

FOSSIL VOCABULARY

Burpee Museum of Natural History

ANGIOSPERMS - One of the great divisions of the seed-bearing plants, including all the higher flowering plants, which evolved in the Cretaceous time.

ANKYLOSAURS - One of the major groups of ornithomischian dinosaurs. They moved on all fours and had a tank-like body.

APATOSAURUS - Formerly called “Brontosaurus,” it was a giant sauropod about 80 feet long and weighed up to 30 tons.

ARTHROPOD - Invertebrate animal, member of the phylum Arthropoda, with an external skeleton, segmented body, and jointed limbs. Examples include insects and fossil trilobites.

BIPEDAL - An animal that walks on two feet in a semi-upright or upright posture.

BRACHIOPOD - Bivalve marine invertebrate; member of phylum Brachiopoda.

BRYOZOAN - Small, colonial aquatic animal that usually secretes a calcareous skeleton; member of the phylum Bryozoa.

CALCAREOUS - Composed of, containing, or characteristic of calcium carbonate, calcium, or limestone; chalky

CARBONIZATION - The process of fossilization whereby organic remains are reduced to carbon or coal.

CARNIVORE - A meat-eating animal.

CENOZOIC - The latest era of geologic time, following the Mesozoic and extending into the present.

CEPHALOPOD - Invertebrate animal, member of the class Cephalopoda, with well-defined head and eyes, and tentacles around the mouth. Fossil ammonites and the modern octopus are cephalopods.

CRETACEOUS PERIOD - The period in Earth’s history that lasted from about 144 million years ago until about 65 million years ago. A Belgian scientist found certain kinds of fossils over and over again in beds of chalk, so he named this period after the Latin word for chalk.

CRINOID - Member of the class Crinoidea within phylum Echinodermata, stemmed crinoids are also known as “sea lilies.”

DINOSAUR - Meaning “terrible lizard” in Greek, a term first used in 1842 by Richard Owen to describe a group of extinct reptiles.

EUKARYOTE - Organism comprising cells with a well-defined nucleus containing its genetic material. Includes all animals, plants, fungi, and protists.

EVOLUTION - “Descent with modification,” a process that results in heritable changes in a population spread over many generations.

EXTANT - A condition referring to a type of organism having currently living representations.

EXTINCT - A condition referring to a type of organisms that has died out, leaving no current representation.

FOSSILS - The remains of organisms from long ago or the traces of their activity.

GASTROPOD - An invertebrate animal, member of the class Gastropoda, usually with a single, calcareous, coiled shell, such as snails.

GEOLOGIC MAP - A map showing the distribution of rock outcrops, structural features, mineral deposits, etc.

HABITAT - The area or environment where an organism normally lives.

HADROSAURS - Dinosaurs found in North America, Asia, and Europe during the late Cretaceous. Referred to as the “duck-billed dinosaurs” because of their duck-like bills and webbed feet.

HERBIVORE - A plant-eating animal.

INVERTEBRATE - Animal without a backbone.

JURASSIC PERIOD - The time in Earth’s history from 190-144 million years ago. It was named for rock layers in the Jura Mountains in Switzerland.

MAIASAURA - A dinosaur of North America during the Cretaceous period that grew up to 30 feet long. This hadrosaur built nests, indicating parental care. Its name means “Good Mother Lizard.”

MASTODON - An extinct mammal, resembling a modern elephant that lived during the late Tertiary and Pleistocene periods.

MESOZOIC - An era of geologic time following the Paleozoic and preceding the Cenozoic. It includes the Triassic, Jurassic, and Cretaceous periods.

MOSASAURS - Aquatic lizards of the late Cretaceous, some of which grew to nearly 30 feet in length.

ORNITHISCHIA - A group of dinosaurs with “bird-like” hips. All were herbivores.

PALEONTOLOGY - The study of fossils.

PALEOZOIC - An era of geologic time following the Pre-Cambrian and preceding the Mesozoic. It includes the Cambrian through Permian periods.

PANGAEA - A single land mass, made up of all the current continents, which began to split up in the early Cretaceous.

QUADRAPEDAL - An animal that walks on four legs.

PRECAMBRIAN PERIOD - The time in Earth's history that lasted from the formation of the earth, about 4.5 billion years ago until the beginning of the Cambrian Period roughly 590 million years ago.

PROKARYOTE - Organism with cells lacking a well-defined nucleus. Bacteria and archaea are prokaryotes.

PTEROSAURS - Flying reptiles, the first vertebrates to take to the air.

SAURISCHIA - A group of dinosaurs with "lizard-like" hips, including both herbivores and carnivores.

STEGOSAURUS - A dinosaur of North America during the Jurassic period that grew up to 30 feet long and had plates along its back.

STRATUM - A bed or layer of sedimentary rock having approximately the same composition throughout. (plural STRATA)

TRIASSIC PERIOD - The time in Earth's history from 248-190 million years ago. It was named by a mining engineer in Germany who noticed that rocks of this period were of three distinct types.

TRICERATOPS - A dinosaur of North America during the late Cretaceous with a horn on its nose and one above each eye.

TRILOBITE - An extinct marine arthropod having a flattened, segmented body covered by a hard exoskeleton on its back.

TYRANNOSAURUS - The largest and most ferocious of the flesh-eating dinosaurs. Its remains have been found in rocks in North America and Asia dating to the Cretaceous period. It stood about 15 feet tall and weighed up to 7 tons.

VERTEBRATE - Animal with a backbone, including all fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals.