中国学者联合发表 Nature 进化文章

Chinese scholars jointly published Nature evolution articles

来自北京自然博物馆,美国芝加哥大学的研究人员发表了题为"New evidence for mammaliaform ear evolution and feeding adaptation in a Jurassic ecosystem"的文章,发现了迄今为止最原始的滑翔哺乳动物化石,比现存最早的滑翔类哺乳动物化石早了 1.1 亿年。



北京自然博物馆孟庆金研究员

【Nature 系列】这两篇相关研究成果公布在北京时间 8 月 17 日的 Nature 杂志上,其中一篇文章的通讯作者分别为北京自然博物馆的孟庆金研究员和美国芝加哥大学罗哲西教授。此前罗哲西教授和孟庆金研究员也曾合作发现了迄今为止发现的人类最古老的"曾祖母"——中华侏罗兽。

在地球上,鸟类并不是唯一会飞翔的物种,会飞的哺乳动物其实也很多,共有 60 多种。蝙蝠这种具有与鸟类同样强大飞行能力的哺乳动物是特例,其他哺乳动物的"飞行"更像是滑翔。例如,一种松鼠能从一棵树飞到另一棵树上,而飞鼯猴能平均滑翔飞出约 30 米的距离。

2014 年,这一研究组成员在辽宁省建昌县和河北省青龙县发现化石标本。经过 **3** 年研究,他们确认这些标本属于两种最原始的、具有皮翼的滑翔哺乳型动物化石,它们被埋在距今约 **1.6** 亿年的晚侏罗世地层中。目前这一化石标本保存在北京自然博物馆。



似叉骨祖翼兽生态复原图

研究人员将新发现的滑翔动物命名为似叉骨祖翼兽和双钵翔齿兽。它们属于哺乳型动物基干支系,也是现代哺乳动物的祖先类群,均为贼兽类的新属种。

据介绍,这两种哺乳动物个头不大。似叉骨祖翼兽体重约 120 克到 170 克,在中生代哺乳动物中属中等体型;双钵翔齿兽为中生代小哺乳动物体型,体重约 35 克到 55 克。

为何判断它们属于滑翔动物呢?孟庆金说,新化石的锁骨与间锁骨已愈合,形成 Y 字形,与鸟的叉骨形状相似,并且锁骨与肩胛骨关节有很大的活动性,其四肢骨骼比例也符合滑翔功能的形态特征,能满足攀爬和滑翔需求。

这项发现说明,这类"可以飞翔"的哺乳动物,它们的祖先最早主要生活在树上,最终飞向天空,跨越了由地面栖息向空中运动的重要演化过渡。



北京自然博物馆 孟庆金 8月17日 doi:10.1038/nature23483 Stem mammaliaforms are forerunners to modern mammals, and they achieved considerable ecomorphological diversity in their own right. Recent discoveries suggest that eleutherodontids, a subclade of Haramiyida, were more species-rich during the Jurassic period in Asia than previously recognized. Here we report a new Jurassic eleutherodontid mammaliaform with an unusual mosaic of highly specialized characteristics, and the results of phylogenetic analyses that support the hypothesis that haramiyidans are stem mammaliaforms. The new fossil shows fossilized skin membranes that are interpreted to be for gliding and a mandibular middle ear with a unique character combination previously unknown in mammaliaforms. Incisor replacement is prolonged until well after molars are fully erupted, a timing pattern unique to most other mammaliaforms. In situ molar occlusion and a functional analysis reveal a new mode of dental occlusion: dual mortar-pestle occlusion of opposing upper and lower molars, probably for dual crushing and grinding. This suggests that eleutherodontids are herbivorous, and probably specialized for granivory or feeding on soft plant tissues. The inferred dietary adaptation of eleutherodontid gliders represents a remarkable evolutionary convergence with herbivorous gliders in Theria. These Jurassic fossils represent volant, herbivorous stem mammaliaforms associated with pre-angiosperm plants that appear long before the later, iterative associations between angiosperm plants and volant herbivores in various therian clades.