

Here's One of the Biggest Dinosaur Discoveries of the Year

Esquire **Sammy Nickalls**
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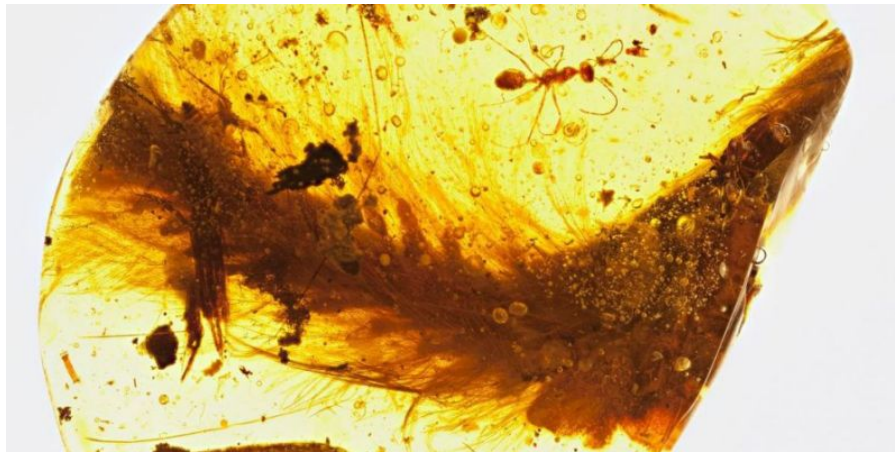


Photo credit: R. C. McKellar, Royal Saskatchewan Museum

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Amber is an archaeologist's best friend.

National Geographic reports that a fully intact tail of a 99-million-year-old dinosaur was found preserved in amber, according to a report published Thursday in *Current Biology*. We're talking a tail with bones, soft tissue, and even feathers that has been preserved for *millions and millions of years*.

The research was led by paleontologist Lida Xing of the China University of Geosciences and was funded partially by the National Geographic Society's Expeditions Council. *National Geographic* reports that this is the very first time scientists were able to "clearly associate well-preserved feathers with a dinosaur," and this particular sample-which is approximately the size of an apricot-gives scientists a "better understanding of the evolution and structure of dinosaur feathers."

The tail itself is about 1.4 inches and covered in "delicate feathers." Though the tail sample itself had eight vertebrae, it looks as though it's from the middle or end of a long tail that may have had over 25 vertebrae. Researchers think the tail belonged to a juvenile coelurosaur, which is part of a group of dinosaurs that includes tyrannosaurs and modern birds.

However, that said, researchers note that if the entire tail was covered in the same

kind of feathers found in the sample, the dinosaur "would likely have been incapable of flight" as the feathers may have functioned to signal or regulate temperature.

A study of the chemistry of the sample showed that ferrous iron was present, which was a decomposition product from the blood hemoglobin once in the dinosaur's soft tissue. "The fact that [the iron] is still present gives us a lot of hope for future analysis, to obtain other chemical information on things like pigmentation or even to identify parts of the original keratin," McKellar told *National Geographic*. "Maybe not for this particular specimen, but for other [samples] down the road...Maybe we can find a complete dinosaur."

(H/T [National Geographic](#))

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