

Q: What was the smallest dinosaur?

A: Since 2003 the 41 centimetre-long *Microraptor zhaoianus* has been considered the smallest dinosaur. But recent discoveries on two fronts have disqualified it from that title. One is that the larger *Microraptor* species, *M. gui*, seems to be the adult form of *M. zhaoianus* – apparently the type specimen was a juvenile, and would have grown almost twice as large as an adult. The other is the discovery of several other, new dinosaur species that are even smaller than *Microraptor*.

From the Qiatou formation of Northeastern China comes *Jinfengopteryx*, a half-metre long sickle-clawed omnivore that massed less than half a kilo. It had bird-like feathers on its tail. At 45 centimetres in length, *Mei* from the Yixian formation of Liaoning was slightly smaller. The type specimen was found curled up with its arms folded and its head tucked over its back like a sleeping bird, hence the name *Mei*, which is the Chinese word for ‘sleeping.’ Smaller still was *Anchiornis* from the Tiaojishan formation of Northeastern China. The splendid preservation of this 40 centimetre long, quarter-kilo creature shows that it had feathers on its arms and legs and a fuzzy crest on top of its head.

But the smallest known dinosaur – as well as one of the weirdest – seems to be *Epidexipteryx* from the Daohugou formation of Northern China. This buck-toothed tree climber had a very short bony tail and long arms with large claws. Like the other Teensy-Saurs it was covered with feathers, including four very long, narrow feathers that grew from its tail. (Indeed, one study suggested that *Epidexipteryx* was actually a very primitive bird). *Epidexipteryx* was only 30 centimetres long and had a live mass of only 220 grams – even as an adult, it wasn’t any larger than a red squirrel.

