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Pterodactyl is the common term for the winged reptiles properly called pterosaurs, which belong to the taxonomic order Pterosauria. Scientists typically avoid using the term and concentrate on individual genera, such as Pterodactylus and Pteranodon. There are at least 130 valid pterosaur genera, according to David Hone, a palaeontologist at Queen Mary University of London. They were widespread and lived in numerous locations across the globe, from China to Germany to the Americas.Pterosaurs first appeared in the late Triassic Period and roamed the skies until the end of the Cretaceous period (228 million to 66 million years ago), according to the journal Zitteliana. Pterosaurs lived among the dinosaurs and became extinct around the same time but they were pterosaurs. Rather pterosaurs were flying reptiles. You may like Modern birds didn't descend from birds' ancestors were small, feathered, terrestrial dinosaurs. The first pterosaur discovered was Pterodactylus, identified in 1784 by Italian scientist Cosimo Collini, who thought he had discovered a marine creature that used its wings as paddles, according to the Geological Society of London.A French naturalist, Georges Cuvier, proposed that the creatures could fly in 1801, and then later coined the term "Pterodactylus" in 1809 after the discovery of a fossil skeleton in Bavaria, Germany. This was the term used until scientists realized they were finding different genera of flying reptiles. However, "pterodactyl" stuck as the popular term.A fossil specimen of Pterodactylus antiquus. (Image credit: teven U. Vidovic/David M. Martill/Matthew Martyniuk/CC BY 3.0)Pterodactylus comes from the Greek word pterodaktulos, meaning "winged finger," which is an apt description of its flying apparatus. The primary component of the wings of Pterodactylus and other pterosaurs were made up of a skin and muscle membrane that stretched from the animals' highly elongated fourth fingers of the hands to the hind limbs, according to the American Museum of Natural History.The reptiles also had membranes running between the shoulders and wrists (possibly incorporating the first three fingers of the hands), and some groups of pterosaurs had a third membrane between their legs, which may have connected to or incorporated a tail.Early research suggested pterosaurs were cold-blooded animals that were more suited to gliding than active flying. However, scientists later discovered that some pterosaurs, including Sordes pilosus and Jeholopterus ninchengensis, had furry coats consisting of hairlike filaments called pycnofibers, suggesting they were warm-blooded and generated their own body heat, according to the Chinese Science Bulletin.What's more, a study published in the journal PLOS One suggested pterosaurs had powerful flight muscles, which they could use to walk as quadrupeds (on all fours) like vampire bats and vault into the air. Once airborne, the largest pterosaurs (Quetzalcoatlus northropi) could reach speeds of over 67 mph (108 kph) for a few minutes and then glide at cruising speeds of about 56 mph (90 kph), the study found.Sizes of pterosaursThe smallest pterosaur, called Nemicolopterus crypticus, was discovered in the western part of China's Liaoning Province. It had a wingspan of only 10 inches (25 centimeters), according to a description of the animal, published in the Journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. The remains of this flying reptile revealed that over half of the length of its wing was occupied by a long finger, which anchored the membrane that made up the wing to the body, according to the Carnegie Museum of Natural History.Pterodactylus antiquus (the only known species of the genus) was also a comparatively small pterosaur, with an estimated adult wingspan of about 3.5 feet (1.06 meters), according to the journal Paläontologische Zeitschrift. There was some confusion early on as to the size of the Pterodactylus, because some of the specimens turned out to be juveniles rather than adults.The largest species that would have soared during the Jurassic period 201.3 million to 145 million years ago was the Dearc sgiathanach. The remains of this pterosaur were found in Scotland's Isle of Skye an revela the reptile had a wingspan of more than 8 feet (2.5 meters), according to the journal Current Biology.Pteranodon, discovered in 1876 by Othniel C. Marsh, was much bigger. It had a wingspan that ranged from 9 to 20 feet (2.7 to 6 m), according to Current Research in Earth Sciences, a peer-reviewed bulletin of the Kansas Geological Survey. It's thought that Pteranodon spent its time soaring over open ocean in the hunt for fish. These pterosaurs would have been rarely seen on land and potentially spent their time on the water when not in the air, according to the American Museum of natural History. This means that their wings would have had to generate enormous amounts of force to lift them from the water back into the sky.Another large pterosaur was Coloborhynchus capito, which had a wingspan of about 23 feet (7 m). This discovery, described in the journal Cretaceous Research, followed an examination of a fossil that had been in the Natural History Museum of London since 1894.One of the largest pterosaurs ever believed to have lived was Quetzalcoatlus northropi, whose wingspan reached 36 feet (11 m), according to the journal PLOS One.An artist's illustration of Quetzalcoatlus northropi. (Image credit: Mark Witton/Darren Naish/CC BY 3.0)Physical characteristicsThe large number of different types of pterosaurs (the scientific characteristics of the wings) varied widely depending on the animal, published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. The remains of this flying reptile, which ruled the Late Cretaceous skies and included Quetzalcoatlus northropi, were toothless, according to the journal ZooKeys.A distinguishing feature of pterosaurs was the crest on their heads. Though it was initially thought that pterosaurs had no crests, it's now known that crests were widespread across pterosaur genera and came in various forms.For instance, some pterosaurs had big, bony crests, while other crests were fleshy with no underlying bone. Some pterosaurs even appear to have had a saillike crest made up of a membrane sheet connecting two large bones on the head. "We now know that pterosaur crests had all kinds of [bone and flesh] combinations," Hone told Live Science.Over the years, scientists have proposed many possible purposes for these crests, including that they were used for heat regulation or to serve as rudders during flight. "But almost all of the hypotheses have failed the most basic tests," Hone said, adding that models show the crests aren't effective rudders and many small pterosaurs have crests even though they wouldn't have needed them to dissipate heat.What seems most likely is that the crests were used for sexual selection. Hone and his colleagues argued in a 2011 study in the journal Lethaia. There are several lines of evidence that support this function of the crests. Hone explained, perhaps most notably that juveniles, which look like miniature versions of adult pterosaurs, don't have crests, suggesting the structures are used for something that is only relevant to adults, such as mating.What did pterosaurs eat?Pterosaurs were carnivores, though some may have occasionally ate fruits, Hone said. What the reptiles ate depended on where they lived: some species spent their days near water, while others were more terrestrial. Terrestrial pterosaurs ate carcasses, baby dinosaurs, lizards, insects and various other animals. "They were probably fairly active hunters of small prey," Hone said. Water-loving pterosaurs ate a variety of marine life, including fish, squid, crab and other shellfish. In 2010, Hone and his colleagues learned more about the lives of marine pterosaurs. With their animals, juveniles dominate the fossil record. Hone said, "It is odd because young animals are generally targeted by predators, preventing them from becoming a part of the fossil record. One hypothesis to explain this strange occurrence is that the juvenile pterosaurs often died by drowning instead of being eaten. To test this, Hone and his colleague Donald Henderson modelled how well could pterosaurs float on water (like ducks). They found that pterosaurs floated well, but they had poor floating postures, in which their heads rested very close to the water, if not on the water. This suggests that aquatic pterosaurs wouldn't spend much time on the water's surface and would launch into the air shortly after diving for food to avoid drowning. However, young pterosaurs that don't yet have strong muscles or are still learning to fly would have more difficulties launching back into the air from a dive, possibly resulting in drowning. Hone said.Amongst the toothed species of pterosaur, researchers have discovered wear patterns on fossilised teeth that help to reveal their diets, according to Nature. For example, dimorphodon a roughly 3 feet (1 meter) long pterosaur had previously believed to be a fishing reptile, until dental evidence revealed wear patterns that would have been produced by eating insects and land vertebrates rather than marine life.Additional resourcesFor more information about pterosaurs check out Pterosaurs: Natural History, Evolution, Anatomy, by Mark P. Witton. Age of Pterosaurs by Yang Yang and Dinosaurs: New Visions of a Lost World by Michael J. Benton.BibliographyNatalia Jagielska and Stephen L. Brusatte, Pterosaurs, Volume 31, Current biology, August 2021, M. 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Scientists are still trying to figure out how this amazing dinosaur lived and died.Ornithocheirus was a flying dinosaur that lived during the Cretaceous period. It was a pterosaur, meaning that it had wings made of skin and muscle, supported by a network of bones. Ornithocheirus was one of the largest flying animals of all time, with some specimens measuring more than 30 feet from wingtip to wingtip. It is thought to have fed on fish, which it scooped up from the waters surface with its long beak.Ornithocheirus is perhaps best known for its distinctive crest, which ran along the top of its head and may have served to attract mates or intimidate rivals. Today, this fascinating creature is revered by dinosaur enthusiasts around the world.Rhamphorhynchus was a small, flying dinosaur that lived during the Late Jurassic period. Unlike its modern-day cousins, the Rhamphorhynchus had a long tail that it used for balance while in flight. It also had a set of large wings that it could use to glide through the air.While it was not as fast or as agile as some of the other flying dinosaurs, the Rhamphorhynchus was still able to avoid predators and catch its prey. Today, the Rhamphorhynchus is one of the best-known flying dinosaurs, thanks in part to its unique appearance.Anurognathus was a small, winged dinosaur that lived during the Late Jurassic period. Although it was only about the size of a crow, Anurognathus was a fierce predator, armed with sharp teeth and powerful claws. It is thought that Anurognathus hunted in packs, using its agility and claws to catch small prey in midair.Fossils of Anurognathus have been found in Germany, China, and North America, which suggests that this creature was widespread during its time. Despite its fearsome appearance, Anurognathus ultimately went extinct along with the other dinosaurs during the Cretaceous-Tertiary mass extinction event. Today, this flying reptile is one of the most popular dinosaurs among kids and adults alike.Caiuajara dobruskii was a flying dinosaur that lived during the Late Cretaceous period. It was a small creature, with a wingspan of only about 2.5 feet. Despite its size, it was a skilled flyer, able to navigate through dense forests and even make tight turns. It is believed that Caiuajara dobruskii fed on small mammals and insects.The discovery of this creature has shed new light on the evolution of flight in dinosaurs. Scientists now believe that there may have been multiple lineages of flying dinosaurs, each with its own unique set of adaptations. Caiuajara dobruskii is just one example of the many fascinating creatures that roamed the Earth during the Age of Dinosaurs.Jeholopterus was a flying dinosaur that lived during the Early Cretaceous period, about 130 million years ago. It was a small creature, only about the size of a modern-day pigeon. Nevertheless, it was an excellent flyer, thanks to its long wings and lightweight body. Scientists believe that Jeholopterus may have used its wings to glide from tree to tree or to catch insects in midair. In any case, its ability to fly gave it a significant advantage over other dinosaurs. Today, Jeholopterus is one of the most well-known flying dinosaurs, and its fossils are some of the most sought-after by collectors and museums.Its hard to imagine, but there was once a time when creatures the size of passenger jets roamed the earth. These massive beasts were the dinosaurs, and among them was a creature known as Darwinopterus. Although it was considerably smaller than some of its relatives, Darwinopterus was unique in that it had wings.This made it one of the only flying dinosaurs, and it is thought that it used its aerial abilities to hunt for prey. Although it has been many years since these creatures walked (or flew) the earth, their legacy lives on in the popular culture. Films such as Jurassic Park have brought dinosaurs back to life for a new generation, and who knows? Maybe one day we'll even be able to bring back Darwinopterus itself.Cathayornis was a flying dinosaur that lived during the Early Cretaceous period. The first fossil of this species was discovered in China, hence its name. Cathayornis was a relatively small dinosaur, with an estimated wingspan of 3-4 meters. It had long legs and arms, and its feathers were arranged in a way that would have allowed it to glide rather than fly.It is believed that Cathayornis may have been an important source of food for other dinosaurs. The fossil record for this species is relatively sparse, but scientists continue to studyCathayornis in hopes of learning more about the lives of these fascinating creatures.While most people think of dinosaurs as massive, land-dwelling creatures, the truth is that some dinosaurs could fly. One of the largest flying dinosaurs was Pelagornis sandersi, which lived during the Late Miocene period. This giant bird had a wingspan of up to 24 feet, making it one of the largest flying animals of all time.The Pelagornis sandersi had two sets of wings, one primary and one secondary. The primary feathers were long and narrow, while the secondary feathers were shorter and wider. This unique wing structure allowed the Pelagornis sandersi to glide for long distances and to make sharp turns in mid-air.While the exact purpose of this wing structure is not known, it is believed that it helped the Pelagornis sandersi to catch prey or to escape predators. Today, the Pelagornis sandersi is extinct, but its remains provide a fascinating glimpse into the world of flying dinosaurs.I founded Dinosaur Universe to offer dinosaur enthusiasts a dedicated space where they can express their interest in the magnificent creatures that inhabited our planet millions of years ago. I hope you enjoyed this blog post and that it allowed you to learn more about this fascinating universe.

Flying dinosaur types and names. Dinosaur flying. Different kind of flying dinosaurs. Different types of dinosaurs for toddlers. Types of flying dinosaurs.

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