



All Yesterdays: Unique and Speculative Views of Dinosaurs and Other Prehistoric Animals

John Conway , C.M. Kosemen , Darren Naish

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All Yesterdays is a book about the way we see dinosaurs and other prehistoric animals. Lavishly illustrated with over sixty original artworks, All Yesterdays aims to challenge our notions of how prehistoric animals looked and behaved. As an critical exploration of palaeontological art, All Yesterdays asks questions about what is probable, what is possible, and what is commonly ignored.

Written by palaeozoologist Darren Naish, and palaeontological artists John Conway and C.M. Kosemen, All Yesterdays is scientifically rigorous and artistically imaginative in its approach to fossils of the past - and those of the future.

All Yesterdays: Unique and Speculative Views of Dinosaurs and Other Prehistoric Animals Details

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From Reader Review All Yesterdays: Unique and Speculative Views of Dinosaurs and Other Prehistoric Animals for online ebook

Ian Cunningham says

A quick primer on the blind spots and weak links in the paleontographic materials published. I enjoy speculative zoology, and when you're speculating about real, once-living critters, that's even more exciting.

Johnny says

This is awesome. It's a little short, but it's well worth reading. The book is essentially a critique of pop culture's (and even certain scientific) constants when it comes to portraying dinosaurs, and opens up theories and suggestions for how they might have actually behaved or appeared as actual animals. Scientific fact is spread liberally throughout, but the book focuses on what we can't know about dinosaurs, such as their muscle mass, coloration, feather arrangements, behaviors, etc--and challenges the reader to open their minds to new possibilities, to give dinosaurs a more realistic edge, than to just accept whatever pop culture has to feed them. For example, many carnivorous dinosaurs are portrayed as being vicious and constantly hunting and violent, and are rarely shown as playful or restful creatures. However, modern carnivores, such as lions and wolves, are known for being social and having lives beyond just being killers, so why not portray dinosaurs that way as well? My example is very simplified--the book goes into more scientific and biological-behavioral reasoning for its suggestions, acknowledges that it might be seen as "heretical" or "silly," but just goes with it. The illustrations are simple but effective and often very inspiring. Definitely a fun and different way to look at some very interesting creatures!

Darnell says

Short but very fun. Though I wish it was more methodical and substantive about its main subjects, just jumping between different concepts the authors want to explore is enjoyable. The incorrect modern recreations are entertaining too.

s says

I remember fondly my encyclopedia of dinosaurs -- actually, a succession of them, with increasing sophistication, that I owned over the years. Those books gleefully explained how people had thought of dinosaurs as plodding and stupid, but now realized they may have been warmblooded and fast moving. There was little hint that dinosaurs would soon be seen as close kin to birds, with many species showing evidence of feathers. All this preamble to say what a pleasure it was to read this short, light book of illustrations highlighting how real dinosaurs might have deviated from their standard depiction -- and closing with a similar treatment of modern animals, seen via fossils through some far-future lens. The illustrations are more typical of children's books than field guides, favoring imagination over precision; in contrast, the text (while deftly and elegantly written) is far beyond the reading level of most pre-teens. This makes the book's target market slightly difficult to gauge. Whoever that market is, it evidently includes me.

Jim says

This book could have been titled "Imaging Dinosaurs Without the Shrink Wrapping" because it shows how the public has allowed a few paleo-artists to dictate our perceptions of how the dinosaurs might have appeared. Some of what we thought we knew turns out to be wrong, but, more importantly, we now know better than we don't know. For example, the artist imagines that the vertical spines of the sail-finned spinosaurus might simply have supported a hump like those of our camels or bison. And that what we thought was a 70 cm claw may have been a support for feathers. And the triceratops outer layer may have looked more like a porcupine! The fresh imaginings of the lives of dinosaurs in this book depict them in poses like sleeping (necessary for carnivores that have gorged themselves on large prey), playing, mating (interspecies!)

But the best part of this book is at the end when the author turns the reconstruction problem upside down and imagines how modern skeletons might be reconstructed by some future paleontologists of the holocene era. Like, skinny cows, flat-nosed elephants, mountain grazing manatees, and, most fun, the fearsome "cat" with five razor sharp claws it used to slaughter its hapless human prey.

Jamie Revell says

A lovely little art book depicting dinosaurs, and living animals as you've never seen them before. All the work is based on scientifically plausible possibilities, even though much of it can never be proved or disproved. Every illustration comes with accompanying text and at least one reference to the relevant scientific evidence.

The first two thirds or so of the book is the dinosaur part. Some of them are pictures of dinosaurs doing things that nobody ever draws them doing, despite the fact that they must have done, or at least that similar modern animals also do. Others are more speculative, building on what we don't know about their soft anatomy. It's hard to pick out favourites, but the therizinosaurs and *Laellynasaura* are a couple that stand out for me.

The remaining third covers modern, living animals. The twist here is that they are reconstructed from their skeletons alone, using the same techniques that we use today for dinosaurs, and accompanied by appropriate text. Much of it is hilarious: "A solitary manatee, grazing in its mountain home. We only know the skull of this enigmatic herbivore". And much of it, of course, is cautionary...

A fascinating, and beautifully illustrated guide to what might have been, or that we can't prove wasn't. And, implicitly, an important challenge to today's palaeoartists. Palaeoart has evolved before, and perhaps its time for it shake off old assumptions, and do so again.

Josh says

As a kid, I once came across an incomplete animal skeleton in a field. Being a naive paleontology nut, I picked up a fan-shaped piece and concluded the bones must belong to a prehistoric duck of some kind,

because the fan looked just like a duck's webbed foot . . . Turns out the bone was a scapula, the shoulder bone of what my family helped me to quickly deduce was part of the remains of our elderly barn cat, Miss Kitty, who had disappeared weeks earlier.

I say this just to illustrate that I would've been a great consultant for this book on speculative looks at prehistoric beasts. A missed opportunity.

Liam says

Man this basically felt like Hipster Dinosaur Artist: The Anthology. I picked it up expecting, like, neat alternative/speculative reconstructions of dinos, I got like three of them, and other than that got "Well everyone draws T-rex charging at prey and roaring all the time, whereas he probably didn't do that very often, so here we drew him sleeping" and "Well dinosaurs might have rolled in mud and such to disguise themselves and lay in ambush so here's a dinosaur covered in mud".

And then some just hilariously exaggerated modern examples. 2/10 would not waste \$8 on again.

Tony Harris says

Since before this book came out in print this was an Internet sensation, and now I finally get to read it I understand why. The book is not long, only 104 pages, but it doesn't need to be to convey its simple, powerful idea: how *little* we actually know about dinosaurs and other fossil beasts like plesiosaurs and pterosaurs. When reconstructing the living appearance of these animals, we are usually guilty of pretending knowledge we don't really have, particularly about living appearance, diet, habits, ecology, etc. Furthermore, reconstructions tend to bow both to conservatism--rarely do reconstructors speculate beyond what is patently shown by fossil evidence--and to fad and fashion, as in Paul's "shrink-wrapped" dinosaur reconstructions (they certainly had more "meat" on their bones than Paul shows!)

The book is in two major sections: There's a brief introduction, followed by "All Yesterdays," where featured artists Conway, Kosen and Naish (featuring skeletal illustrations by Scott Hartman) put forth their most liberally imaginative and speculative reconstructions of ancient life, often using attributes of living, even common organisms, their imaginations bounded only by the "hard" evidence(that is, what we know from their fossils they could NOT have done, had, etc.) Then there's an "All Today's" section, where these artists imagine how paleontologists of the distant future might try to reconstruct familiar animals of today with no more to go on than what we have of creatures of the past.

My personal favorite is their reconstruction of the Australian dinosaur *Leallynasaura amicagraphica* on page 63. We know from fossil and geological evidence that Australia lay close to the South Pole during the time *Leallynasaura* lived; It was a plant eater and forager in an environment with no real parallels in our modern world: a polar forest that lay in 24/7 sunlight for half the year and total darkness the other half. And despite the Cretaceous climate being much warmer than today's, even at the poles, we also have reason to believe it did get cold enough during those six-month nights for snow to accumulate.

Traditionally, *Leallynasaura* was reconstructed with scaly skin; "feathers" or "dinofuzz" were believed restricted only to those dinosaurs closely related to birds (the "raptors"). I always had problems with that,

because *Leallynasaura* was not a large animal, smaller than a person in fact. And since dinosaurs have for a while now been believed warm-blooded, I just couldn't see how *Leallynasaura* could have survived those cold winters with a lizard's hide. Fortunately, new fossils out of Asia: *Psittacosaurus* and *Tianyulong*, suggest "dinofuzz" (the technical term is pycnofibers) was more widespread than previously believed.

Thus: *Leallynasaura* the fuzzball, most of its features hidden under dense "fluff" and fat, with an incredibly long tail, which they tipped with a fluff flag out of Dr. Seuss. While I'm convinced of the fuzz, the tail I'm certain is a mistake in the original "scientific" reconstruction--too many vertebrae added.

My second favorite is a NSFW reconstruction of a sexually frustrated *Stegosaurus* forcing its attentions on a hapless *Haplocanthosaurus* (pages 32-33). Not only does it graphically illustrate how the prickly creatures may have managed to mate, it shows just how huge *Stegosaurus* really got!

An interesting epilogue reminds us that ultimately, what we know--or think we know--about the world constrains our understanding of the past. A Swiss scholar from 1726, Johan Jakob Scheuchzer interpreted a fossil salamander as a human drowned in Noah's flood, because that was the reality he understood.

It's certain many of these speculative reconstructions will be ruled out by future findings--my bet is on *Leallynasaura's* tail--and others will be seen as prescient. Even if that happens, we'll still have gained, because we'll at least know more about these creatures that we need to keep reminding ourselves: *we do not know as much as we think we do.*

Trike says

This relatively thin volume of speculative art makes a solid argument: we're almost certainly imagining dinosaurs incorrectly. Even with all the new information and theories about dinosaurs that have come about in the past 40-50 years, we're probably still drawing them wrong.

In my lifetime dinosaurs have gone from lumbering cold-blooded reptiles to swift warm-blooded animals, many of whom were covered with feathers, fuzz or quills. Jurassic Park came out 25 years ago and every single dino in that movie is probably rendered inaccurately. The 2015 sequel, Jurassic World, is not a good movie, but it does have one awesome scene where the new owner confronts Dr. Wu in the lab:

Simon Masrani: You are to cease all activities here immediately.

Henry Wu: You are acting like we are engaged in some kind of mad science. But we are doing what we have done from the beginning. Nothing in Jurassic World is natural. We have always filled gaps in the genome with the DNA of other animals. **And, if their genetic code was pure, many of them would look quite different. But you didn't ask for reality. You asked for more TEETH!**

I love that scene. It manages to redeem the inaccuracies of the franchise by showing that they never intended to recreate actual dinosaurs, just to give the audience what they expected dinosaurs to look like. (It also serves as a metacommentary on movies in general, because no film ever depicts anything realistically. Even movies don't get making movies right, and all they have to do is literally look around at what they're doing.)

So goes a lot of paleoart, where artists merely imitate what they've seen from earlier artists, giving the audience what they expect.

But the authors point out that even artists who try to be more up to date in their dino representations still err on the side of what's already been done. Dinosaur art tends to show the creatures shrink-wrapped, showing off their muscles as if they are all body builders flexing for our amusement. In many cases they even show the underlying bone structure. That's always bothered me because lizards and alligators don't look like that, and every other animal that looks skeletal is grievously ill.

Conway, Naish and Kosemen call that out in a very cool way: they reimagine modern animals drawn in the style typical of paleoartists. Their renditions of hippos, elephants, swans, cats and more are by turns hilarious and horrifying, because we know what the real animal looks like. That serves to underscore how they've reimagined dinosaurs, departing radically from the usual depictions, and it does lend credence to their point.

Once it was discovered that most dinosaurs had feathers, even the mighty carnososaurs, it made me wonder why small, birdlike dinosaurs weren't covered with feathers. Oviraptor is a case in point. The name means "egg thief" but we now know that the clutch of eggs it was found on top of was its own. It wasn't eating them as was assumed, it was protecting them from whatever calamity buried them all alive. So the art changed from a predator snatching eggs to a mother brooding them. Yet it still is drawn like a lizard, when it looks like a plucked chicken. I think it should be covered in feathers, looking more like archaeopteryx sitting hen-like on its eggs. Good luck finding many pictures like that.

All in all this is a cool little book. There are a couple times where the art is lost in the valley between pages (seriously designers, why do you do that? Have you guys never seen a book?!) but overall the reimagining of dinosaurs is really amazing.

Jennifer says

I heard about this book maybe a year ago, and wanted it immediately. At the time, though, I could only find it as an e-book, which, meh. Somehow I saw that it was in paperback right around the time I was putting together a Christmas wishlist, and a few weeks later, I was delighted to unwrap it. It was instantly at the top of my reading pile.

It took longer than I would have predicted to read, but in all the best ways! I had been expecting just an art book -- creatively imagining how dinosaurs might have looked because -- who knows!? The sample illustrations (especially the sleeping T Rex) sold me, I wasn't really expecting science. But it *was* science. Each picture came with a story of how paleoart works, and the prejudices we hold that have prevented species from being depicted a certain way in the past. For instance -- why are there almost no pictures of dinosaurs sleeping? Why no pictures of smaller dinosaurs sheltering in dens, despite recent evidence some certainly did. Why are all tall spines in dinosaurs almost always interpreted as "skin sails" like the Dimetrodon, even though the Dimetrodon *isn't* a dinosaur, and modern species like chameleons exhibit tall vertebral spines but do not have sails.

In addition to all the cutting edge paleoart discussion, there was also a *fantastic* section illustrating the difficulties of drawing an animal based only on its skeleton by imaging future scientists, lacking picture of present-day species, trying to imagine what cats, cows, vultures, etc., looked like based only on *theirs*.

Fascinating and delightful. Highly recommended!

Nate says

This book is so damn cool. Like most boys, I grew up with a(n) (un)healthy obsession with dinosaurs. I seriously felt like I was 6 years old again, learning about dinosaurs for the first time.

This book encourages us to throw out our old notions of what dinosaurs looked like or how they acted. If we look back at what we know, or thought we knew, about dinosaurs and other prehistoric creatures, we'd realize how little we actually did know. Here, they've reinvented some past assumptions. Additionally, behavior is often times a an assumption based on evidence available. In 65 million years, would anyone have any way of knowing the elaborate mating rituals of bower birds?

Very cool book. Worth spending a few hours perusing.

Audra says

I found out about this book through a blog, Love in the Time of Chasmosaurs, which talks about dinosaurs and paleoart (artistic renderings of prehistoric animals), and how our pictorial representations of dinosaurs have changed over the years as we have learned more about them. The blog authors really gushed about this book, so I decided to ask for it for Christmas and give it a try.

It turned out to be one of the most interesting books about dinosaurs that I've read in quite awhile.

The idea of All Yesterdays is to explore the fact that, as far as we have come in our knowledge about dinosaurs and other prehistoric animals, there is still a lot that we do not know, and a lot that we cannot know. There are aspects of physical bodies that are never preserved in the fossil record, for example. Animal behaviors, also, are something that we may catch occasional glimpses of in the fossil record, but if the range of animal behavior today is any good indication (and there is no reason it wouldn't be), then we are missing a vast array of unique, interesting, or possibly downright weird dinosaur behavior because such things do not leave traces for us to find tens or hundreds of millions of years later.

The point of this discussion, however, is to set the stage for the book's artists, who go on to depict dinosaurs in unusual ways. In some cases, this involves more imaginative depictions of dinosaurs' bodies with color and extra padding or spines or other things that we don't have direct evidence for, but that seem plausible given the range of such things on animals today. Our common depictions of dinosaurs tend to adhere very closely to skeletal outlines; even fleshed out with well-proportioned muscles and skin, these depictions are probably not what dinosaurs actually looked like. There are few living animals whose full bodies (with all the organs/muscles/flesh/fur/feather/spines/scales/etc. included) that really look much like their skeletons - why would dinosaurs have not had all that extra stuff too? Unfortunately a lot of that is the stuff that doesn't get preserved as fossils, so it is up to us and our imaginations to fill in the missing parts.

Other images in the book depict dinosaurs engaging in behaviors that seem unlikely or uncommon; Protoceratops climbing trees, for instance (as the book points out, goats climb trees sometimes, even though they aren't designed for it - why not protoceratops?), T.Rex sleeping, or Camarasaurus rolling in the mud. Things that we don't usually think about dinosaurs doing, but that they probably did do - or at least, that they did some other but equally "weird" thing that we don't know about.

The book finishes with a section title "All Todays," which picks up on the question of animal depictions based solely on skeletal remains by taking the skeletons of modern animals and imagining how paleoartists of the future might depict them if they lacked all knowledge of the animals in question except the skeletons. This was a really intriguing exercise, and I liked this part of the book just as much as the part about dinosaurs (though I don't think I'll ever look quite the same way at cats, swans or baboons again).

I think my favorite aspect of this book is how imaginative it is. It definitely involves a lot of speculation, but it is speculation with knowledge and reasons to back it up. The artists and authors are clear that the possibilities that they are depicting are just that: possibilities. The truth may in fact have been even more wonderful and bizarre than we can imagine. It was wonderful to read a book that gave it a try, while building off the foundation of things that we do know about dinosaurs. (Parenthetically, I will add that this is probably one of the main reasons that I personally like Raptor Red so much; it had a similar element of imaginative speculation based in good paleontology.)

As All Yesterdays indicates, there is a lot that we know we don't know about dinosaurs and other prehistoric animals, and there's probably also plenty that we don't even know we don't know about them. But that leaves the field for some grounded speculation wide open, and if this book is any indication, the possibilities in that realm are numerous, intriguing and delightful.

Harris says

I quite enjoyed this quick, thought-provoking little book calling into question our preconceptions and assumptions of prehistoric life, especially as conceived in artistic reconstruction of dinosaurs which populate "cutting-edge" science writing and museum exhibits to this day. This is a book that I guarantee would have been a favorite of mine as a kid (and would be highly recommended to any child with an interest in dinosaurs and nature- though it does have some rather frank discussions of dinosaur sex!), but it also is an informative and inspiring to adults who have such interests as well.

Paleozoologist Darren Naish and artists John Conway and C.M. Kosemen illustrate prehistoric animals in ways that illustrate how little we can really know about lifeforms known only from a few bones, and how widely speculation can vary with a little imagination. In addition, it displays dinosaurs in ways that challenge how even modern assumptions of how dinosaurs behaved. Whether showing a *Tyrannosaurus* simply laying down, *Camarasaurus* playing, fat *Parasaurolophus*, the use of camouflage, or even dinosaurs with fur, these artists take a refreshing non-traditional approach that is just breathtaking. These is especially seen in the section illustrating modern life forms in the typical style of illustrating prehistoric life based on just fossils, including the deadly *cat*, known for their five-switch blade claws (pack hunters who no doubt preyed on *humans*, near whose fossils they are often found). Could future paleontology tell that elephants had trunks lacking fossils? All very interesting and paradigm shifting stuff, I think and I don't think I'll think of traditional ideas of dinosaurs the same way again.

Csenge says

I really love and support the idea of this book, so I am going to say up front why it lost a star. The image quality could have been better; in addition, some of the two-page images were cut in very unfortunate places (sometimes right through the central dinosaur). I would have also loved to see some of the "old" depictions

the new ones were being compared to (but at least there were citations for them, so I can always look them up later). And, of course, it always could have been longer.

Other than that, I really enjoyed the heck out of this book. I don't think I ever quite shed my childhood enthusiasm for dinosaurs and other ancient creatures, and this one raised a whole lot of interesting questions and ideas about them. I also liked that it was written with scientific accuracy, including notes and references. The pictures themselves were innovative and really cool. I would not have quite seen that the big deal was about all of them, but the text explained in each case what I should be looking for. The explanation was sometimes more interesting than the image, but I didn't mind it.
