

Fossils are ancient relics of bones from millions of years ago. They aren't actually bones any more; instead, they are a type of rock which has replaced the thing that was left behind.

When an ancient animal or plant died, if they fell to the ground, then there was a chance they could be fossilised. Their body had to be covered by sediment (mud, sand etc.) quickly so that other animals didn't eat them and scatter their remains. Over tens of thousands of years, more sediment piled on top, creating enormous pressures.

This mixture of pressure and time, forced minerals from the soil to enter the bones and start to convert the bone into a fossil. If the body wasn't covered quickly, then even the bones would rot down over time. Fewer than 0.1% of all dead animals would have become fossils, and most of those would have been destroyed as the Earth's crust moved around over the millennia.

Soft material such as skin and flesh would rot before it could be fossilised, but the imprint of feathers and leaves is often preserved. Tree sap sometimes flowed over soft-bodied insects such as flies and worms, trapping them in amber for millions of years.

Vocabulary

Which word describes something left over from an earlier time in history?

Which word means "move around a lot"?

Retrieve

What percentage of living things have a chance of becoming a fossil?

What doesn't survive as a fossil?

Infer

Why are there likely to be very few human fossils?