CHINA

Scientists identify duck-billed dinosaur

Scientists have confirmed that a set of skeletal fossils discovered in southern China belonged to duck-billed dinosaurs from over 70 million years ago, expanding the region's fossil record of these large, toothy creatures that likely migrated from North America.

The bones were found in May 2009 by a Chinese amateur fossil hunter at a construction site in Sihui, Guangdong province, and he donated them to a local museum.

After cleaning and restoration in 2020, researchers identified the fossilized skeleton comprising dorsal and caudal vertebrae, a humerus, ilium, femur and tibia. They believe the fossils belong to the tribe *Lambeosaurini*, a subfamily of plant-eating *Hadrosauroidea* dinosaurs that lived during the Cretaceous period.

The study, led by paleontologists from China and Canada, was published in the journal Historical Biology in late January.

According to the research team, *Hadrosauroidea* is renowned for its distinctive duck-billed mouth structure. These dinosaurs had thousands of teeth well arranged within their jaws, enabling them to exhibit strong chewing efficiency and viability.

First author Wang Donghao, a doctoral student from the China University of Geosciences (Beijing), noted that the research team had identified long and narrow neural spines on the fossil specimen, which is an extremely rare feature. However, the fossils are mainly fragmentary bones and were not well-preserved, lacking substantial biological information about the dinosaur's cranial structure.

The researchers estimated that the creatures were not yet fully grown, measuring about 8 meters in length.

They identified them as a more derived clade of *Lambeosaurini* dinosaurs that migrated from North America back to Asia via the Bering Strait, as their tall, narrow neural spines are a common trait among North American dinosaurs.

The fossilized bones are the first record of *Lambeosaurini* in South China.

"They represent the only evidence suggesting a potential migration of North American dinosaurs to the region in Late Cretaceous," co-author Xing Lida, a paleontologist from the university, told Xinhua on Monday, noting that the study will help people understand the ecological conditions across various regions before the mass extinction during the Late Cretaceous period.

XINHUA



Restoration drawing of a *Lambeosaurini* dinosaur based on its fossils discovered in Sihui, Guangdong province. HAN ZHIXIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Fair for storytelling



Scores of people gather in Majie village to enjoy storytelling performances in Pingdingshan, Henan province, on Monday. Nearly 2,000 artists from across the country convened for the Majie Quyi fair, which has been celebrated for over 700 years. *Quyi* is a collection of storytelling, cross-talk, ballad singing and other spoken art forms. ZHANG CONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Marriage rate tumbles despite efforts

By CHENG SI
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China recorded a more than 20 percent drop in marriage registrations last year, despite a slight rebound in the previous year, following a decadelong decline. Experts say the downward trend may be irreversible and are calling for more supportive policies to boost young people's confidence in marriage.

Figures recently released by the Ministry of Civil Affairs show that about 6.1 million marriages were registered in 2024, down 20.5 percent from 7.68 million in 2023. Meanwhile, the number of divorces rose 1.1 percent year-on-year to 2.62 million.

Marriage registrations in China have steadily declined since 2014, reaching 6.84 million in 2022 before a modest increase in 2023.

Zhao Xiaolin, 31, an after-sales service engineer in Beijing, said finding a partner for marriage has become increasingly difficult, especially in major cities like Beijing and Shanghai.

"Women here have strong careers and good incomes, often on par with men. Many are unwilling to take on the potential risks of marriage," Zhao said.

He recalled dating a woman in July last year who was reluctant to discuss marriage, fearing it could hurt her career advancement. He also cited the traditional expectation of owning a home before marriage as a major financial burden.

Lin Shiyi, a 28-year-old from Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, said her parents have pressured her to marry, but she refuses to settle.

"It takes courage to step into marriage. I won't marry someone mediocre just because of family pressure," she said.

Experts say shifting outlook toward marriage, an unbalanced sex ratio and the trend of delaying first marriages are key factors driving the decline in registrations. They also warn that fewer marriages will affect China's future birthrate.

According to the country's seventh population census in 2020, China had 723.34 million men and 688.44 million women. The average age of people entering their first marriage was 28.67 in 2020, an increase of 3.78 years from 2010.

"The financial burden of high housing prices, education costs and a competitive job market have made young people uncertain about their future, heightening fears about marriage and childbirth," said Jiang Quanbao, a professor at the Institute for Population and Development Studies at Xi'an Jiaotong University in Shaanxi province.

Jiang said many young people, especially women, delay marriage in pursuit of higher education and financial independence.

"Women may have greater concerns, both physical and psychological, about marriage. They still shoulder more responsibility for housework and child care," he said, adding that rising divorce rates have also discouraged singles from committing to marriage.

Jiang noted that China's marriage-age population — typically those between 20 and 40 — is shrinking, making the decline in marriages unlikely to reverse. He urged the government to introduce more housing, education and employment policies to restore confidence in marriage.

According to financial news outlet Yicai, China has about 220 million people born after 1980, 208.5 million born after 1990 and 162.6 million born after 2000, citing official data.

Jiang suggested authorities create a more supportive environment for marriage by promoting family values and improving matchmaking services. He also called for stricter regulation of excessive bride prices and financial support for housing, child care and education to encourage young couples to marry.

China to lift restrictions on foreign capital

New plan to encourage investors paves way for high-level opening-up

By WANG KEJU
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China rolled out a plan on Monday to stabilize foreign investment this year, signaling the country's determination to achieve high-level opening-up in the face of rising global protectionism, analysts said.

The plan, adopted at the State Council executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Qiang, outlined more practical and effective measures to both retain existing and attract new foreign investment because of the vital role that foreign-invested businesses play in terms of job creation, export stability and industrial upgrading.

China will fully implement its commitment to remove all market access restrictions for foreign investors in the manufacturing sector and expand the list of sectors encouraging foreign investment, according to the plan.

The country will encourage foreign enterprises to reinvest their capital within the Chinese market and participate more actively in equity investments. Meanwhile, steps will be taken toward optimizing the rules and regulations governing foreign mergers and acquisitions, as outlined in the plan.

Foreign enterprises will be treated on an equal footing with their Chinese counterparts in government procurement, according to the plan, which also put an emphasis on widening the financing options available to foreign-invested enterprises and strengthening intellectual property protection for them.

China will further open up its services sector, with a particular focus on accelerating pilot programs in key areas such as telecommunications, healthcare and education, said Li Yongjie, deputy international trade representative of the Ministry of Commerce, at a news conference in mid-January.

The country is committed to aligning itself with high-standard international trade and economic rules while building a network of high-level opening-up platforms such as free trade zones as it aims to enhance its overall business environment, Li said.

A total of 59,080 new foreign-invested firms were established across China last year, an increase of 9.9 percent year-on-year, data from the ministry showed.

These proactive opening-up policies stand in stark contrast with the intensifying investment restrictions tipped by certain economies, and have created a more welcoming and accessible environment for foreign enterprises — particularly small and medium-sized ones — looking to enter the Chinese market, said Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

While the global economy grapples with sluggish demand, the sheer size of China's consumer base, the nation's rising middle class and growing purchasing power have presented a crucial lifeline for foreign enterprises navigating broader economic uncertainties, Zhou added.

Regulations protect minor guests at hotels

By WANG QINGYUN
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Hotels in China reported to police more than 42 million check-ins by minor guests in 2024, the Ministry of Public Security said, adding that authorities have also handled 522,000 "suspicious incidents" involving minors to ensure their safety.

In a news release on Saturday, the ministry said police continued urging hotel operators to comply with special requirements for accommodating minors and held accountable those who have failed to do so.

The regulations, introduced in 2021 under China's Law on the Protection of Minors, require hotels to verify the identities of minors checking in, register their information and report it to police.

Hotels must also record contact details of the minors' parents or guardians, verify the identities of those sharing rooms with them, enhance patrols and visitor management to prevent rights violations, and alert police and guardians if suspicious circumstances arise.

The ministry highlighted five cases where hotels contacted police last year to help protect minors.

In one case, a hotel in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, reported three adults in September who were unable to provide identification for a female infant accompanying them. Police determined the child was being trafficked, rescued the infant and cracked the case through further investigation.

And in June, a hotel in Shanghai's Baoshan district reported two boys who had traveled from outside the city and refused to provide their guardians' contact information. Police learned the boys had run away from home after a fight with their parents. Officers contacted the parents, who picked up their children.

Rescue workers striving to find landslide survivors

By PENG CHAO in Chengdu
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Against the threat of potential landslides, rescuers are working around the clock to search for survivors with cutting-edge equipment while affected residents have been relocated with ample supplies after a landslide hit a mountainous village in Yibin, Sichuan province, on Saturday.

The landslide occurred at around 11:50 am on Saturday in the Jinping village of Junlian county in Yibin, burying 10 residential houses and a production building. It has left one person dead, two injured and 28 missing as of 5 pm on Monday.

The injured have been hospitalized and are both in stable condition. Around 360 residents who were at risk have all been relocated, said the command center of emergency rescue for the landslide.

The temporary shelters for the relocated are not only providing essential living supplies, but are also offering medical services and psychological counseling, the command center said.

Hu Zexiu, who was relocated to a temporary shelter at Junlian County No 2 High School with her husband, said the shelter has provided an abundance of food, including eggs, steamed buns, noodles and various dishes.

"The volunteers gave us three quilts and a cotton coat, which are very warm," she said, pointing to her bed.

Preliminary assessment indicates that the landslide had a vertical drop of 432 meters, unleashing over 100,000 cubic meters of debris downhill and creating a debris accumulation zone stretching 1.2 kilometers.

Rescue forces rushed to the scene immediately after the accident. As of 5 pm on Monday, 710 rescuers, along with over 160 sets of emergency equipment such as excavators, trucks and ambulances, have participated in the rescue mission, according to the command center.

The rescue site has been divided into 11 sections, with rescuers organized into 11 teams to conduct rescue operations in each section. They are also aided by sniffer dogs and life-detection devices.

Cutting-edge equipment, including drones, oblique aerial cameras and the country's latest slope radar, which can penetrate through rain and fog as thick as 2 km, are being used in the rescue operation. Drones help provide illumination at night.

Li Zhuo, head of Yibin's fire and rescue brigade, said the low temperatures and persistent rain, combined with the slippery ground and the risk of secondary landslides, are posing significant challenges to the rescue efforts.

"Nevertheless, as long as there is a glimmer of hope, we will spare no effort," he said, adding that rescuers from his brigade take shifts every three hours, racing against time to find the missing.

Liu Zhengyu, director of Yibin's natural resources and planning bureau, said the city has initiated comprehensive inspections and patrols for potential geological hazards, especially slopes with similar landslide risks, striving to safeguard the lives and property of residents in the mountainous areas.

Hu Yiqian, head of Junlian's militia emergency company, told China Central Television that in case of secondary disasters, the militia kept patrolling and monitoring the disaster site to ensure safety.

Xinhua contributed to this story.



Medical workers assess health conditions of disaster-affected residents at a temporary shelter at Junlian County No 2 High School in Yibin, Sichuan province, on Monday. ZHUANG GEER / FOR CHINA DAILY