

‘Ancient lion’: Meet the largest carnivore we’ve ever discovered

Twenty-three million years ago, a giant carnivore larger than any modern-day lion or polar bear stalked sub-Saharan Africa, according to the fossils of a previously undiscovered species that spent decades in a museum drawer.

Portions of the animal’s jaw, skull and skeleton, including enormous teeth, were discovered in a drawer at the National Museums of Kenya. The fossils were originally found in Kenya decades ago and thought to be a smaller species, but those researchers were searching for ancient apes, so the fossils were put aside.

“Opening a museum drawer, we saw a row of gigantic meat-eating teeth, clearly belonging to a species new to science,” said Matthew Borths, study author and curator of the Division of Fossil Primates at Duke University, in a statement.

The skull is comparable to that of a rhinoceros, and given its size and giant sharp teeth, the carnivore was at the head of its food chain. The researchers estimate that it weighed 1.6 tons and could prey on large herbivores akin to today’s elephant and hippopotamus.

The fossils of this ‘ancient lion’ are described in a study published [April 18] in the [Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology](#).

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