‘Thieves,’ ‘demons,’ and pint-sized birds among world’s dinosaurs

Word Café
by Mara Fisher

In a vast marble hall in the heart of the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles, skeletons of a Tyrannosaurus rex and Triceratops leer toward one another as if locked in battle, their fearsome rage so palpable you can almost hear the earth-shaking cries. Icons of the museum since they were first installed in 1996, the “Dueling Dinos’” fighting days are of course long gone, their fossils dating back 67 million years.

Dinosaurs are a relatively recent area of study, with the now extinct creatures having only been identified as a class of Mesozoic reptiles in 1841, when Sir Richard Owen coined the category, from the Greek “deinos,” meaning “terrible” or “fearfully great,” and “sauros,” or “lizard.” A large grouping of our most well-known dinos sport the same suffix, like the aforementioned Tyrannosaurus rex, which combines the Greek “tyranno” (“tyrant”) with “sauros” and “rex” (“king”) to form the mighty designation “king tyrant lizard.”

Other uses of “sauros” abound. There’s the Brachiosaurus, meaning “arm lizard,” named for the long-necked quadrupedal animal’s elongated limbs. (They’re the first dinosaurs glimpsed in “Jurassic Park” as Sam Neill’s gobsmacked paleontologist sheds a tear and the film’s monumental theme music reaches its crescendo.) “Einiosaurus,” a plant-eater with a curved nasal horn also on display at the museum, translates to “buffalo lizard,” originating from the Blackfeet Indian word for the American buffalo, “eini.” There’s also the Brontosaurus (“thunder lizard”), Apatosaurus (“deceptive lizard”), and Stegosaurus, or “roof lizard,” determined as such because the ancient creature’s telltale upright dorsal plates were originally thought to lay flat, like tiles on a roof.

Then there are the herbivorous, beaked Ceratopsia, or “horned face,” dinosaurs, arriving from the Greek “keras” meaning “horn of an animal” and “ops,” or “face.” Those include the Triceratops (“three-horned face”); the dog-sized Bagaceratops, first discovered in Mongolia’s Gobi Desert and titled from the Mongolian “baga,” meaning “small”; and “Diabloceratops,” or “devil-horned face,” whose sinister skull resembles the curved-horn Baphomet.

Of similarly satanic influence are the names of two pachycephalosaurs with a bony dome and spikes on the top of their heads: the “dragon king,” Dracorex, and the Stygimoloch, translating to “demon from the river Styx.” And death arrives not with a scythe but a sickle-shaped claw with the nightmare-inducing Velociraptor, or “swift thief,” from the Latin “velox” (“speedy”) and “raptor,” meaning “robber.”

And there are many more to come. On average, paleontologists name a new dinosaur species every two weeks from fossils discovered at sites around the globe, armed with Greek, Latin, and any number of local languages to devise each new title. In 2022, the Jakapil, an early bipedal species from Argentina, was identified, breathing new life both into the dinosaur and the extinct Puelchean language from which the species receives its label (translating to “shield bearer”). The following year, scientists in Chile announced the discovery of a species they called the Gonkoken, from the words “gon” (meaning “similar to”) and “koken” (“wild duck or swan”) in the extinct language of the Aónik’enk, the indigenous people that inhabited the region where the species was found.

The name of the smallest dinosaur ever to be discovered seems simple by contrast—the hummingbird, identified by Irish zoologist Nicholas Aylward Vigors in 1825. Dubbed for the sound created by their beating wings, the earliest species of hummingbirds appeared 34–28 million years ago, evolving—like all birds—directly from the same group of theropods that counts the “king tyrant lizard” and “three-horned face” among its descendants. While non-avian dinosaur species met their demise after a massive asteroid struck Mexico’s Yucatán Peninsula about 66 million years ago, those with the gift of flight survived.

So if it’s living dinosaurs you’d like to encounter, no need to hire a team of genetic scientists to create a multi-billion-dollar theme park of de-extinct dinosaurs. Rather, look around—they’re living, breathing, flapping, chirping, hooting, and squawking all around us.

Las Madrinas enters its 92nd year

Las Madrinas, the oldest affiliate group of Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, honored 19 families and their daughters for their service to the Southern California community at the Las Madrinas Ball.

Larchmont resident Victoria Lee Bessant was among the debutantes.

The organization continues its 92nd year of support for the hospital with funding toward a $5 million pledge to the Las Madrinas Endowment and Chair in development-behavioral pediatrics, said Kimberly Root Sandifer, president of Las Madrinas

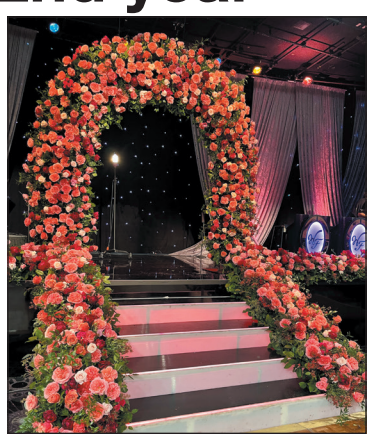
Larchmont Florist created the “California Winter Garden” themed centerpieces and floral décor. The Wayne Foster Orchestra accompanied the Presentation of the Debutantes and played the traditional waltz that transitioned the party from ceremony to celebration at the ball, held Dec. 20 in the Beverly Hilton Hotel’s International Ballroom.

Las Madrinas was founded in 1933, at the heart of the Great Depression, by 65 Southern California women who recognized the need to save what was then known as the Convalescent Home of Children’s Hospital.

Las Madrinas history

As the first Affiliate Group of Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, Las Madrinas has been supporting equity, quality, and innovation in pediatric medicine for 92 years. Since 1939, Las Madrinas has honored families who have demonstrated a commitment to the civic, cultural, and philanthropic life of Southern California by presenting their daughters at the Las Madrinas Ball. Donations made in honor of the young women, together with the annual support of Las Madrinas Members and friends, have enabled Las Madrinas to give over $60 million in support of Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, including the funding of 12 Las Madrinas Endowments and Projects.

DEBUTANTE Victoria Lee Bessant of Larchmont.
Nick Boswell Photography



GARDEN ROSES, peonies, and lisianthus formed the arch created by Michelle Kim of Larchmont Florist.

Children’s Hospital Los Angeles is the highest-ranked children’s hospital in California and 4th in the nation on the prestigious U.S. News & World Report Honor Roll of best children’s hospitals. U.S. News ranks Children’s Hospital Los Angeles in all 10 specialty categories. Clinical care at the hospital is led by physicians who are faculty members of Keck School of Medicine of USC. The Saban Research Institute of Children’s Hospital Los Angeles is home to all basic, translational, clinical, and community research conducted at the hospital, allowing proven discoveries to quickly reach patients.

2026 LADIES of the Las Madrinas Ball.
Nick Boswell Photography

Estate from California’s Golden Age is 61st Showcase House

Clara Baldwin Stocker didn’t just throw a party. She was the party. Daughter of pioneer Elias “Lucky” Baldwin, Stocker’s Baldwin Oaks Estate will be featured in the 61st Pasadena Showcase House. A total of 30 interior and landscape designers are busy adding finishing touches for its public debut in April. The home’s storied legacy is rooted in California’s Golden Age. Built in 1907, the Arts & Crafts estate is on two acres in Arcadia.

The home features a wrap-around porch, grand oak staircase and expansive park-like grounds with rose gardens and fruit trees, and it offers a glimpse into the grandeur of a bygone era.

Public tours will take place April 19 to May 17 everyday but Monday. Proceeds fund the Pasadena Showcase House for the Arts four philanthropies.

Ticket are available at pasadenashowcase.org/tickets, or call 626-606-1600.

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