

A turiasaurian sauropod dinosaur from the Early Cretaceous Wealden Supergroup of the United Kingdom

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The Jurassic/Cretaceous (J/K) boundary, 145 Ma, has long been recognised as an extinction event or faunal turnover for sauropod dinosaurs, with many ‘basal’ lineages disappearing. However, recently, a number of ‘extinct’ groups have been recognised in the Early Cretaceous, including diplodocids in Gondwana, and non-titanosauriform macronarians in Laurasia. Turiasauria, a clade of non-neosauropod eusauropods, was originally thought to have been restricted to the Late Jurassic of western Europe. However, its distribution has recently been extended to the Late Jurassic of Tanzania (*Tendaguria tanzaniensis*), as well as the Early Cretaceous of the USA (*Mierasaurus bobyongi* and *Moabosaurus utahensis*), demonstrating the survival of another ‘basal’ clade across the J/K boundary. Teeth from the Middle Jurassic–Early Cretaceous of western Europe and North Africa have also tentatively been attributed to turiasaurs, whilst recent phylogenetic analyses recovered Late Jurassic taxa from Argentina and China as further members of Turiasauria. Here, an anterior dorsal vertebra (NHMUK 1871) from the Early Cretaceous Wealden Supergroup of the UK is described for the first time. It shares several synapomorphies with the turiasaurs *Moabosaurus* and *Tendaguria*, including: (1) a strongly dorsoventrally compressed centrum; (2) the retention of prominent epipophyses; and (3) an extremely low, non-bifid neural spine. NHMUK 1871 therefore represents the first postcranial evidence for Turiasauria from European deposits of unequivocal Early Cretaceous age. Although turiasaurs show clear heterodont dentition, only broad, characteristically ‘heart’-shaped teeth can currently be attributed to Turiasauria with confidence. As such, several putative turiasaur occurrences based on isolated teeth from Europe, as well as the Middle Jurassic and Early Cretaceous of Africa, cannot be confidently referred to Turiasauria. Unequivocal evidence for turiasaurs is therefore restricted to the late Middle Jurassic–Early Cretaceous of western Europe, the Late Jurassic of Tanzania, and the late Early Cretaceous of the USA, although remains from elsewhere might ultimately demonstrate that the group had a near-global distribution.

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ABSTRACT

The Jurassic/Cretaceous (J/K) boundary, 145 Ma, has long been recognised as an extinction event or faunal turnover for sauropod dinosaurs, with many ‘basal’ lineages disappearing. However, recently, a number of ‘extinct’ groups have been recognised in the Early Cretaceous, including diplodocids in Gondwana, and non-titanosauriform macronarians in Laurasia. Turiasauria, a clade of non-neosauropod eusauropods, was originally thought to have been restricted to the Late Jurassic of western Europe. However, its distribution has recently been extended to the Late Jurassic of Tanzania (*Tendaguria tanzaniensis*), as well as the Early Cretaceous of the USA (*Mierasaurus bobyouni* and *Moabosaurus utahensis*), demonstrating the survival of another ‘basal’ clade across the J/K boundary. Teeth from the Middle Jurassic–Early Cretaceous of western Europe and North Africa have also tentatively been attributed to turiasaurs, whilst recent phylogenetic analyses recovered Late Jurassic taxa from Argentina and China as further members of Turiasauria. Here, an anterior dorsal vertebra (NHMUK 1871) from the Early Cretaceous Wealden Supergroup of the UK is described for the first time. It shares several synapomorphies with the turiasaurs *Moabosaurus* and *Tendaguria*, including: (1) a strongly dorsoventrally compressed centrum; (2) the retention of prominent epiphyses; and (3) an extremely low, non-bifid neural spine. NHMUK 1871 therefore represents the first postcranial evidence for Turiasauria from European deposits of unequivocal Early Cretaceous age. Although turiasaurs show clear heterodont dentition, only broad, characteristically ‘heart’-shaped teeth can currently be attributed to Turiasauria with confidence. As such, several putative turiasaur occurrences based on isolated teeth from Europe, as well as the Middle Jurassic and Early Cretaceous of Africa, cannot be confidently referred to Turiasauria. Unequivocal evidence for turiasaurs is therefore restricted to the late Middle Jurassic–Early Cretaceous of western Europe, the Late Jurassic of Tanzania, and the late Early Cretaceous of the USA, although remains from elsewhere might ultimately demonstrate that the group had a near-global distribution.

INTRODUCTION

The Late Jurassic is often regarded as a period of heightened sauropod dinosaur diversity, prior to a precipitous decline across the Jurassic/Cretaceous (J/K) boundary (145 Ma), at which point many ‘basal’ sauropod lineages went extinct (Bakker, 1977; Hunt *et al.*, 1994; Wilson &

Sereno, 1998; Upchurch & Barrett, 2005; Barrett, McGowan & Page, 2009; Mannion *et al.*, 2011). Increasingly, however, it is becoming apparent that any J/K extinction was not instantaneous (Tennant *et al.*, 2017), at least in sauropods, with representatives of several 'extinct' sauropod groups now recognised from Early Cretaceous deposits (Gallina *et al.*, 2014; Royo-Torres *et al.*, 2014, 2017a,b; Upchurch, Mannion & Taylor, 2015; D'Emic & Foster, 2016; McPhee *et al.*, 2016).

The non-neosauropod eusauropod clade Turiasauria was first recognised by Royo-Torres, Cobos & Alcalá (2006) for three genera (*Turiasaurus riodevensis*, *Losillasaurus giganteus*, *Galveosaurus herreroi*) from either the latest Jurassic (late Tithonian) or earliest Cretaceous (early Berriasian) of Spain. Although *Galveosaurus* has subsequently been demonstrated to more likely represent a macronarian neosauropod (e.g. Barco, Canudo & Cuenca-Bescós, 2006; Carballido *et al.*, 2011; D'Emic, 2012; Mannion *et al.*, 2013), the western European record of named turiasaurs has since been expanded to include the Late Jurassic Portuguese taxon *Zby atlanticus* (Mateus, Mannion & Upchurch, 2014). In addition to postcranial remains, both *Turiasaurus* and *Zby* preserve teeth. These tooth crowns are mesiodistally broad relative to their apicobasal length, and have a distinctive 'heart'-shaped outline (Royo-Torres, Cobos & Alcalá, 2006), narrowing mesiodistally along their apical halves (Mateus, Mannion & Upchurch, 2014). Primarily consisting of isolated teeth, additional remains have been referred to Turiasauria from contemporaneous Iberian deposits (Royo-Torres, Cobos & Alcalá, 2006; Royo-Torres *et al.*, 2009; Mocho *et al.*, 2016). Several authors have suggested that 'heart'-shaped teeth from the Middle Jurassic–Early Cretaceous of the UK and France might also be attributable to turiasaurs (Royo-Torres, Cobos & Alcalá, 2006; Néraudeau *et al.*, 2012; Royo-Torres & Upchurch, 2012; Mocho *et al.*, 2016).

The distribution of turiasaurs was recently expanded to include the Early Cretaceous of the western USA (Royo-Torres *et al.*, 2017a), based on relatively complete skeletons of two taxa, *Mierasaurus bobyouni* (Royo-Torres *et al.*, 2017a) and *Moabosaurus utahensis* (Britt *et al.*, 2017), and thus confirming the group's survival across the J/K boundary. Finally, several remains from Africa have been suggested to represent turiasaurs. Mocho *et al.* (2016) commented upon similarities of two fragmentary Middle Jurassic teeth from Madagascar and Morocco, as well as a partial tooth from the Early Cretaceous of Libya, with European turiasaurs. Xing *et al.* (2015) also recovered the Middle Jurassic Moroccan sauropod *Atlasaurus imelakei* in a polytomy with *Losillasaurus* and *Turiasaurus*. Royo-Torres & Cobos (2009) suggested that several postcranial remains from the Late Jurassic Tendaguru Formation of Tanzania might also belong to Turiasauria. Most recently, Mannion *et al.* (in press) presented new anatomical data and phylogenetic analyses linking the enigmatic Tendaguru sauropod *Tendaguria tanzaniensis* with the turiasaur *Moabosaurus*. These authors recovered additional Late Jurassic taxa as possible turiasaurs: in some of their analyses, the Tendaguru sauropod *Janenschia robusta* and the Argentinean taxon *Tehuelchesaurus benitezii* were also placed in Turiasauria, whilst the Chinese sauropod *Bellusaurus sui* was consistently positioned as a turiasaur too.

Here, a previously undescribed anterior dorsal vertebra (NHMUK 1871) of a turiasaur from the Early Cretaceous Wealden Supergroup of the UK is presented. The putative turiasaurian affinities of several African and European occurrences are also discussed, including the utility of tooth morphology for identifying turiasaurs.

HISTORY AND PROVENANCE OF NHMUK 1871

NHMUK 1871 is a relatively complete, but poorly preserved, anterior dorsal vertebra from an unknown Early Cretaceous ‘Wealden’ locality of the UK. Purchased by the NHMUK in 1891 as part of the Samuel H. Beckles collection, this specimen does not seem to have ever been mentioned in the published literature. Correspondence between Beckles and the NHMUK also does not provide any information on the provenance of NHMUK 1871. Most of the dinosaur specimens collected by Beckles (e.g. the sauropod *Haestasaurus* [*Pelorosaurus*] *becklesii* [Upchurch, Mannion & Taylor, 2015]) came from the late Berriasian–Valanginian Hastings Group, in Hastings, East Sussex, southeastern England (Woodhams, 1990), and so this is the most likely source of NHMUK 1871. However, Beckles also collected material from elsewhere in the southeast of England, including the Isle of Wight (Woodhams, 1990), and so the specimen could conceivably have come from another Wealden locality. As such, although NHMUK 1871 is most likely to be late Berriasian–Valanginian, it could conceivably have come from any section in the Wealden Supergroup, and thus its stratigraphic age could be anywhere from late Berriasian–early Aptian (Batten, 2011).

NHMUK 1871 comprises the centrum (including neural arch pedicels) and unfused neural arch. It is not possible to re-articulate the centrum and neural arch. Although this might be a result of missing material through erosion, it remains possible that these elements do not belong together. In particular, whereas the neural arch is primarily black in colour, only a few small areas of the centrum display a similar colour. As such, although the available information indicates that they came from the same locality, and their relative sizes are consistent, it is possible that the centrum and neural arch come from separate beds.

Institutional Abbreviations

NHMUK, Natural History Museum, London, UK

SYSTEMATIC PALAEONTOLOGY

Sauropoda Marsh, 1878

Eusauropoda Upchurch, 1995

Turiasauria Royo-Torres, Cobos & Alcalá, 2006

Turiasauria indet.

Material: NHMUK 1871, a relatively complete, but poorly preserved, anterior dorsal vertebra (Figs 1, 2).

Locality and stratigraphic position: Unknown locality, southeastern England, United Kingdom; Wealden Supergroup; late Berriasian–early Aptian (Early Cretaceous).

DESCRIPTION

The centrum is poorly preserved and incomplete, especially around the ventrolateral margins of its posterior cotyle (Fig. 1; see Table 1 for measurements). It is strongly opisthocoelous, and much wider mediolaterally than it is dorsoventrally tall (ratio = 1.44). The ventral surface is transversely convex, lacking ridges or excavations. Each lateral surface is too poorly preserved to determine whether the parapophyses were situated on the centrum or on the neural arch pedicels, although they are definitely absent from the preserved neural arch. Based on the right side of the centrum, a lateral pneumatic foramen is present (Fig. 1), but poor preservation and infilling by matrix mean that little of its morphology can be discerned. There is evidence for several poorly preserved laminae, comprising the anterior centrodiapophyseal lamina (ACDL), posterior centrodiapophyseal lamina (PCDL), centroprezygapophyseal lamina (CPRL), and centropostzygapophyseal lamina (CPOL) (Fig. 1). The neural arch pedicels terminate a short distance from the posterior margin of the centrum.

Erosion of the centrum in places reveals that it was pneumatized, with rounded camerae of ~15 mm in diameter. No evidence for pneumaticity is visible in the neural arch. Unfortunately, attempts to CT scan the vertebra, to examine its internal tissue structure, were unsuccessful, as a result of its high density. As such, we cannot be sure whether the centrum was pneumatized by small camerae throughout, or if these were primarily restricted to near the outer bone surface.

In general, the neural arch is better preserved than the centrum (Fig. 2; see Table 1 for measurements). The flat articular surfaces of the widely separated prezygapophyses face dorsomedially and slightly anteriorly. They also expand anteroposteriorly towards their lateral tips. There is evidence for a V-shaped interprezygapophyseal lamina (TPRL), but this has been largely worn away (Fig. 2). The postzygapophyses are situated more dorsally than the prezygapophyses, and their articular surfaces face ventrolaterally and posteriorly. Overall, the zygapophyseal table is oriented at approximately 40° to the horizontal. There is no hyposphene, which is consistent with this being an anterior dorsal vertebra, and the postzygapophyses are connected by a horizontal interpostzygapophyseal lamina (TPOL). A prominent epipophysis is present on the dorsal surface of each postzygapophysis (Fig. 2).

The diapophyses project laterally and slightly ventrally, and there is evidence for a poorly preserved PCDL. The anterior and posterior surfaces of the diapophyses are unexcavated. A poorly preserved, near-horizontal postzygodiapophyseal lamina (PODL) is present. A shallow, dorsally-facing, elliptical spinodiapophyseal fossa (SDF) is situated anterior to the PODL, bounded anteriorly by the spinoprezygapophyseal lamina (SPRL) (Fig. 2).

SPRLs run dorsomedially from the middle of the posterior margin of the prezygapophyses. The anterior surface of the neural spine is transversely concave between the two SPRLs, and becomes rugose towards the midline, although there is no clearly defined prespinal ridge. The posterior surface of the neural spine is transversely concave, but poor preservation obscures whether a postspinal ridge or rugosity was present. Dorsomedially oriented, undivided spinopostzygapophyseal laminae (SPOLs) contribute to the posterolateral margins of the neural spine, but there are no spinodiapophyseal laminae (SPDLs). The dorsoventrally low, unbifurcated neural spine projects only very slightly above the level of the postzygapophyses, and is anteroposteriorly narrow, especially towards the midline (Fig. 2).

DISCUSSION

Taxonomic affinities of NHMUK 1871

A strongly dorsoventrally compressed centrum (mediolateral width to dorsoventral height ratio of > 1.3) characterises the anterior dorsal vertebrae of several somphospondylan titanosauriforms (Mannion *et al.*, 2013), the basal macronarian *Lourinhasaurus* (Mocho *et al.*, 2014), *Apatosaurus* (Gilmore, 1936), and Turiasauria (Mannion *et al.*, in press). The presence of camerae in the centrum is consistent with the anteriormost dorsal vertebrae of most eusauropods more derived than *Omeisaurus*, whereas the absence of clear camellae suggests that NHMUK 1871 lies outside of Titanosauriformes, and that it is not a mamenchisaurid (Wedel, 2003, 2005).

The steeply inclined zygapophyseal table of NHMUK 1871 is most similar to the morphology in the anterior dorsal vertebrae of titanosaurs and rebbachisaurids (Carballido *et al.*, 2012). Whereas the cervical vertebrae of most sauropods are characterised by the presence of epipophyses (Yates, 2007; Wilson & Upchurch, 2009; Mannion *et al.*, 2013), their retention in anterior dorsal vertebrae is much less common, where they tend to be reduced structures (Mannion *et al.*, in press). However, NHMUK 1871 shares the presence of prominent epipophyses with the turiasaurs *Moabosaurus* and *Tendaguria*, as well as *Jobaria* (Mannion *et al.*, in press). Only a small number of sauropod taxa are characterised by such a low neural spine in their anterior dorsal vertebrae, in which the spine is approximately level with the SPOLs. *Euhelopus* and *Mamenchisaurus* both share this feature, but the anterior dorsal neural spines of those taxa are bifid (Ouyang & Ye, 2002; Wilson & Upchurch, 2009). In contrast, the non-bifid anterior dorsal neural spines of *Moabosaurus* and *Tendaguria* (Britt *et al.*, 2017; Mannion *et al.*, in press) strongly resemble that of NHMUK 1871.

In summary, the combination of: (1) a dorsoventrally compressed centrum; (2) the retention of prominent epipophyses; (3) the low, non-bifid neural spine; and (4) the overall morphology of NHMUK 1871, more closely resembles the holotypic dorsal vertebrae of the turiasaurs *Moabosaurus* and *Tendaguria* than any other sauropods. The anterior and posterior surfaces of the diapophyses of NHMUK 1871 are unexcavated though, contrasting with those two taxa (Mannion *et al.*, in press). Despite the incomplete and fragmentary nature of NHMUK 1871, it appears to be readily referable to Turiasauria, more closely related to *Moabosaurus* + *Tendaguria* than to other turiasaurs. The lack of fusion between the centrum and neural arch indicates that this individual was not fully grown at the time of death.

Possible implications for turiasaurs from the Late Jurassic Tendaguru Formation of Tanzania

Upchurch, Mannion & Taylor (2015) recovered a sister taxon relationship between *Janenschia* and *Haestasaurus* (see also Mannion *et al.*, in press), which are sympatric with *Tendaguria* and (probably) NHMUK 1871, respectively. Such close affinities might indicate a close faunal relationship between the latest Jurassic Tendaguru Formation and the Early Cretaceous Wealden Supergroup. Furthermore, this could conceivably be regarded as circumstantial evidence that *Tendaguria* is a junior synonym of *Janenschia* if NHMUK 1871 was recovered from the same area and stratigraphic bed as *Haestasaurus*. Given that both *Janenschia* and *Tendaguria* are recovered as turiasaurs in some of the phylogenetic analyses of

Mannion *et al.* (in press), synonymy remains a possibility. However, until we find limb material associated with anterior dorsal vertebrae that can be referred to any of these taxa, such synonymisation cannot be justified.

Turiasaurian sauropod biogeography and evolutionary history

In addition to the named taxa *Turiasaurus*, *Losillasaurus*, *Zby*, *Mierasaurus*, *Moabosaurus*, and *Tendaguria*, several remains have been referred to Turiasauria (see Introduction). Most of these referrals are based on isolated teeth. Although the ‘heart’-shape is quite distinctive in most of the referred western European teeth, this is not the case in all instances (e.g. the type specimen of *Oplosaurus armatus*, from the Early Cretaceous of the UK), and especially not for the African specimens (two of which preserve only half of the crown). Mocho *et al.* (2016) identified three morphotypes of putative turiasaur teeth, which they suggested could be explained in two ways: either they represent different taxa, potentially including non-turiasaurs, or they are indicative of variation along the tooth row. The North American turiasaurs *Mierasaurus* and *Moabosaurus* show a clear heterodont dentition (Britt *et al.*, 2017; Royo-Torres *et al.*, 2017a), with subtle heterodonty present in *Turiasaurus* too (Royo-Torres & Upchurch, 2012). As such, the second hypothesis of Mocho *et al.* (2016) might well be correct. However, two of their morphotypes overlap with the teeth of other non-neosauropods, and thus only broad, ‘heart’-shaped teeth can currently be attributed to Turiasauria with confidence. As such, the isolated teeth from the Middle Jurassic and Early Cretaceous of Africa cannot unambiguously be referred to Turiasauria, and are herein regarded as indeterminate eusauropods.

Xing *et al.* (2015) recovered the Middle Jurassic Moroccan sauropod *Atlasaurus* as a turiasaur in their phylogenetic analysis, but this result was not supported in recent studies that scored turiasaurian taxa based on firsthand observations (Mannion, Allain & Moine, 2017; Royo-Torres *et al.* 2017a; Mannion *et al.*, in press). Very little published information is currently available for *Atlasaurus*, and it is in need of revision. As such, its phylogenetic affinities are uncertain (see Mannion *et al.*, in press), but there is currently no evidence to support a turiasaurian placement. Finally, Mannion *et al.* (in press) recovered two Late Jurassic taxa within Turiasauria that would greatly extend the group’s distribution: the Argentinean sauropod *Tehuelchesaurus*, and the Chinese taxon *Bellusaurus*. However, those placements should be treated with caution: *Tehuelchesaurus* was placed outside of Turiasauria when extended implied weighting was applied, and *Bellusaurus* is known only from juvenile remains, which might affect its phylogenetic position (Moore *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, these positions have not been recovered in independent analyses (e.g. D’Emic, 2012; Royo-Torres & Upchurch, 2012; Carballido *et al.*, 2017).

In summary, there is currently only unequivocal evidence for Turiasauria in the late Middle Jurassic–Early Cretaceous of western Europe (UK, France, Spain and Portugal), the Late Jurassic of Tanzania, and the late Early Cretaceous of the USA, but other remains suggest the possibility that the clade was more widespread, at least in the Late Jurassic.

CONCLUSIONS

A previously undescribed anterior dorsal vertebra (NHMUK 1871) from the Early Cretaceous Wealden Supergroup of the UK is recognised as a turiasaurian eusauropod dinosaur. It shares several synapomorphies with the Late Jurassic Tanzanian sauropod *Tendaguria*, as well as with *Moabosaurus*, from the Early Cretaceous of the USA. NHMUK 1871 represents the first postcranial evidence for Turiasauria from European deposits of unequivocal Early Cretaceous age. Unambiguous evidence for the non-neosauropod eusauropod clade Turiasauria is restricted to the late Middle Jurassic–Early Cretaceous of western Europe, the Late Jurassic of Tanzania, and the late Early Cretaceous of the USA, although remains from the Late Jurassic of Argentina and China might mean that the group had a near-global distribution.

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Figure 1. Photographs of the anterior dorsal centrum NHMUK 1871 in (A) anterior, (B) posterior, (C) left lateral, (D) right lateral, (E) dorsal, and (F) ventral views. Abbreviations: ACDL, anterior centrodiapophyseal lamina; CPOL, centropostzygapophyseal lamina; CPRL, centroprezygapophyseal lamina; lpf, lateral pneumatic foramen; nc, neural canal; PCDL, posterior centrodiapophyseal lamina. Scale bar equals 100 mm.

Figure 2. Photographs of the anterior dorsal neural arch NHMUK 1871 in (A) anterior, (B) posterior, (C) right lateral, and (D) dorsal views. Abbreviations: dia, diapophysis; epi, epipophysis; PCDL, posterior centrodiapophyseal lamina; PODL, postzygapophysis; poz, postzygapophysis; prz, prezygapophysis; SDF, spinodiapophyseal fossa; SPOL, spinopostzygapophyseal lamina; SPRL, spinoprezygapophyseal lamina; TPOL, interpostzygapophyseal lamina; TPRL, interprezygapophyseal lamina. Scale bar equals 200 mm.

Table 1. Measurements of the anterior dorsal vertebra NHMUK 1871. All measurements in millimetres.

Dimension	Measurement
Centrum length (including condyle)	229
Centrum length (excluding condyle)	170
Anterior centrum dorsoventral height	158
Anterior centrum mediolateral width	228
Total preserved dorsoventral height of neural arch and spine	205
Neural arch height	167
Transverse width from midline to distal tip of right diapophysis	248

Figure 1

Photographs of the anterior dorsal centum NHMUK 1871.

(A) anterior, (B) posterior, (C) left lateral, (D) right lateral, (E) dorsal, and (F) ventral views.

Abbreviations: ACDL, anterior centrodiapophyseal lamina; CPOL, centropostzygapophyseal lamina; CPRL, centroprezygapophyseal lamina; lpf, lateral pneumatic foramen; nc, neural canal; PCDL, posterior centrodiapophyseal lamina. Scale bar equals 100 mm.

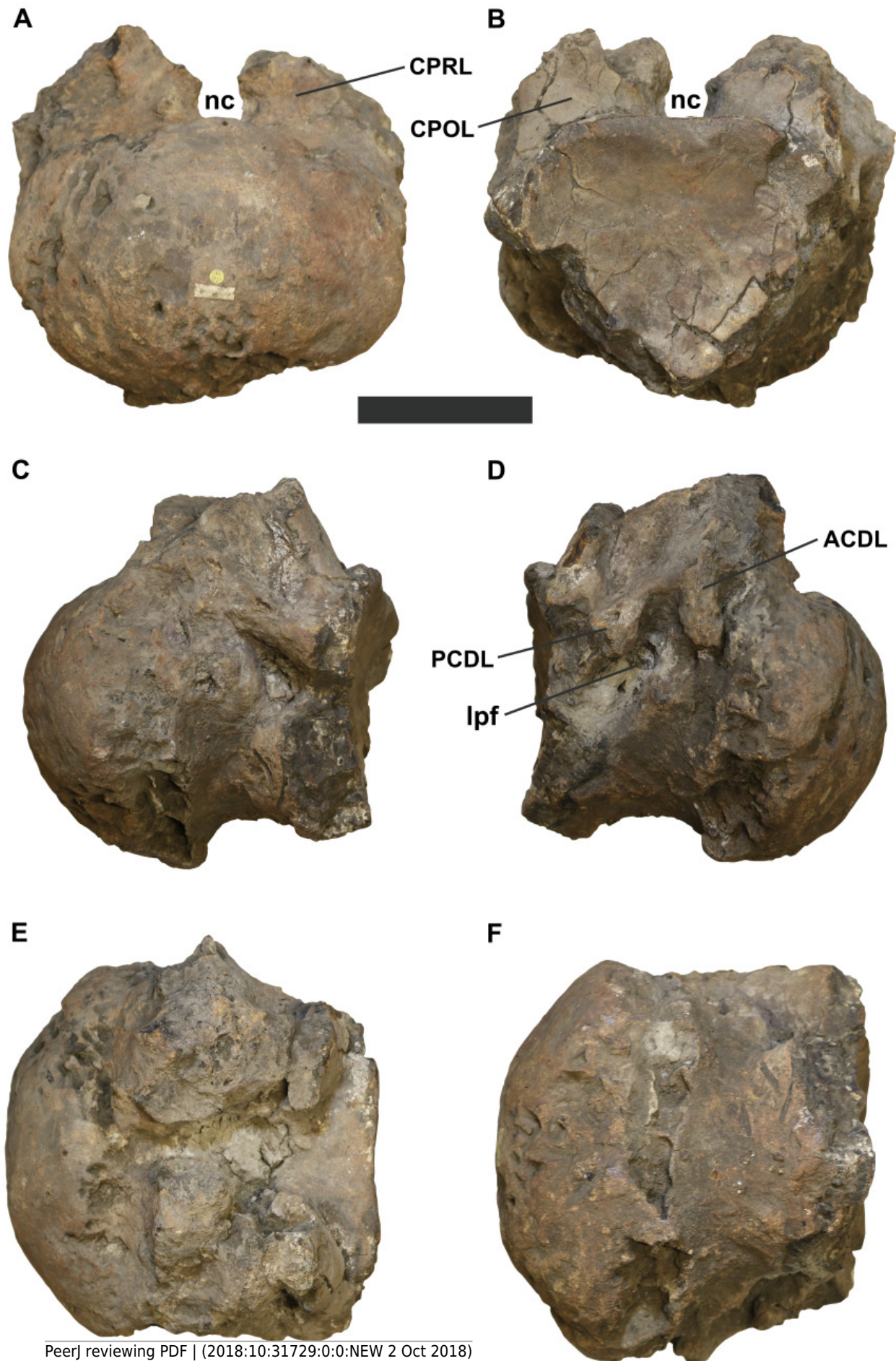


Figure 2

Photographs of the anterior dorsal neural arch NHMUK 1871.

(A) anterior, (B) posterior, (C) right lateral, and (D) dorsal views. Abbreviations: dia, diapophysis; epi, epipophysis; PCDL, posterior centrodiapophyseal lamina; PODL, postzygapophysis; poz, postzygapophysis; prz, prezygapophysis; SDF, spinodiapophyseal fossa; SPOL, spinopostzygapophyseal lamina; SPRL, spinoprezygapophyseal lamina; TPOL, interpostzygapophyseal lamina; TPRL, interprezygapophyseal lamina. Scale bar equals 200 mm.

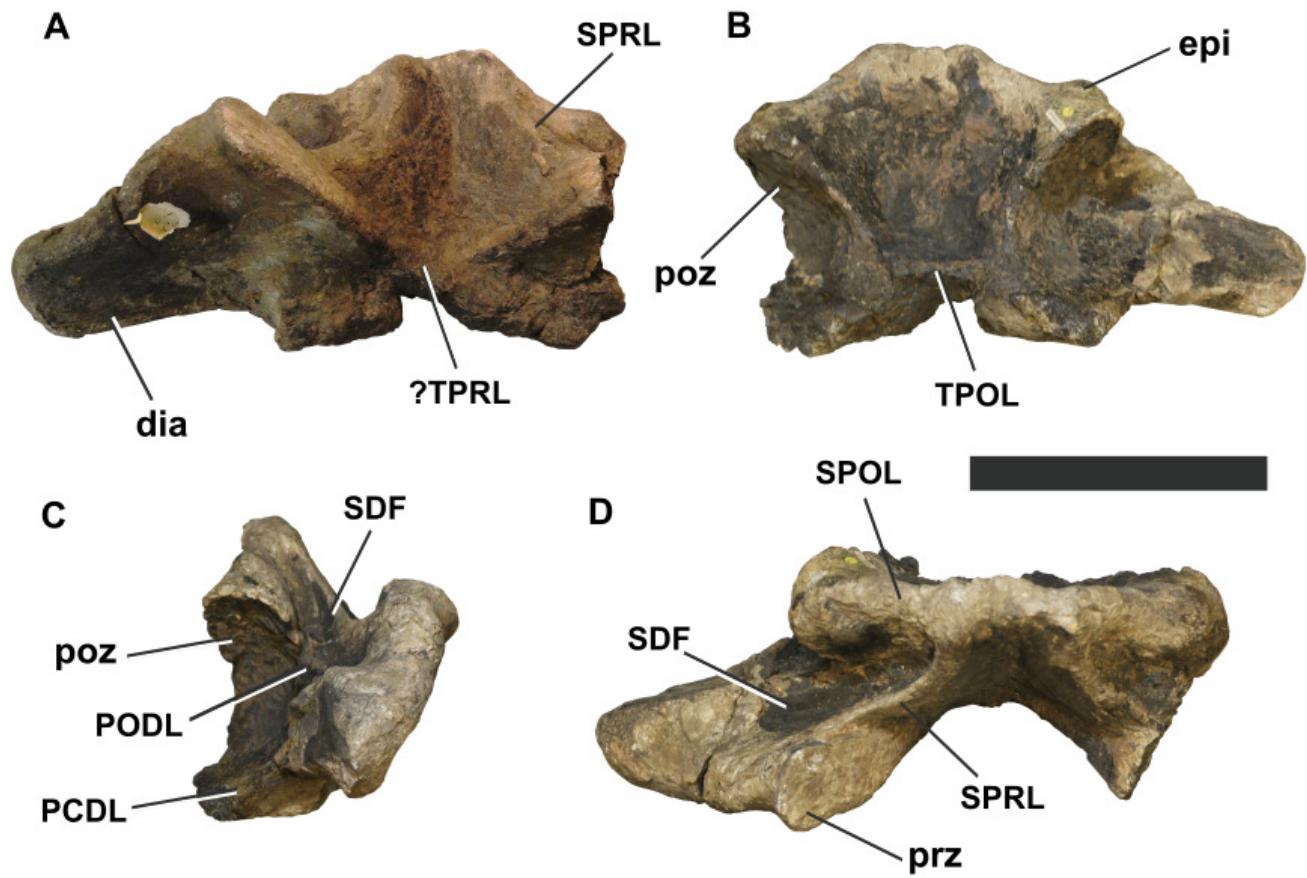


Table 1(on next page)

Measurements of the anterior dorsal vertebra NHMUK 1871.

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