DEVONIAN FISH AND AMPHIBIANS AND THE GENE-THEME MODEL

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Abstract

Certain fish and amphibians from Devonian rocks share common features. Line after line of this fish evidence for evolution, however, has been removed with the uncovering of new data. One main linking candidate remains, but even this is now on the verge of collapse, leaving my creationist alternative view of why they share features (the gene-theme model) emerging as the strongest contender for fulfilling the role as the answer to why there are shared features.

The oldest known amphibian is now viewed to be 360 million years old on the evolutionary time scale. The creature, known as ***Ichthyostega,*** shares a number of features with certain types of fishes in and around that time. For example, both ***Ichthyostega*** and the fishes have the type of vertebrae known as arch vertebrae (Figure 1). Another similarity is the pattern on the surface of the teeth, the similarity persisting down to the microscopic level. The brain capsule is similar in that it is in two parts. The skull pattern is also similar (Figure 2).

Several fish types have been linked to ***Ichthyostega*** over the years, such as coelacanth, lungfishes, and eusthenopteron, but all such ties have since been abandoned.

In recent years, a number of other fossil amphibians have come to light. One of them, ***Acanthostega,*** has eight digits. It is found to have a brain case similar to the fish ***Moythomasia,*** a form of ray-finned fish dated at 377-367 million years (Clack, 1994, p. 393), while ***Acanthostega*** is given the age of 360 million years (Coates and Clack, 1990).

A form of ***Ichthyostega*** has been discovered with seven digits, and another amphibian named ***Tulerpeton*** with six digits, both younger than ***Ichthyostega.*** At present, fish known as panderichthyids are viewed to be closest to amphibians. These seem to range from 378 million years onward. They have paired fins and, like ***Ichthyostega,*** they have a finned tail. One of the more well-known members, ***Elpistostege,*** was originally identified as an amphibian due to the pattern of plates that make up the skull. Therefore, two amphibians were formerly identified as fish (Ahlberg and Milner, 1994, p. 508). ***Elpistostege*** is dated at about 360 million years. These fish also have several specialized features. This situation therefore raises questions over their alleged connections with amphibians.

Enter the Gene-Theme Model

Several types of fishes have been removed from the amphibian line. The gap between ***Ichthyostega*** and these fishes is geologically short on the evolutionary time scale. The plates in the skulls follow no particular order, and also fish are identified as amphibians and vice versa. All the foregoing facts point to that which I have called the Gene-Theme model (Brown, 1987a, b, 1989a, b, 1991). Within this model God could have created both fishes and amphibians with all of these similar features or He could have created these creatures with some of them, while others could have arrived via adaptation as part of the creature's genetic variation potential.

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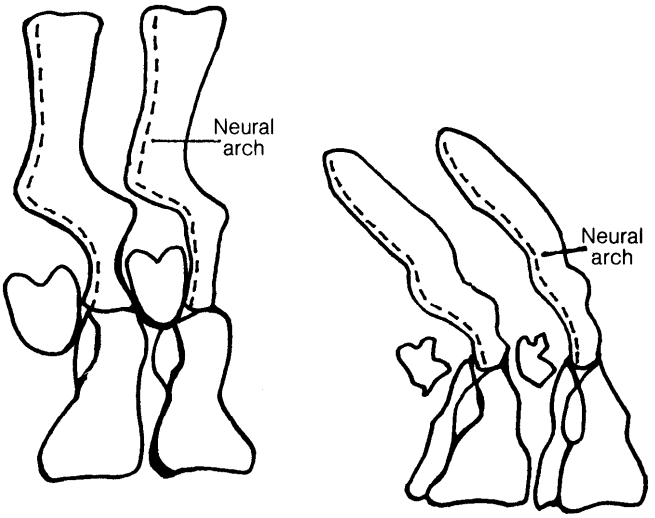

Figure 1. Both creatures share the arch type vertebrae. On the right fish on the left amphibian. Drawing by Lee MacPherson.

The Law of Symmetric Variation

The way amino acids are coded and arranged into families ensures that some changes in the bases of the codons that code for amino acids will produce the same amino acid and therefore symmetric changes, while other changes via mutation will produce a variation within the chemical group or family to which it belongs, giving a variational change. Any change which takes an amino acid beyond the group to which it belongs, will either be repaired by the repair system, if undesirable, or allowed to remain, if not harmful, as part of the broader expression of the law. Anything that is unhelpful and is not returned to the symmetric position by the repair system could result in the organism's removal from the population. All other genetic changes are merely vehicle systems for the law. The organism's variation potential is so enormous that it will ensure that kinds may adapt to almost any environment, provided the correct variation is there at the time. A human pair could, if they lived long enough, produce more variations than the number of atoms in the know universe before producing a person identical to their first offspring.

The Pentadactyl Limb

The discovery of amphibians with more than five digits does not in any way detract from my 1983 paper

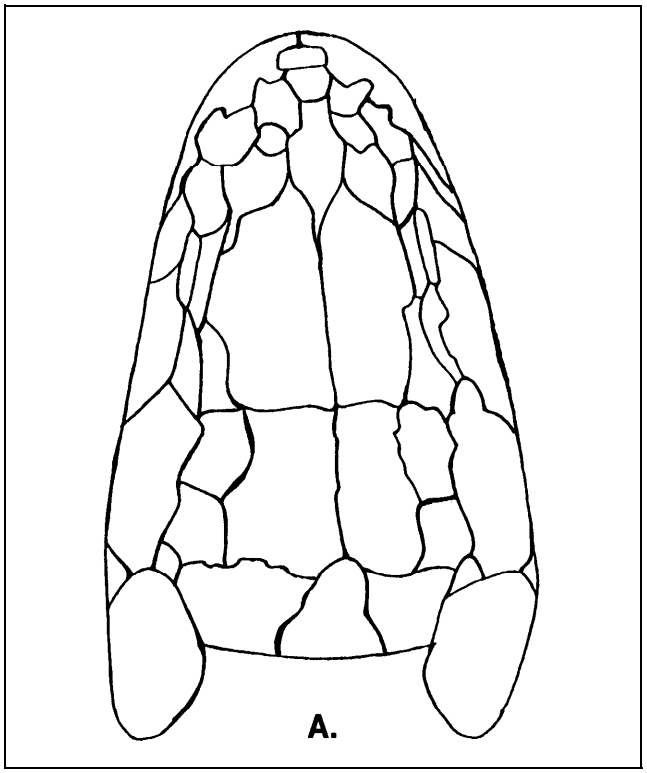

Figure 2. Skulls are: A. Eusthenopteron

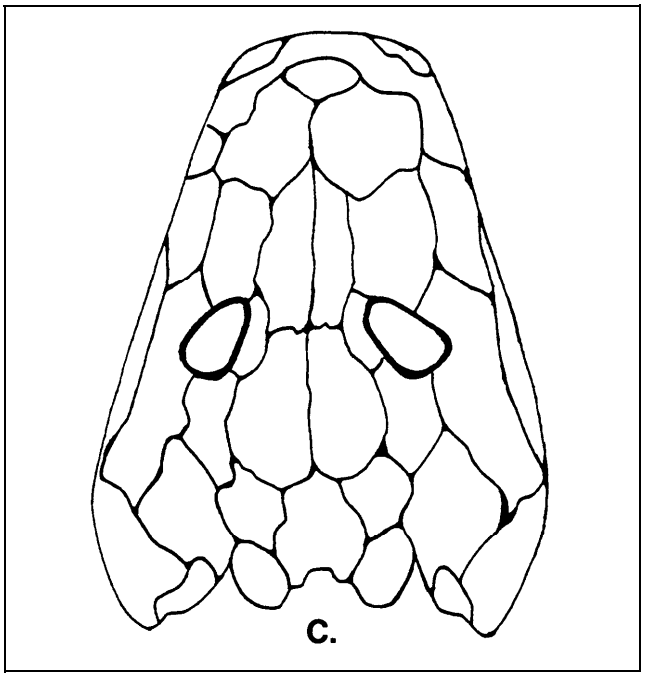

Figure 2. C. Ichthyostega. Drawing by Lee MacPherson.

(Brown, 1983, p. 6). My main point was that the boned limb with its basic design is the best type of limb. Indeed, in terms of digits, the fox and other members of the dog family have only four digits, while the frog has two of its limb bones fused, but this is merely variation within the basic boned limb which, as I mention in the paper, can occur.

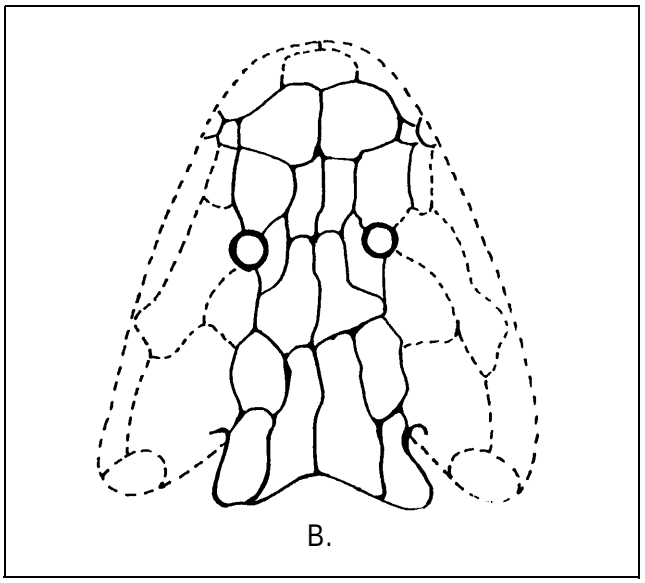

Figure 2. B. Elpistostege

The whole situation surrounding the Devonian fishes and amphibians does indeed seem to bear very well for the Gene-Theme Model and the Law of Symmetric Variation, the two most important principles in biology. Therefore, creation is beginning to win the day as more and more fossils are being discovered.

Table I. Dates for fish and amphibians and the growing evidence for the gene-theme model.

	Amphibians	Fish
	Ichthyostega	*Eusthenopteron*
360 myrs	*Acanthostega*	*Elpistostege*
	Tulerpeton	
	Hynerpeton	
370 myrs	*Strong Legs*	
		Moythomasia
380 myrs		*Panderichthyrids*
390 myrs		*Osteolepiforms*
400 myrs	Start of Devonian Rocks	

Footnote

After I had finished the paper two more fossil discoveries came to light. Amphibian remains dated at 365 million years, given the name ***Hynerpeton,*** show that the gap between 365 and 370 million years is filled with amphibians. To complete this view, amphibian remains have been found which are dated at 370 million years (Strong enough, 1994, p. 17). The panderichthyids are first found at 378 million years. The further back we discover amphibian remains along side the continued lack of intermediate forms will clearly signal the end of the evolutionary theory. If we allow at least a three million year history on the evolutionary scale for the amphibian at 370 million years, then clearly a time range from 378 million years will not be enough to evolve into an amphibian. To make things worse, going beyond 380 million years likely means that the fish assigned to the time are in less of a physical condition, such as ***Osteolepiforms,*** to produce an amphibian. We have seen with the case of strong legs, that it is logically possible to show that 10 million years is not enough to evolve into such an amphibian. In like manner the same would apply to any other amphibian discoveries, thus if remains were found at 375 million years then one could cover a 10 million year period up to 385 million years. Hence, the further back we find amphibian remains along with the lack of fossil intermediates the stronger the case for the Gene-Theme model and for creation. See Table I for the dates.

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Strong enough to leg it when the going got tough. 1994. *New Scientist* 143(1937):17.

Editorial Note: After this paper had been accepted, cranial remains of a new genus- *Elginerpeton* -were reported from the Upper Devonian of Scotland (Scat Craig beds, Upper Frasnian). It is not clear whether this genus had feet or fins, but it was assigned to the Tetrapoda on the basis of cranial characters. Perhaps these finds will result in showing that amphibians existed even lower in the stratigraphic record. The references are:

Ahlberg, P. E. 1995. *Elginerpeton pancheni* and the earliest tetrapod clade. *Nature* 373:420-424.
Carroll, R. 1995. Between fish an amphibian. *Nature* 373:389-390.

THE PHANTOM BRIDGE EXPOSED: THE LATEST TURTLE ATTACK

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Abstract

Do turtles have common ancestors that evolved many turtle-like traits before they acquired shells. So claim recent papers by Michael Lee published in Science and Natural History. An artist's conception of lizard-to-turtle progression was demonstrated and published by this author; but only one photograph of a skeleton was documented. Forty-five lizard-like creatures were divided into seven groups each and similarities were delineated. Yet, Lee's technical paper stated that "evidence uniting captorhinid . . . with turtles is shown to be weak." No statistical significance is documented. In fact the author of these theories admits to a luck of objectivity and to the embarrassment of persistent gaps in the continuum of life.

Introduction

Recently, Lee published his reasons for believing that turtles evolved from a lizard-like ancestry (Lee, 1993, 1994). He produced five drawings showing a hypothetical transition. These drawings have been redrawn in Figure 1 to demonstrate the body and cranial structures.

Unfortunately, these five drawings have many problems in terms of the reality of the organisms that they represent and that is why they are phantom drawings. The abstract of Lee's technical paper states that, "Evidence uniting captorhinid . . . with turtles is shown to be weak." (Lee, 1994) A question the reader should ask is that if the relationship between ***Captorhinus*** and ***Proganochelys*** is weak, then why make it part of the proposed progression? Thus the author states that ***Captorhinus*** which he draws as a non-vertebrate (in reality it is a vertebrate-a reptile), should be excluded in hypothetical progression of the vertebrate lizards. Yet in the popular article, Lee schematically includes ***Captorhinus*** in his diagrammatical sketches.

Most creationist and evolutionist biologists would agree that the "oldest" fossil turtle, ***Proganochelys,*** is a valid and legitimate primitive turtle. Notice how similar this turtle looks to the turtles of today (Frair, 1991, Figure 2). Therefore, it is easy to see why somebody would associate the ***Proganochelys*** turtle reported to be 210 million years old to the turtles we have today. In fact, Frair states this about ***Proganochelys,*** "The first turtles, although differing in some features from extant forms, clearly were turtles." (Frair, 1991, p. 22) Also, evolutionist Jackel says that, "They are already unquestionably turtles in most features of their anatomy and show little if any affinity with other groups of reptiles." (Carroll, 1969, p. 9).

Lee went to the University of Illinois to search for 45 specimens which he classified into seven different groups in order to form his background data. Next, he

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