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Early flight

A report of a gliding mammal from the Late Jurassic or Early Cretaceous of China represents the earliest known attempt of a mammal to take to the air, long before bats and at about the same time as birds. The squirrel-sized animal is unusual in many ways and is believed to represent a hitherto

unknown mammalian order. Living some 130 million years ago, it had a set of sharp teeth suitable for eating insects and a fold of body skin membrane (the patagium) used for gliding flight. The skin membrane, preserved in the fossil as an impression, was covered with dense hair and supported by elongated limb bones and tail. This discovery shows that mammals were living highly diverse lives during this relatively early stage of their evolution. The artistic reconstruction on the cover shows *Volaticotherium antiquus* ('ancient gliding beast') in a late afternoon forest.

Cover illustration by Chuang Zhao and Lida Xing.

Article:

A Mesozoic gliding mammal from northeastern China

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doi:10.1038/nature05234