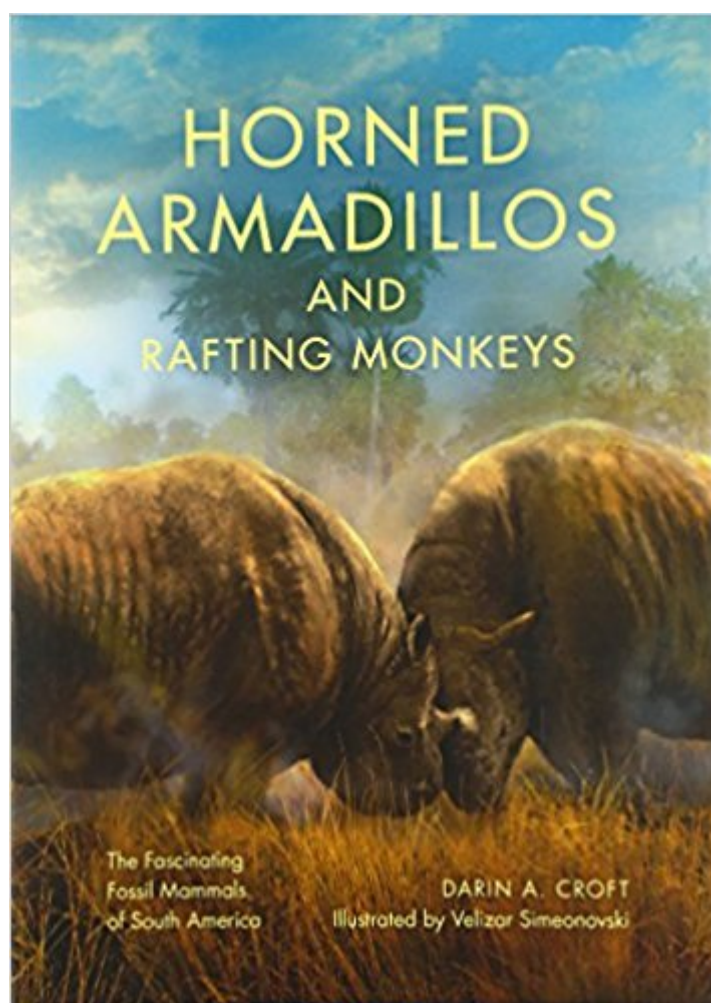


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# Horned Armadillos And Rafting Monkeys: The Fascinating Fossil Mammals Of South America (Life Of The Past)



## Synopsis

South America is home to some of the most distinctive mammals on Earth—giant armadillos, tiny anteaters, the world's largest rodent, and its smallest deer. But the continent once supported a variety of other equally intriguing mammals that have no close living relatives: armored mammals with tail clubs, saber-toothed marsupials, and even a swimming sloth. We know of the existence of these peculiar species thanks to South America's rich fossil record, which provides many glimpses of prehistoric mammals and the ecosystems in which they lived. Organized as a "walk through time" and featuring species from 15 important fossil sites, this book is the most extensive and richly illustrated volume devoted exclusively to the Cenozoic mammals of South America. The text is supported by 75 life reconstructions of extinct species in their native habitats, as well as photographs of fossil specimens and the sites highlighted in the book. An annotated bibliography is included for those interested in delving into the scientific literature.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Well-written and easy for the nonspecialist to understand, this is also a most needed updating of this subject, much in the line of classic works such as Simpson's *The Beginning of the Age of Mammals in South America* and Patterson and Pascual's *The Fossil Mammal Fauna of South America*." —Richard Fariña, coauthor *Megafauna: Giant Beasts of Pleistocene South America* "Organized as a 'walk through time' and featuring species from 15 important fossil sites, this

book is the most extensive and richly illustrated volume devoted exclusively to the Cenozoic mammals of South America." *BirdBooker Report*"An expert in fossil mammals from South America, this is Croft's magnum opus on his life's passion." *Twilight Beasts*"This handsome book, written by a leading expert in South American paleontology, is profusely illustrated with maps, time charts, color photographs of fossils, and exquisite life reconstructions. The book is accessible to the general reader, and it will appeal to any individual, young and old alike, interested in the fossil record, as well as to students and scholars of paleontology who work in other parts of the globe." *Choice*

Darin A. Croft is Associate Professor of Anatomy at Case Western Reserve University and a research associate at several museums, including the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. He is an authority on the extinct mammals of South America and has active field programs in the Andes of Chile and Bolivia. Velizar Simeonovski is an artist based in Chicago who specializes in life reconstructions of extinct species and visualizations of ancient landscapes. His works have been featured in scientific journals and magazines, in the book *Extinct Madagascar: Picturing the Island's Past*, and in museum exhibits in the US and in his home country of Bulgaria.

Amazing, a thorough presentation of Cenozoic mammalian evolution in South America. I wish I could write more about it, but there is nothing to fault, and it is a fantastic reference all around. Even as an experienced amateur Paleontologist, there were creatures written and pictured in this book that I had no idea had existed.

I am not a paleontologist, so I can't vouch for the accuracy of the product. What I can give you is the impression of somebody who has just dabbled in the study of fossil mammals. If you have never read any technical literature about fossil mammals, you might slog down in a few places. However, the text should be fairly clear to people with some relevant background. Many older summaries of South American fossil mammals emphasized phylogeny -- who's related to who -- with scant details on ecology and behavior. This book provides a much more balanced approach. It is not a comprehensive compendium of every species of fossil South American mammal: that would be enormous. However, it does emphasize specific sites, which is probably more comprehensible to most readers than just lumping specimens of diverse provenance into "Land Mammal Ages". I am more interested in what lived in a particular place at a particular time, than in creating the generalizations that some specialists pursue. Many of the extinct taxa have no close modern

relatives, so most people might have only vague ideas about basic facts pertaining to many species. Presenting estimated weights of species is very helpful. Some of the illustrations were off-putting at first glance: the artist seems not to display many anatomical details. In retrospect, however, many such details that are probably unknown and highly conjectural. The result evokes a sense of mystery --- what was this creature really like?

After decades of relative neglect, it is good to see South America's fossil mammals getting some attention (this volume and "Megafauna"). The peculiarities of the fauna made it a great test-kitchen for how evolution fills the niches of the environment. Perhaps South America is even more instructive than Australia, since in South America the different "newcomer" groups filtered into the continent at varying times and the existing fauna either adapted or lost the battle to survive. There was a great deal of new information presented in a not too technical fashion. I'd place this in my top ten for books on mammalian paleontology aimed at adult, but not specialist, readers.

Well worth the money especially given the lack of books on South American extinct mammals. Well illustrated and easy enough for someone with an interest in fossil animals but no biology degree to keep up with.

An outstanding introduction to the unique fauna of Cretaceous South America.

This is an intriguing book in several ways. The illustrations are excellent. The book covers prominent fossil sites in South America (from oldest fossil to most recent). The section on each site includes an illustration or two, usually a photo of the site's general area, and detail on one or two species from each site (the data includes size, weight, what the name means and a bit more). The writing is very good. Taken together the book provides a vivid sense of species once alive on the continent--and the promise of more, because South America has not been explored by paleontologists with anything like the thoroughness of North America. Each chapter has an appendix listing species found there (the appendixes are all at the end--and there is an excellent glossary, as well). The author says he hopes that the book will "...engender a wider and deeper appreciation of the splendidly unique mammals that once called the continent home." It does achieve that purpose, at least with this reader. The illustrations are different than those in many books about fossils, which typically contain paintings, artists' impressions of the fossil when alive. In this book, they are much like photos--I'm not sure what the right word would be for the originals,

manipulated computer images? They are remarkably good. Any book with illustrations by Simeonowski will be worth a closer look. My favorites from the book are Granastropotherium snorki, something about that name. Then there's the terror bird, Brontornis burmeisteri, which weighed around 750-850 pounds and was 9 feet tall, and the teratorn Argentavis magnificens, the largest known bird ever that weighed 150 pounds and had a 23 foot wingspan. The book is about mammals, but these birds crept in.

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