scientists know about. The truth is these creatures could have had much more astounding abilities than we can imagine.

- ◆ Before 1842, no one knew the term dinosaur. It was coined by Richard Owen, a British paleontologist, from the Greek words *dienos* (terrible) and *sauros* (lizard).
- ◆ How many types of dinosaurs existed? Over 700 species have been named, but there could have been much more.
- ◆ How long did the big dinosaurs like *Apatosaurus* live? At one time, scientists speculated they might have lived 300 years, but recent studies suggest it was more like 70-80 years, similar to modern elephants.
- ◆ Why were some dinosaur skulls holey? Scientists think dinosaurs like *Tyrannosaurus rex* could have used these open areas in their skull to cool or heat their blood as needed. Perhaps *T. rex* wasn't as hotheaded as we've always thought.
- ◆ First dinosaur discovery? The first species of dinosaur was named before the word dinosaur was coined. In 1824, the first geology professor at Oxford, William Buckland, named the bones of what he understood to be an ancient lizard, *Megalosaurus* (great lizard). Although few bones of this beast were found, we still use this name today, so he is credited with naming the first dinosaur. However, a man named Robert Plot is credited with discovering the first dinosaur bone in 1677. At the time, Plot mistakenly thought it belonged to a giant human.
- ◆ Largest carnivorous dinosaur: *Spinosaurus* at up to 59 feet (18 m) long and weighing in at almost 9 tons, it was bigger than the previous record holder, *Giganotosaurus*.
- ◆ Longest dinosaur? *Seismosaurus* at 111 feet (34 m) has claimed this title—about 3 school buses in length—but in recent years a new group of sauropods, called *Titanosaurs* has reached for the goal of longest dinosaur. Some of the *Titanosaurs* may have been up to 120 feet (37 m) long, but the specimens aren't complete enough to know for sure.
- ◆ Heaviest dinosaur? *Argentinosaurus* at 98 feet (30 m) long and weighing between 60-100 tons, as much as seven African elephants (estimates vary because the fossil bones aren't complete).
- ◆ Tallest dinosaur? *Sauroposeidon* at 55 feet (17 m) tall. It was almost as tall as George Washington's head on Mt. Rushmore (60 feet). Although *Sauroposeidon* fossils are incomplete, estimates of its height beat out the previous record holder, *Brachiosaurus*, which stands at 39 feet (12 m) tall.



Apatosaurus



Spinosaurus

Dinosaur Fun Facts (cont.)

- ◆ Longest carnivorous teeth? *Tyrannosaurus rex* had banana shaped teeth that were 12 inches long. Those teeth delivered the strongest bite of any land animal that has ever lived.
- ◆ Longest Claw? *Therizinosaurus* (scythe lizard) whose claws were up to 3 feet (1 m) long.
- ◆ Dumbest dinosaur? *Stegosaurus* had a brain that was only 3 cm long and weighed 75 grams (the size of a walnut).
- ◆ Longest dinosaur name? *Micropachycephalosaurus* (tiny thick headed lizard).
- ◆ Scientists estimate some of the largest sauropod dinosaurs may have required 100,000 calories a day to sustain their bulk. Certainly, they would have had to eat hundreds, if not thousands, of pounds of food per day. Talk about being incessantly hungry.
- ◆ Dinosaurs often swallowed large rocks (called gastroliths) that stayed in their stomach to help them digest food.
- ◆ One of the first prolific fossil hunters was actually a woman. Mary Anning was born in 1799 on the southern coast of England. When her father died and left the family in debt, she began fossil hunting for survival. One of her first sales was an *Ichthyosaurus* (fish lizard) found by her brother and excavated by her. Even though she had little formal education, she worked closely throughout her life with professional fossil hunters of the time, such as William Buckland and Richard Owen (who would go on to coin the term dinosaur).
- ◆ *Parasaurolophus* had a crest that reached up to 6 feet (1.8 m) long, the biggest crest of all the dinosaurs. It could have been used for mating, defense, or communication through sound (or all of this).
- ◆ *Velociraptor* (speedy thief) was named in 1924 by Henry Fairfield Osborn to describe its speed and carnivorous diet, but this wasn't the first name for the dinosaur. Earlier, Osborn had described the specimen in a popular magazine, giving it the name *Ovoraptor* (meaning egg thief). He changed the name to *Velociraptor* in his scientific paper, so that name became the accepted one. Although *Velociraptors* are usually depicted as naked in the movies, scientists have discovered quill knobs on their bones, indicating they likely had feathers.



Therizinosaurus



Parasaurolophus

Note: This information was compiled from online resources: The Dinosaur Museum, American Museum of Natural History, Live Science, BBC, National Geographic, BBC Science Focus Magazine, Discovery, and History.