



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Scientists in Peru Discover a Huge Whale Ancestor

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Scientists in Peru have discovered the **skull** of an ancestor of modern-day whales.

The **fossilized** skull is believed to be about 36 million years old. Researchers say the discovery suggests that the animal lived in an ocean that once covered Peru's southern Ocucaje desert.

The scientists reported the skull was in good condition when dug up last year. It has a series of long, pointy teeth, said Rodolfo Salas, chief of paleontology at Peru's National University of San Marcos. Salas spoke to reporters about the discovery.

Scientists say the ancient **mammal** was a basilosaurus, which belongs to the cetacean family. This is the same family that includes modern water creatures like whales, dolphins and porpoises.

The name basilosaurus means "king lizard" and the animal is thought to have been about 12 meters long. But it was not a reptile although its long body might have moved like a large snake, the researchers said.

Salas called the animal "a **marine** monster" that may belong to a new **species** of basilosaurus. "When it was searching for its food, it surely did a lot of damage," he added.

The skull is already being shown at the university's museum.

Scientists believe the first cetaceans **evolved** from mammals that lived on land about 55 million years ago. Salas explained that when the ancient basilosaurus died out, its skull likely sank to the bottom of the ocean, where it was quickly buried and remained.

"Back during this age, the conditions for fossilization were very good in Ocucaje," Salas said.

I'm Bryan Lynn.

Reuters reported this story. Bryan Lynn adapted the report for VOA Learning English.

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Words in This Story

skull – *n.* the part of the head, made of bone, that protects the brain

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

mammal – *v.* a kind of animal that feeds milk to its young and that usually has hair or fur covering most of its skin

marine – *adj.* found in or relating to the sea

species – *n.* a group of animals or plants that are similar and can produce young animals or plants

evolve – *v.* to develop or make something develop over time
