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Opening extract from

Day of the Dinosaurs

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Fliers and tree-jumpers

There are no birds around in the Triassic. They will come later, during the Jurassic. But as you look up, you see the skies are not empty. Flapping and soaring in the breeze are many species of pterosaurs, winged reptiles that are close cousins of dinosaurs. Many other types of strange reptiles live high in the trees, jumping and gliding between the branches.

Eudimorphodon: Flocks of *Eudimorphodon* gather in the sky, deciding what they should eat. Should they attack a swarm of insects over to their left? Or should they dive 30 metres below, into the water, and feast on some fish?

Eudimorphodon can choose what it eats because it has many different types of teeth. Some can be used to slice flesh, others to crush insects.

Megalancosaurus: If you want a Triassic pet, you should choose *Megalancosaurus*. It's small, only about 30 centimetres long, and has cute big eyes and colourful skin. It uses its tail to grab onto branches, and its feet have long, curving fingers to hold on tight.

This little reptile can't fly, but it lives high above the ground in the trees, far out of reach of the hungry dinosaurs down below.

SCALE



Austriadactylus: You look up to see something flying fast, manoeuvring in the air like a fighter plane. *Austriadactylus* is a close cousin of *Eudimorphodon*.

Like all pterosaurs, *Austriadactylus* has a light body and a very long finger (like our ring finger) on its hands. A thin but strong sheet of skin stretches backwards from this finger, making up the wing. *Austriadactylus* has a wingspan of about 1 metre.

Kuehneosaurus: This reptile is about the size of an iguana. It has wings, but they are not on the arms, like the wings of birds or pterosaurs. Instead, they are supported by long ribs that stick out of the body!

Kuehneosaurus cannot flap its ribs, so it can't really fly. Instead, it uses its wings as a parachute, to break its fall when it is jumping between trees.

Sharovipteryx: High in the trees there is a rustling sound. You can just make out a tiny animal, a bit like a fruit bat with a big sheet of skin on its body, sticking out to the sides.

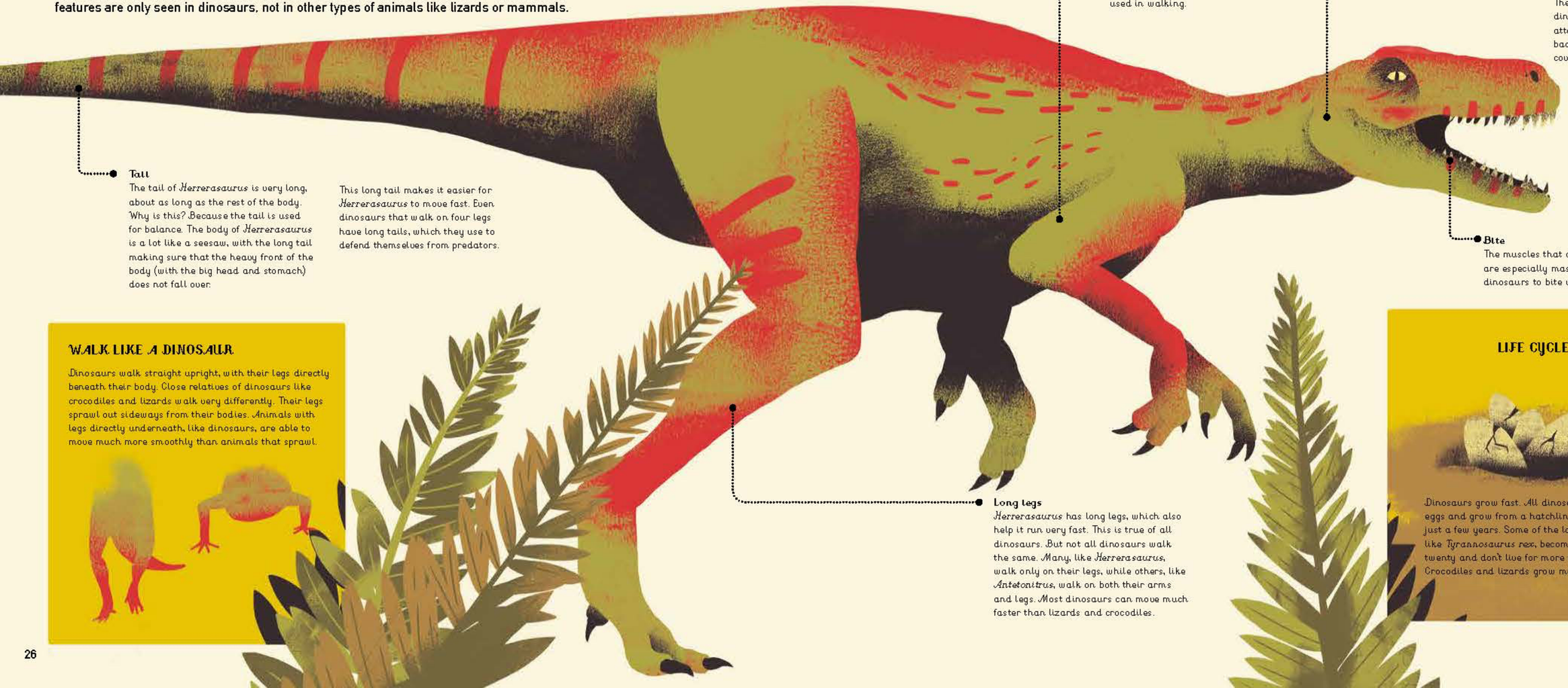
The wing you see is not on the arms, or supported by ribs, like *Kuehneosaurus*. Instead, the wing is on the legs! Say hello to *Sharovipteryx*, a strange reptile that glides between the trees.

Mecistotrachelos: This small, rat-sized reptile looks like *Kuehneosaurus*. It also has big wings sticking out from its body, anchored by ribs. These wings are huge for its size.

Mecistotrachelos are very rare animals, and like to keep a low profile to avoid predators, so you'll be lucky to see one.

Dinosaur features: *Herrerasaurus*

What does it mean to be a dinosaur? Many of the animals you've seen in the Triassic are dinosaurs: like *Herrerasaurus*, *Tawa*, *Plateosaurus*, *Antetonitrus* and *Pisanosaurus*. But many others are not. Pterosaurs like *Eudimorphodon*, phytosaurs like *Smilosuchus* and sea-reptiles like *Pistosaurus* are not dinosaurs, though they are related. How do scientists know this? Because all dinosaurs share certain features. These features are only seen in dinosaurs, not in other types of animals like lizards or mammals.



Tail
The tail of *Herrerasaurus* is very long, about as long as the rest of the body. Why is this? Because the tail is used for balance. The body of *Herrerasaurus* is a lot like a seesaw, with the long tail making sure that the heavy front of the body (with the big head and stomach) does not fall over.

This long tail makes it easier for *Herrerasaurus* to move fast. Even dinosaurs that walk on four legs have long tails, which they use to defend themselves from predators.

Big muscles
All dinosaurs have big muscles on the arms, shoulder and chest. For dinosaurs like *Herrerasaurus*, these muscles help them to grab and slash prey. For others, like *Antetonitrus*, these muscles are used in walking.

Jaw
The jaw muscles of dinosaurs are huge. They attach to the bones of the back of the skull, and are covered by skin.

Bite
The muscles that close the jaw are especially massive. They allow dinosaurs to bite very strongly.

Long legs
Herrerasaurus has long legs, which also help it run very fast. This is true of all dinosaurs. But not all dinosaurs walk the same. Many, like *Herrerasaurus*, walk only on their legs, while others, like *Antetonitrus*, walk on both their arms and legs. Most dinosaurs can move much faster than lizards and crocodiles.

WALK LIKE A DINOSAUR

Dinosaurs walk straight upright, with their legs directly beneath their body. Close relatives of dinosaurs like crocodiles and lizards walk very differently. Their legs sprawl out sideways from their bodies. Animals with legs directly underneath, like dinosaurs, are able to move much more smoothly than animals that sprawl.

LIFE CYCLE

Dinosaurs grow fast. All dinosaurs hatch from eggs and grow from a hatchling to a teenager in just a few years. Some of the largest dinosaurs, like *Tyrannosaurus rex*, become adults around age twenty and don't live for more than thirty years. Crocodiles and lizards grow much, much slower.