



Talk About It

What do we gain from learning about the natural world around us?



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Discovering
Nature's
Secrets

Vocabulary

fossil

stumbled upon

paleontologist

inspected

Amber: Nature's Time Capsule

About 30 million years ago, this tiny scorpion found trouble. It got stuck in some sticky stuff called resin. Over millions of years, that resin grew dryer and harder. Finally it turned into a material called amber. The scorpion remained perfectly preserved in a golden prison.

Amber is nature's time capsule. It forms a tight seal around whatever is trapped inside, protecting it from the effects of aging. Scientists have found insects preserved in amber that come from the time of the dinosaurs.

Several years ago, a scientist discovered an important amber **fossil**: three tiny flowers that were 90 million years old. Found in New Jersey, they are the oldest whole flowers ever seen.

Because amber is beautiful, people value it for reasons other than science. For centuries people have made jewelry and sculpture from amber. To the ancient Etruscans, who lived in what is now Italy, amber was as precious as gold. But not all amber is golden. Some is white, red, or green.

Scorpion and damsel fly trapped in amber (above), and an Etruscan amber carving (below)



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A Dinosaur Named Bambi



Bambiraptor had a long, stiff tail and long arms that could bend at the wrist. It may also have had feathers.

“This big ball of dirt rolled over, and I saw black bones in it,” recalls Wes Linster, describing his astonishing discovery in 1994 at age 14. Linster was digging on a ranch near Choteau, Montana, when he **stumbled upon** the new dinosaur species. His family nicknamed the three-foot-long fossil Bambi because it was so small.

The fossil itself is the skeleton of a baby that lived 75 million years ago. It belongs to a dinosaur family that most scientists believe are the ancestors of birds.

Paleontologist John Ostrom first **inspected** the bones in 1995. “The skeleton is a jewel,” he says. “I think it’s one of the most valuable scientific specimens ever found in North America.”

Louise Hose explores a water-filled cave.

Into the Dark Unknown

Louise Hose is a geologist and a speleologist, or caver. For the past few years, she has gone to Tapijulapa (tah•pee•hoo•LA•pa), Mexico, to map a cave. She and her fellow explorers found that it is full of animals that have adapted to life underground. There are vampire bats, spiders, and colorless fish and crabs in the cave’s streams.

They also discovered something more amazing: colonies of microscopic living creatures that can survive in extreme conditions. Even with poisonous air and with no light, these creatures thrive underground. The living colonies drip down like a runny nose. They contain sulfuric acid, which can burn human skin. A photographer on the expedition named the slimy critters “snottites.”