



AS IT IS

Possible 'Earliest Animal Predator' Named for British Naturalist

July 28, 2022

A **fossil** of a 560-million-year-old creature has been named after a famous British naturalist and broadcaster.

Researchers say *auroralumina attenboroughii* may have been the first animal **predator**, or hunter.

The creature is named after 96-year-old David Attenborough who has also written many books about the natural world. He reportedly said he was “truly delighted” with the honor.

The first part of the name, *auroralumina*, means dawn **lantern** in the Latin language.

Phil Wilby studies ancient life at the British Geological Survey. He told the Associated Press it is believed that “...modern animal groups like jellyfish appeared 540 million years ago in the Cambrian explosion.”

“But this predator,” he said, “predates that by 20 million years.”

Scientists call the period between about 541 million to 530 million years ago, the Cambrian explosion. During that time, many kinds of animals and plants developed. Also during that period, creatures with hard body parts such as shells made of calcium carbonate appeared.

Wilby said it was “massively exciting” to know that the fossil was one of possibly many that can help us understand “when complex life began on Earth.”

A paleontologist studies ancient life mostly through its mineralized remains, which are known as fossils.

The fossil of the newly named creature was found in Charnwood Forest near Leicester in central England. That area is where Attenborough used to go fossil hunting.

Scientists say *auroralumina attenboroughii* might be the earliest creature known to have a form of **skeleton**. They said it is related to the animal group that includes corals, jellyfish, and anemones.

Frankie Dunn is a researcher at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History. She said the fossil is very different from other fossils found in Charnwood Forest and around the world.

Dunn said, unlike most other fossils from the Cambrian period, “this one clearly has a skeleton, with densely-packed **tentacles** that would have waved around in the water capturing passing food, much like corals and sea anemones do today.”

I'm Anna Matteo.

The Associated Press reported on this from London. Anna Matteo adapted this story for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

fossil -n. the remains of ancient life forms that have mineralized and turned to stone

predator -n. an animal that lives by killing and eating other animals

lantern -n. a light that is usually covered by glass and can be carried around

skeleton -n. the structure of bones (or similar substance) that supports the body of an animal

tentacle -n. a long, moveable arm of soft-bodied animals like the octopus

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