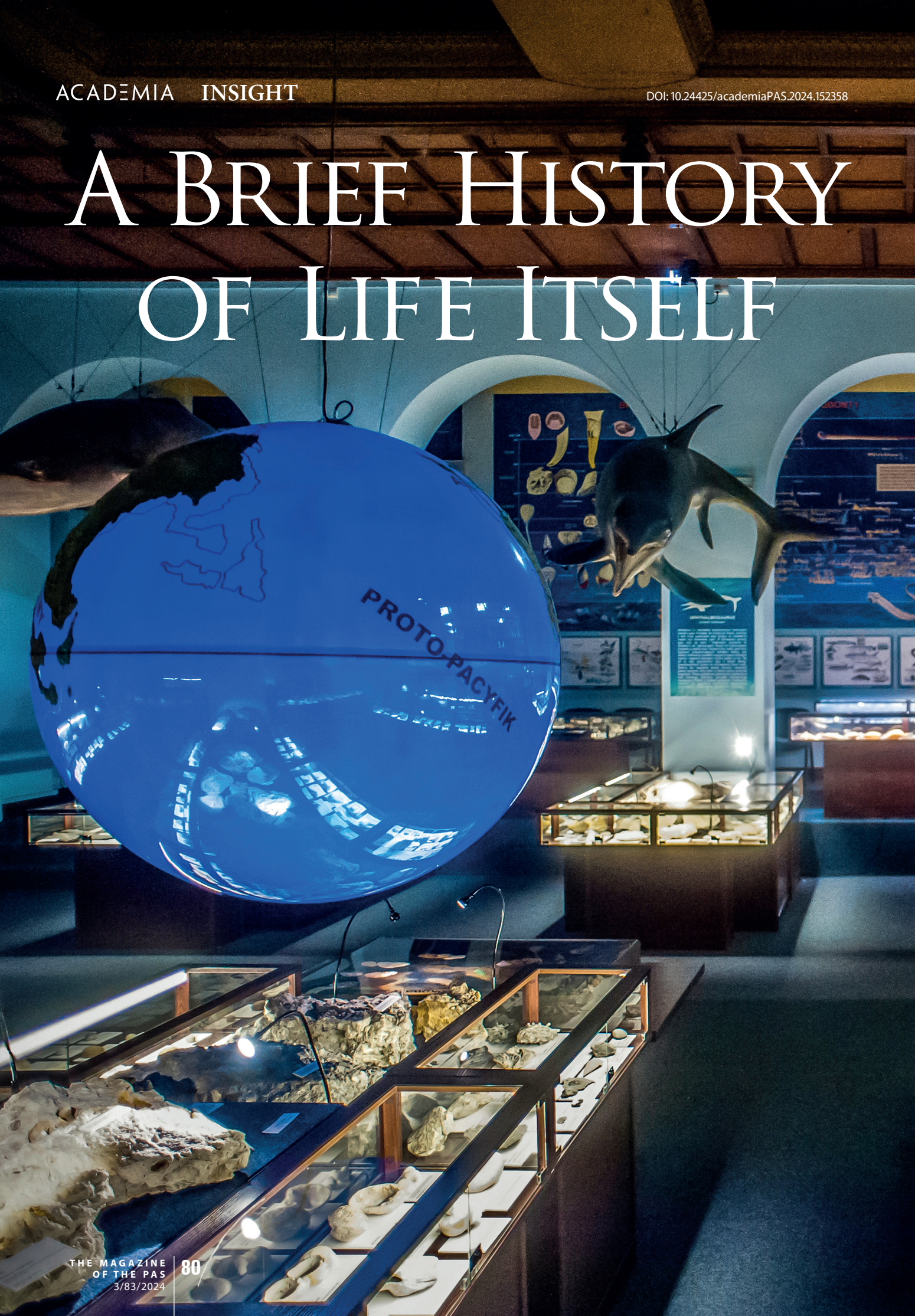


A BRIEF HISTORY OF LIFE ITSELF



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SYLWIA PIWOWAR

The Museum of Evolution at the Institute of Paleobiology, Polish Academy of Sciences, hosts one of Poland's most significant natural history exhibitions. It focuses primarily on the paleobiology of vertebrates, but sections on the evolution of other life forms are continuously being expanded. The diversity of specimens on display reflects the rich collections of the Institute of Paleobiology, which has been active for over 70 years



The exhibition on "Evolution in the Sea" – fossils and paleogeographic globes depicting the configurations of the continents in past periods



Photo 1
The museum's central hall featuring a model skeleton of *Opisthocoelicaudia skarzynskii*, a Cretaceous sauropod from Mongolia's Nemegt Formation

Photo 2
Diorama of the Triassic environment at the Krasiejów site in southern Poland, showing the early dinosaur *Silesaurus opolensis* among period-appropriate flora



Photo 3
Model skeletons of the Triassic reptiles *Smok wawelski* (background) and *Lisowicia bojani* (foreground)



The main theme of the Museum of Evolution's exhibitions is the history of the biosphere, with a particular emphasis on evolutionary processes and scientifically significant extinct organisms from Poland. The museum is operated by the Institute of Paleobiology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, which aims to popularize scientific findings within its research fields. Most displayed items originate from the institute's scientific work, while globally unique specimens are represented as model replicas.

Due to limited space, only a fraction of the Institute of Paleobiology's collections is on display at the Museum of Evolution. The exhibits showcase marine and terrestrial fauna from Poland and discoveries from the Polish-Mongolian Paleontological Expeditions of 1963–1971.

The history of the Museum of Evolution began in 1968 with an exhibition focused on the findings of the Polish-Mongolian Paleontological Expeditions, which explored Mongolia's Gobi Desert from geological and paleontological perspectives. In 1975, the exhibition was relocated to the current site in Warsaw's iconic Palace of Culture and Science. The present name, the "Museum of Evolution," was introduced in 1985.

The museum comprises six halls. The entrance hall displays the origins of life on Earth, late Triassic aquatic vertebrates from Krasiejów (a major site in southern Poland), and Mesozoic marine reptiles. The marine evolution hall focuses on fossils from marine environments, especially from Devonian (about 420–358 million years ago), Jurassic (about 201–145 million years ago), and Miocene (about 23–5 million years ago) periods. The central hall exhibits herbivorous dinosaurs, mammals, turtles, and lizards from Mongolia, pterosaurs, bird evolution, and a reconstruction of the late Triassic (about 228 million years ago) environment of Krasiejów, along with local fossils. Another hall is dedicated to Cretaceous (about 70 million years ago) dinosaurs from Mongolia's Nemegt Formation, with the main display being an original juvenile skeleton of the predatory dinosaur *Tarbosaurus bataar*. Since 1968, the skeleton has been displayed in the previously accepted upright posture with its tail on the ground, a reconstruction now considered inaccurate; work on updating the skeleton's position began this year. This hall also houses fossils from the Triassic site at Lisowice in southern Poland, including skeletal reconstructions of the reptiles *Smok wawelski* (named after the Wawel Dragon of Kraków folklore) and *Lisowicia bojani*. Two smaller halls display the evolution of turtles and mammals.

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Photo 4
Life reconstruction
of juvenile and adult
Cretaceous dinosaurs
Protoceratops andrewsi,
known from Mongolia's
Djadokhta Formation



Photo 5
Model skeleton of an adult
Cretaceous dinosaur
Tarbosaurus bataar from
Mongolia's Nemegt Formation



Photo 6
Life reconstruction of
the Pliocene hominid
Australopithecus afarensis,
nicknamed Lucy

Photo 7
Skeleton of a mountain hare,
Lepus timidus

Photo 8
Skeletons and wet specimens
of modern amphibians
and reptiles

Photo 9
Cast skeleton of the Jurassic
pterosaur *Rhamphorhynchus
muensteri*, with preserved
soft tissue impressions

Photo 10–12
While the main focus of
the Museum of Evolution
is on land evolution,
a room documenting the
fascinating story of evolution
in the sea is being expanded.
There is a striking variety
of shapes and adaptations
of creatures inhabiting
ancient seas, including spiral
impressions of ammonite
shells (photo 11) and colorful
skeletons and shells
of today's corals (photo 10)
and snails (photo 12).
In the past, as today,
the greatest biodiversity
in the seas was concentrated
in the equatorial zones

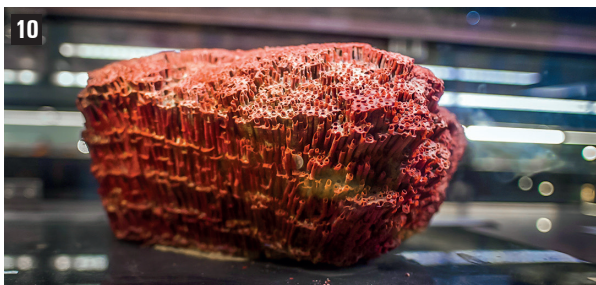




Photo 13
Cast skeleton of the lizard *Gilmoreteius chulsanensis* (“Macrocephalosaurus”) from the Cretaceous Baruungoyot Formation in Mongolia

Photo 14
Fossils from Jurassic seas of Poland, with a globe depicting ancient ocean and continental layouts above them

Photo 15
Entrance hall of the museum featuring an exhibit on the vertebrate transition to land. In the background, the original wooden decor of the Palace of Culture and Science from the 1950s can be seen

