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MEDIA RELEASE

Fossil fishes leave palaeontologists reeling

The 100 million year old fossils of small and gigantic fishes have been found by palaeontologists on an Outback property – revealing new insights into creatures from Australia’s ancient inland sea.

The exciting discoveries were made on Proa Redclaw Farm, near Julia Creek, QLD in July. Local landowners Duncan and Judy Fysh invited representatives from Kronosaurus Korner in Richmond, QLD and students from RMIT University, VIC to search for fossils on their property.

“We were out in the paddock when I heard a terrific scream - I thought that someone had been bitten by a snake. It turned out to be an excited palaeontologist instead,” remarked Mr Fysh.

“I was turning over pieces of mudstone, searching for bone. Much to my surprise, the underside of one of these rocks contained the huge eye socket of a fish called *Cooyoo* – it was almost like it was staring up at me,” recalled Dr Timothy Holland, Curator of Kronosaurus Korner.

The significant new find showed that *Cooyoo* had far larger teeth than previously thought, with prior reconstructions depicting small, comb-like teeth in the upper jaw. The two centimetre long pointed teeth were suited for gripping struggling prey, including other fishes from the inland sea.

“*Cooyoo* looked like the tarpon from hell, with a large underbite giving it an exaggerated cartoonish appearance. It stretched over three metres in length and had a powerful tail enabling rapid movement. Its only threats were large marine reptiles and sharks,” explained Dr Holland.

Further searching at the site revealed another startling find – the skeletons of over 20 diminutive fossil fishes inside the shell of a clam. The skeletons, each measuring three to four centimetres in length, were discovered by Paul Ter of RMIT University.

“This is the best preserved example of smaller fish from Australia’s Cretaceous inland sea. We usually deal with jumbled or isolated bones from such creatures, not entire skeletons. It’s possible that the associated clam shell may have protected the remains of these fish from scavengers or currents that would have otherwise disarticulated their bones,” stated Dr Holland.

“To see tiny articulated skulls, strings of vertebrae and fins is amazing. This find will hopefully allow a detailed study of these previously undescribed extinct forms.”

The specimens went on display today at Kronosaurus Korner, Richmond, QLD. Kronosaurus Korner is Australia’s Premier Marine Fossil Museum, showcasing over a thousand well-preserved fossils from Australia’s Cretaceous inland sea.

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