

Unit 11: Ichthyosaurs

Narrator: While dinosaurs walked the earth, sea monsters called ichthyosaurs ruled the world's oceans.

Ichthyosaurs were ancient reptiles. They first appeared about 251 million years ago during the Triassic Period, about 20 million years before dinosaurs came about. True to their name, which means "fish-lizards" in Greek, the earliest ichthyosaurs looked much like lizards with fins. Over a period of 100 million years, their bodies changed and they developed fish-like tails. They had long, narrow skulls and jaws with sharp teeth. These teeth were used to catch and eat animals like fish and squid.

Their eyes were the largest ever recorded of any animal. In fact, one species, *Temnodontosaurus*, had eyes that were over 10 inches wide. Large eyes helped ichthyosaurs see through the dark waters of the deep ocean.

Ichthyosaurs were different sizes. Some were only around 60 centimeters long. But the longest were about 26 meters long. Ichthyosaurs had paddle-like fins and a large tail, which helped them swim at speeds of around 35 kmph. Altogether, these qualities put ichthyosaurs at the top of the food chain.

By the late Cretaceous period, about 25 million years before an asteroid wiped out the dinosaurs, ichthyosaurs became extinct. Some scientists believe it may have been a result of climate change, but the exact reason why these early sea monsters died out is still a mystery.