

# Desmatochelys padillai: Paleontologists Find Oldest Known Species of Sea Turtle

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<http://www.sci-news.com/paleontology/science-desmatochelys-padillai-oldest-sea-turtle-03212.html>

A new species of ancient sea turtle has been identified from fossils found in Colombia. The fossils are at least 120 million years old, about 10 million years older than the previously known oldest sea turtle specimen, according to paleontologists Dr Edwin Cadena of the Senckenberg Research Institute and his colleague, Dr James Parham of California State University, Fullerton.

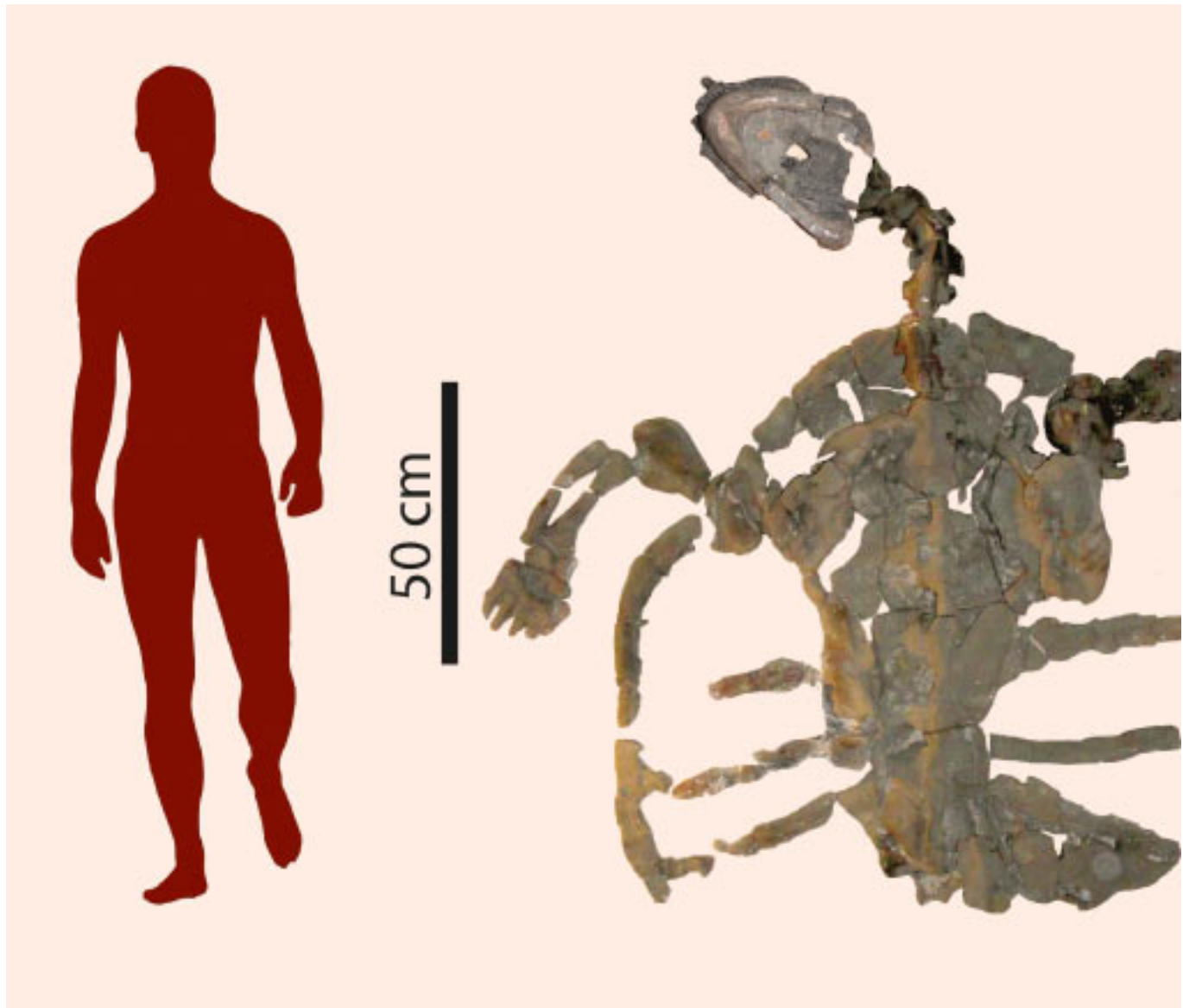


This is what the habitat of *Desmatochelys padillai* might have looked like 120 million years ago. Image credit: Jorge Blanco.

“[Santanachelys gaffneyi](#) is the oldest known sea turtle’ – this sentence from Wikipedia is no longer up to date. We described a fossil sea turtle from Colombia that is about 10 million years older,” Dr Cadena said.

“The turtle described by us as *Desmatochelys padillai* originates from Cretaceous sediments and is at least 120 million years old.”

The partial skeleton of *Desmatochelys padillai*, with a length of nearly 6.5 feet (2 m), shows all of the characteristic traits of modern marine turtles, the paleontologists report online today in the [journal \*PaleoBios\*](#).



The skeleton of *Desmatochelys padillai* measures almost 6.5 feet (2 m). Image credit: Edwin Cadena / PaleoBios.

“Sea turtles descended from terrestrial and freshwater turtles that arose 230 million years ago. During the Cretaceous period, they split into land and sea dwellers,” Dr Cadena said.

“Fossil evidence from this time period is very sparse, however, and the exact time of the split is difficult to verify,” he added.

“This lends a special importance to every fossil discovery that can contribute to clarifying the phylogeny of the sea turtles.”

The fossilized turtle shells and bones of *Desmatochelys padillai* were collected from two sites near the community of Villa de Leyva in Colombia.

The scientists placed the fossils in [Chelonioidea](#), a group that includes both of the two living families of sea turtle (Dermochelylids and Cheloniids).

“We are indeed dealing with the oldest known fossil sea turtle,” Dr Cadena said.