



## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

# Study: Octopus Ancestors Lived Before Dinosaurs

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Scientists say a **fossil** of the oldest known octopus ancestor suggests that the animal lived before the dinosaurs.

The researchers have estimated the fossil is about 330 million years old. It was discovered in what is now the western American state of Montana.

The fossil was donated to Canada's Royal Ontario Museum in 1988. But it was not considered an important find for many years as scientists studied other fossils found at the same site.

But then some researchers discovered that the fossil showed the many **limbs** of an animal and began to study it further.

The 12-centimeter fossil has 10 limbs, each with two rows of **suckers**. Modern octopuses have eight limbs. The scientists say the ancient creature likely lived in **shallow** ocean areas.

The researchers say the fossil suggests that octopuses lived millions of years earlier than scientists believed. This means that the animals developed before the dinosaurs.

The team recently reported its findings in the publication *Nature Communications*.

"It's very rare to find soft tissue fossils, except in a few places," Mike Vecchione told The Associated Press. He is a zoologist with the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History who was not involved in the study. "This is a very exciting finding. It pushes back the ancestry much farther than previously known," Vecchione said.

Christopher Whalen is a scientist with the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. He was a co-writer of the study. He told the AP the well-**preserved** fossil showed evidence that the ancient octopus had the ability to release a dark liquid to help it hide from **predators**, just like modern octopuses.

The creature, known as a vampyropod, was likely the ancestor of both modern octopuses and vampire squid, the researchers said. Such creatures are more similar to an octopus than a squid.

The team said until now, the “oldest known **definitive**” vampyropod was believed to have lived around 240 million years ago.

The scientists named the fossil *Syllipsimopodi bideni*, after American President Joe Biden. They said they decided on the name to show respect for Biden’s science and research policies.

I’m Bryan Lynn.

*The Associated Press reported this story. Bryan Lynn adapted the report for VOA Learning English.*

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## Words in This Story

**fossil** – *n.* part of an animal or plant that lived a long time ago that has been preserved in rock

**limb** – *n.* the arm or leg of a person or animal

**sucker** – *n.* an organ that some animals use to hold or stick to something

**shallow** – *adj.* not deep

**preserve** – *v.* keep something the same or prevent it from being damaged or destroyed

**predator** – *n.* an animal that hunts and kills other animals for food

**definitive** – *adj.* certain and not likely to change

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