



Dinosaurs have been extinct for millions of years — right? Not necessarily. Because common birds like pigeons and sparrows are direct descendants of dinosaurs, technically they never really vanished from Earth — which is what the *Dinosaurs Among Us* exhibit is all about.

The exhibit highlights the unbroken line between modern birds and the dinosaurs that dominated the planet for approximately 170 million years. Comprised of large-scale color illustrations of familiar and newly discovered extinct dinosaur species, the exhibit demonstrates what these creatures would have looked like in real life. The illustrations, which will be displayed inside and outside of the Betty Ford Alpine Gardens Education Center in Ford Park, are part of the traveling exhibit that is a collaboration between the Gardens, the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York, and the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS).

According to the Gardens' Education Director Nanette Kuich, while the AMNH curated *Dinosaurs Among Us*, the DMNS is providing fossils, casts and other materials that will add three-dimensional elements to the exhibit. These elements include a life-size cast of *Masiakasaurus knopfleri*, a small predatory theropod dinosaur from Madagascar, as well as bones from native Colorado dinosaurs *Tyrannosaurus rex* and *Triceratops*.



# DINOSAUR?

By Laura Lief

## CITIPATI

The first *Citipati osmolskae* specimens were discovered by scientists from the American Museum of Natural History and the Mongolian Academy of Sciences in 1993 at Ukhaa Tolgod, the Gobi Desert in Mongolia. In traditional Himalayan Buddhism, Citipati are the dancing skeletons that guard funeral pyres. The name *osmolskae* honors Halszka Osmólska, a Polish paleontologist who specialized in dinosaurs and was an explorer of the Gobi Desert.

## SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

A self-guided exhibit for all ages, patrons can explore and take part in the scavenger hunt, fossil dig sandbox and other dinosaur-themed activities daily. Additionally, young “paleontologists” will be able to find and identify fossils in a cast.

As far as what attracted the Gardens to this exhibit, Kuich says, “the resilience of life on Earth is the most intriguing aspect of *Dinosaurs Among Us*. Dinosaurs filled Earth after a major extinction event over 250 million years ago. Birds, their direct ancestors, survived another major extinction event 66 million years ago, and now fill all our existing ecosystems.”

In addition to the exhibit and accompanying interactive, family-friendly activities, Dr. Tyler Lyson, Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology for the DMNS’ Department of Earth Sciences, will be this summer’s keynote speaker. Hailing from the dinosaur-rich badlands of North Dakota, Dr. Lyson’s childhood was spent looking for fossils.

“I got a summer job working for a paleontologist when I was in sixth grade and never looked back,” he exclaims.

Following his time in North Dakota, Dr. Lyson earned his PhD and MA in geology and paleontology from Yale University, as well as his BA from Swarthmore College. He was a postdoctoral researcher at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History before joining the DMNS in 2014, where he oversees the museum’s fossil reptile and fish collection.

“I do field work to discover new fossils, assist with organizing the collection, and do a lot of outreach including talks and documentaries,” he says.

During his talk, “From the Ashes of Dinosaurs: Dinosaur Extinction and the Rise of Modern Birds and Mammals,” he will discuss what he calls Earth’s greatest story: the extinction of dinosaurs and the rise of the modern world. “Attendees will learn about this fascinating moment and about an amazing discovery from right here in Colorado that is changing our understanding of how and when life rebounded after Earth’s darkest hour.”





### MICRORAPTOR

*This bizarre, birdlike dinosaur, called Microraptor gui, has feathers on both its front and back limbs. And those rear leg feathers weren't just decorative; they show adaptations for flight. But could this creature really fly? Probably not far under its own power. But it might have glided down from trees, perhaps even flapping its front limbs.*

### LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Another speaker to look forward to is longtime Eagle County local Billy Doran, who is the executive director of The Museum at Dinosaur Junction and the founder of Fossil Posse Adventures. Doran and Dr. Lyson are friends and colleagues and have been on expeditions together digging for ancient life in Utah.

For the exhibition, Doran will focus on the history of dinosaurs in Eagle County.

“Dinosaurs still exist today on our windowsills and in our backyards,” says Doran. “There is not much difference between the Velociraptor and a Golden Eagle as they can both swoop down, tackle their prey, eviscerate and consume it in minutes.”

A self-described “play-ontologist,” Doran is also a former actor who became a dinosaur expert by educating himself on paleontology, dinosaur history, where to find fossils, and how to know what to look for in the rocky cliffs of Colorado. He’s also been part of numerous expeditions with several different organizations over the years — including the DMNS.

Doran says people “will be amazed by what we have found in our neighborhood, the animals that used to be here, and what the landscape used to look like. They will see our Eagle County landscape in a whole new way!”

In addition to his knowledge, Doran will bring fossils and life casts, as well as visual aids and pieces from Dinosaur Junction which, since its inception in 2022, has been dedicated to educating local residents and visitors through the research, preservation, and exhibition of paleontological discoveries. [vvm](#)

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**PARACORACIAS**

This bird, *Paracoracias occidentalis*, the fossils of which were found in Green River, Wyoming, closely resembles modern-day birds called rollers that live mostly in the tropics. So what was this bird doing in Wyoming? When it was alive around 50 million years ago, Wyoming was warm and swampy, like the tropics are today.

**DINOSAURS AMONG US**

The free exhibit runs through April 30, 2025 at the Betty Ford Alpine Gardens.

**JUNE 14, 4-6 P.M.**

“From the Ashes of Dinosaurs: Dinosaur Extinction and the Rise of Modern Birds and Mammals” with Dr. Tyler Lyson, Grand View Room in Lionshead

**JULY 1, 4-6 P.M.**

“History of Dinosaurs in Eagle County” with Billy Doran, rooftop of the Betty Ford Alpine Gardens Education Center

The Betty Ford Alpine Gardens also plans to add events and speakers throughout the summer. Check their website for updates and details.

For more information about Dinosaurs Among Us, visit [bettyfordalpinegardens.org](http://bettyfordalpinegardens.org) or call 970.476.0103.