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Oh Baby Dinosaur, How Do You Grow?

An Interview with Professor Robert Reisz
Paleontologist, University of Toronto

What does modern paleontology look like?

Paleontologists are actually scientists, a very small community of scientists that look at the history of life on Earth. What we are looking at is the biosphere. The biosphere is where organisms, like us, interact with the planet. And that area is a very dynamic region of the Earth.

How does your research work?

So I have two main areas of research currently. One is around animals that lived around 300 million years ago: the biology, the evolutionary history, the diversification, the extinction of these animals. The second aspect of my research is working on another stage of vertebrate evolution, and that's currently where I'm focusing a lot of attention, and that's the beginning of the age of dinosaurs. But in particular, I'm very excited because we can actually look at the embryology of these animals as the fossil record is giving us exciting new information from South Africa and from China. For example, we are looking at the oldest embryos on land that were laid by animals, and in this case, they happened to be dinosaurs. We are also looking at the oldest eggs that were ever laid on land. So this is very cool stuff to work with. Understanding our environment, understanding our past, and understanding the potential for the future is probably the only thing that distinguishes us from other organisms, and therefore, this is just what makes us human.