

Discovered the largest ancient tortoise ever existed on Earth

Fossils of the giant terrestrial tortoise - Stupendemys were first found in the 1970s and are considered to be the largest ancient tortoise ever to exist on Earth, but there are still many mysteries about the animal.

Stupendemys is a prehistoric genus of ancient freshwater turtles. Its fossils were found in northern South America, in rocks dating from central Miocene until the start of Pliocene, about 13 to 5 million years ago.



Ground tortoises (*Stupendemys geographicus*) are the largest known turtles. Based on a tortoise fossils up to 3.3 meters long, the estimated total body length can reach 5 meters (because the neck is also very long) and weighs about 5 tons. Because of the discovery of new fossils, scientists have an opportunity to discover more about this super giant turtle!

The close relative of the ground turtles today is the *Podocnemis expansa* that lives in South America. Their trunk length is about 75 cm to 1 meter and the average weight is 90 kg.



A sample of a terrestrial tortoise fossils (*Stupendemys geographicus*).



Podocnemis expansa is a species of turtle in the Podocnemididae family. This species was first described by Schweigger in 1812. The tortoise was found in the Amazon basin. Adults are usually 1 meter long. The female has a broad flat shell and is larger in size and more numerous than the male turtle.

Marcelo Sánchez, director of the Institute of Paleontology at the University of Zurich in Switzerland, who has studied new fossils found in Colombia and Venezuela in recent years, said: more than 3 meters long with an estimated weight of 1145 kg, more than 100 times more than *Podocnemis expansa* ".

According to new studies, over time, the weight of ground turtles has been significantly reduced, but it remains the largest tortoise ever to exist on Earth.



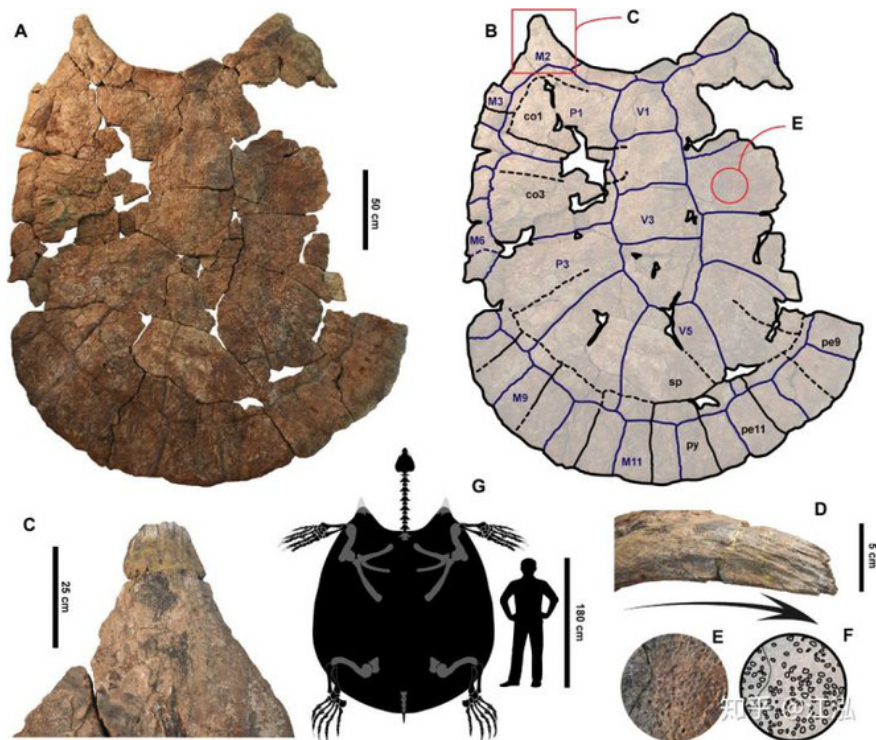
Venezuelan paleontologist Rodolfo Sánchez and a giant ground turtle fossils discovered in Urumac, Venezuela, dated about 8 million years ago.



Compare the size of a giant ground turtle with an adult and today's *Podocnemis expansa*.

Recently, paleontologists have discovered an almost complete fossil specimen of a land turtle. This fossil shows some features that have not been found before, namely the long horn pair.

Not all the giant terrestrial turtles have these long horns, in fact they only exist in males. This pair of horns does not grow on the head, they grow on the front of the body and the sides of the neck and it is considered a prominent feature of the male tortoise.



Pair of horns on the shell of a male tortoise.



Recreate images of huge terrestrial turtles: male (front) and female (rear left).

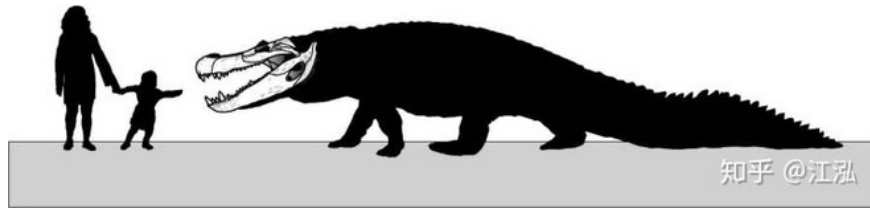
Through analysis and speculation, paleontologists believe that the horns on the shells of terrestrial turtles have a defensive function. Although they are huge in size and extremely hard shell, but in the era when they live, this tortoise still has the natural enemies that Purussaurus crocodile.

According to the bites discovered through the fossilized form of the giant terrestrial tortoise, it is clear that they have been attacked by Purussaurus crocodiles, and the force of the bite from the giant crocodile is entirely possible. disrupting the "solid" layer of the Stupendemys geographicus turtle.

This is similar to the way the black Amazon Caiman crocodile killed *Podocnemis expansa* today.

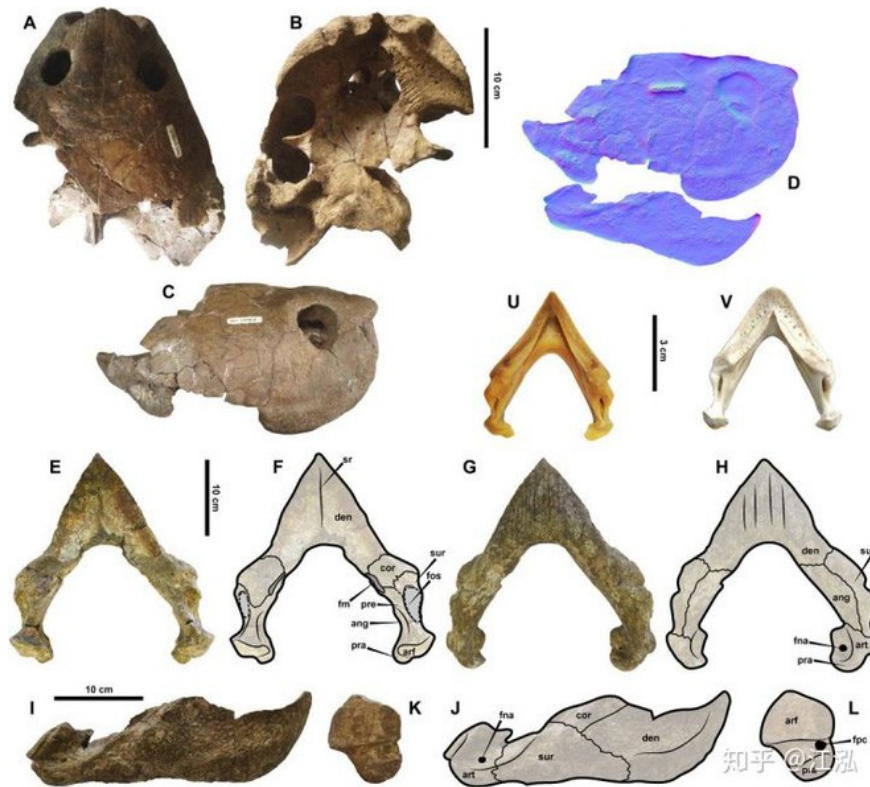


Purussaurus is an extinct genus of giant caiman living in South America during the Miocene era, from Colhuehuapian to Montehermosan in the SALMA classification.

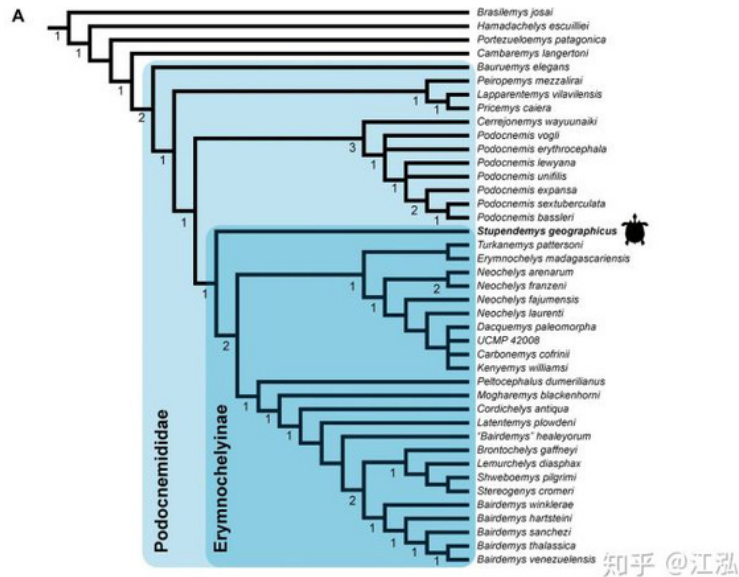


Compare the size of a Purussaurus crocodile to humans.

In addition to discovering turtle shell fossils, archaeologists have also searched for other bone samples that had never been discovered before. Based on the analysis and anatomy of new fossils, paleontologists also identified and proved that this giant tortoise has a relationship with many of today's Amazonian turtles.



Skull and jaw fossils of giant ground turtle.



Taxonomic location of giant ground turtle.

The fossils in this analysis come from Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and other countries. It is found that this area covers almost the entire northern part of South America. The deserted areas today where the giant ground turtle fossils were found were once wetlands and tropical rainforests.



Diagram of the location where fossil turtle found.



Paleontologist, Professor Edwin Cardina and fossils of terrestrial turtles.

Giant ground turtles lived in the central and northern parts of South America 13 to 5 million years ago. Judging from the geological layers where the fossils were found, these giant turtles often live in ponds and lakes in tropical rainforests or in slow-flowing rivers. They spend most of the time in the water and mostly eat plants. The first fossil of this species was found in the 1970s and named after 1976, it is still considered to be the largest tortoise ever discovered by humans.

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