

Animal Evolution

All life on Earth can trace its ancestry back to a handful of living organisms. Back then, they were single-celled microscopic things that looked nothing like an animal you would see today. However, some of the familiar traits that we recognise in modern animals (and indeed modern humans) appeared much earlier than you might think.

Somewhere around 550 million years ago, a creature crawled across the ocean bed before dying suddenly. The trail that it left and its fossilised body now live in a Chinese research institute (they were found in China), but it is the earliest known example of some revolutionary adaptations.

Yilingia spiciformis, as it is known, is the first example of a creature with a distinct front and back end. It is the earliest creature known to have a left side that mirrored its right. These may not seem like big things, but all living animals today follow the same pattern. Imagine a lion without a clear front and back. You'd never know which way to run!

In the same area and from roughly the same time, scientists have found tracks that indicate a small sea creature had tiny legs - the first animal to have them.

Vocabulary

Which word in the first paragraph means "a small amount"?

What is a "trait"?

Infer

Why might things like a symmetrical body not "seem like a big thing"?

Retrieve

How long ago did Yilingia spiciformis live?

Where were the fossils found?

Summarise

Why were the fossils so important?