



2023

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Recommended Citation

Hebert, Leo III (2023) "Do Fossil Data Suggest Greater Animal Longevity in the Pre-Flood World?," *Proceedings of the International Conference on Creationism*: Vol. 9, Article 44.

DOI: 10.15385/jpicc.2023.9.1.51

Available at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/icc_proceedings/vol9/iss1/44

DO FOSSIL DATA SUGGEST GREATER ANIMAL LONGEVITY IN THE PRE-FLOOD WORLD?

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ABSTRACT

One of the Bible's most ridiculed claims is its assertion that pre-Flood and immediate post-Flood humans experienced lifespans of hundreds of years. Hence, the ability to partially corroborate the Bible's claim in this regard should be of great interest to creation researchers. Paleontologists have within the last two decades become increasingly interested in using growth rings recorded in fossil forms to make inferences about past growth rates, sizes, and lifespans. Examination of these growth rings suggest that some creatures in the pre-Flood world matured quite slowly compared to similar extant forms. Also, multiple studies have shown that slower development and greater ages at maturity are positively correlated with longevity in extant forms, including terrestrial vertebrates, marine bivalves, at least one species of fish, and even trees. Hence, evidence of slower growth in extinct animal forms could be evidence of greater animal longevity in the past. This seems reasonable, since whatever regulatory systems and physiological responses enabled greater pre-Flood human longevity may have also been active in at least part of the pre-Flood animal kingdom. Hence, some animals may have experienced much greater longevity than their descendants of today, and if so, this is indirect corroboration of the Bible's claim of greater past human longevity.

Unfortunately, these kinds of studies are difficult to perform on many fossil forms, because some of the growth rings that form first in the course of an organism's development are often 'erased' as the animal matures. However, there are other organisms more suited for this kind of study, such as marine bivalves and crocodylians.

In most examples of this phenomenon, the extinct and extant forms have been assigned to different species. But given the tendency of some taxonomists to 'over-split', in many cases these extinct and extant pairings of animals likely represent the same Genesis kind. Moreover, it is possible to compare growth rates between different species using a calculated 'index of growth performance', as long as the two species have similar body shapes.

This oral presentation discusses four lines of preliminary evidence for greater longevity in the pre-Flood animal kingdom. Some 40-50-year-old pre-Flood crocodylians were apparently growing at rates comparable to 20-30-year-old extant crocodylians. Growth bands in Ptychodontid shark vertebrae from upper Cretaceous strata in Spain suggest it was a rapidly-growing "teenage" shark, though it was 30-years old at time of death. Likewise, there is sclerochronological evidence (albeit possibly conflicting) that pre-Flood clams matured more slowly and lived longer than extant counterparts within the same genus and/or species. There is also evidence that the "first" birds took several years to mature, whereas today's birds usually reach maturity in a year or less.

Creation scientists have ably answered many of the arguments of anti-creation skeptics. Given that the extreme longevity of the antediluvian patriarchs is one of the areas remaining where we do not yet have a strong apologetics defense, I appeal to creationist paleontologists, biologists, and statisticians to zealously and rigorously assist in pursuing this line of inquiry. It may be the case that fossils can demonstrate that at least some animals in the pre-Flood world were experiencing much greater longevity than their counterparts of today. If so, this would help to partially corroborate the Bible's claim regarding much greater human longevity in the past.

KEYWORDS

longevity, fossils, paleontology, antediluvian, pre-Flood, growth rates, lifespans

THE AUTHOR

Leo (Jake) Hebert, III earned a B.S. from Lamar University, an M.S. from Texas A&M University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Dallas (all in physics). His Ph.D. work involved cutting-edge research on a possible connection between cosmic rays, solar activity, and weather and climate. He has had a strong interest in creationism since he was a teenager. He is now a research scientist at the Institute for Creation Research in Dallas, TX, where he has been employed since 2011.