Definition: **dinosaur** from *Collins English Dictionary*

1. Any extinct terrestrial reptile of the orders *Saurischia* and *Ornithischia*, many of which were of gigantic size and abundant in the Mesozoic era. See also saurischian ornithischian. Compare pterosaur plesiosaur.

2. A person or thing that is considered to be out of date.

[**C19:** from New Latin *dinosaurus*, from Greek *deinos* fearful + *sauros* lizard]

> ‒ dinosaurian adj

Summary Article: **dinosaur**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Any extinct carnivorous or herbivorous reptile belonging to the predominantly terrestrial orders *Saurischia* or *Ornithischia* that existed during the Mesozoic era. Evidence of the earliest dinosaurs can be dated back to around 230 million years ago, and every dinosaur species became extinct within a relatively short time period around 65 million years ago. The term ‘dinosauria’ was coined in 1842 by the English palaeontologist Richard Owen.

Many species of dinosaur evolved during the millions of years they were the dominant land animals. Most were large (up to 27 m/90 ft), but some were as small as modern chickens. Although *Stegosaurus*, an armoured plant-eater 6 m/20 ft long, had a brain only about 3 cm/1.25 in long, not all dinosaurs had small brains: at the other extreme, *stenonychosaurus*, a hunting dinosaur 2 m/6 ft long, had a brain size comparable to that of a modern mammal or bird, as well as stereoscopic vision and grasping hands.

**Classification** Dinosaurs are divisible into two orders: *Saurischia* (‘lizard-hip’) and *Ornithischia* (‘bird-hip’). Members of the former group possess a reptile-like pelvis and are mostly bipedal and carnivorous, although some are giant amphibious quadrupedal herbivores. Members of the latter group have a bird-like pelvis and are mainly four-legged and almost entirely herbivorous.

The Saurischia are subdivided into: **theropods** (‘beast-feet’) and **sauropodomorphs** (‘lizard-feet forms’). Theropods include all the bipedal carnivorous forms with long hindlimbs and short forelimbs (e.g. *tyrannosaurus* and *Megalosaurus*). Sauropodomorphs include sauropods, the large quadrupedal herbivorous and amphibious types with massive limbs, long tails and necks, and tiny skulls (e.g. *diplodocus* and *apatosaurus*).

The Ornithischia were almost all plant-eaters, and eventually outnumbered the Saurischia. They are divided into four suborders: **ornithopods** (‘bird-feet’), **stegosaurs** (‘plated’ dinosaurs), **ankylosaurs** (‘armoured’ dinosaurs), and **ceratopsians** (‘horned’ dinosaurs). Ornithopods include Jurassic and Cretaceous bipedal forms (e.g. *iguanodon*) and Cretaceous hadrosaurs with duckbills. Stegosaurs are Jurassic quadrupedal dinosaurs with a double row of triangular plates along the back and spikes on the tail (e.g. *Stegosaurus*). Ankylosaurs are Cretaceous quadrupedal forms, heavily armoured with bony plates (e.g. *nodosaurus*). Ceratopsians are Upper Cretaceous quadrupedal horned dinosaurs with very
large skulls bearing a neck frill and large horns (e.g. triceratops).

These two main dinosaur orders form part of the superorder Archosaurus ('ruling reptiles'), comprising a total of five orders. The other three are Pterosaurs ('winged lizards'), including pterodactyls, of which no examples exist today, crocodilians, and birds. All five orders are thought to have evolved from a 'stem-order', the Thecondontia.

Extinction The most popular theory of dinosaur extinction suggests that the Earth was struck by a giant asteroid or comet 65 million years ago. This is thought to have sent up enough debris and dust into the atmosphere that the Earth's climate was changed into one unsuitable for dinosaurs and they could not adapt quickly enough. Around 70% of all species on Earth died at this time in what is known as the cretaceous tertiary mass extinction event (or KT extinction), which marked the end of the Cretaceous period. The evidence for this includes a high concentration of iridium, an element rare on Earth but common in extraterrestrial bodies, in sedimentary rocks around the world (known as the KT boundary layer) dating from this time.

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