



Here come the (bigger) mammals

Understanding how life rebounded after an asteroid strike 66 million years ago, which is believed to have devastated the dinosaurs, has been hard. But newfound fossils from Corral Bluffs, Colo., along with other outcrops in the region, are offering a look at how mammals and plants recovered and flourished. The fossils (some mammal skulls from Corral Bluffs above) are helping paleontologists piece together a timeline (at left) of how mammals grew in size once non-avian dinosaurs were gone.

The biggest initial mammal survivors were rat-sized creatures. But in rock dated to roughly 100,000 years later, raccoon-sized mammals, such as *Baiocanodon* (No. 2 at left), appear. That's not far off from mammals' maximum body mass (represented by *Didelphodon*, No. 1) before the strike.

A lack of large predators and an explosion in plant diversity may have helped some mammals reach about 25 kilograms, such as beaver-sized *Carsiioptychus* (No. 3), roughly 500,000 years after the impact. By almost 700,000 years after, wolf-sized mammals, such as *Eoconodon* (No. 4), appear, researchers report online October 24 in *Science*.

— John Pickrell



An ancient *Carsiioptychus* mammal may have looked like this CGI rendering (far left). Most of the fossils found so far at Corral Bluffs were hidden inside roughly spherical rocks called concretions (example at left).