Smithsonian

Magazine Research Record



April 2012. Cover feature: Meet the World's Biggest Snake.

Publication Identification

Field	Information
Country	United States
Publisher	Smithsonian Institution
Publisher address	Pending research update
Magazine title	Smithsonian
Publication status	Continuing publication
Publication run	Pending research update
Editor	Pending research update
Printer	Pending research update
ISSN	Pending research update
Language	English
Publication type	General interest science, history, culture, and natural history magazine
Publication frequency	Monthly
Collection coverage	April 2012 issue
Earliest issue represented	April 2012
Latest issue represented	April 2012
Issue date	April 2012
Website printed on cover	smithsonian.com
Cover feature	Meet the World's Biggest Snake
Primary subject	Titanoboa cerrejonensis
Relevant feature article	Monster Discovery

Article author	Guy Gugliotta
Subject period	Approximately 58 million years ago
Estimated length	More than 40 feet
Estimated weight	More than one ton
Primary discovery location	Cerrejón coal mine region, Colombia

Preservation Significance

This issue is significant within the preservation collection because Smithsonian placed an extinct snake at the center of a major general interest science and history magazine. The cover headline, Meet the World's Biggest Snake, presents Titanoboa as the defining feature of the April 2012 issue and connects a fossil discovery directly with public scientific communication.

The issue preserves the moment when Titanoboa moved from specialist paleontological research into broad public awareness. The accompanying feature explains the discovery of an enormous fossil snake from Colombia, its implications for understanding prehistoric tropical ecosystems and the scientific effort required to reconstruct an animal known only from fragmentary fossil remains.

Within the collection, the issue is especially useful because it expands the snake record beyond living species, captive care and modern ecology. It documents paleontology, extinction, deep time, climate interpretation and the reconstruction of prehistoric ecosystems, showing another way snakes have contributed to scientific inquiry and public understanding.

Publication Metadata and Masthead Documentation

Field	Information
Publication	Smithsonian
Publisher	Smithsonian Institution
Issue date	April 2012
Publisher address	Pending research update
Editor	Pending research update
Printer	Pending research update
ISSN	Pending research update
Publication frequency	Monthly
Cover website	smithsonian.com

International Distribution

Pending research update. Specific international distributors and circulation arrangements for the April 2012 issue have not been established in this record.

Issues Represented in the Collection

Field	Information
Issue represented	April 2012
Featured subject	Titanoboa cerrejonensis
Featured article	Monster Discovery, by Guy Gugliotta
Collection coverage	One physical issue documented

Primary Feature

Field	Information
Feature title	Monster Discovery
Author	Guy Gugliotta
Publication	Smithsonian
Issue	April 2012

Primary animal	Titanoboa cerrejonensis
Geological age	Paleocene, approximately 58 million years ago
Discovery region	Cerrejón coal mine, northern Colombia

Smithsonian's issue archive describes Titanoboa as a fierce cold blooded predator that dominated a world of giant creatures 58 million years ago. The feature states that the snake exceeded 40 feet in length, weighed more than a ton and was large enough to swallow a crocodile.

The feature also emphasizes why the discovery mattered scientifically. Titanoboa was not simply a record setting snake. Its enormous size forced researchers to reconsider the ecology and climate of Paleocene tropical South America and the kinds of vertebrates that could thrive there.

Discovery and Scientific Context

The fossils were recovered from the Cerrejón coal mine in Colombia, a site that has yielded remains from a remarkable Paleocene tropical ecosystem. The same environment included very large turtles, crocodile relatives and oversized lungfish.

Smithsonian's reporting identifies paleontologists including Carlos Jaramillo, Jonathan Bloch and Jason Head among the scientists involved in the broader discovery and reconstruction work. A Titanoboa vertebra was sufficiently large to dwarf the vertebra of a modern giant snake, helping researchers estimate the extraordinary dimensions of the extinct animal.

Public Exhibition and Media Context

The April 2012 magazine feature was part of a wider Smithsonian presentation of Titanoboa. A full scale replica was created for Smithsonian Channel programming and public exhibition. The model appeared at Grand Central Terminal in New York before moving to the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C.

The National Museum of Natural History exhibition, Titanoboa: Monster Snake, opened in late March 2012, immediately before the April magazine issue reached readers. Smithsonian Channel also premiered a television special devoted to Titanoboa on April 1, 2012. The magazine, exhibition and television program therefore formed a coordinated public science communication effort around the discovery.

Cover Design and Public Communication

The cover uses a dramatic visual reconstruction of a giant snake breaking through printed paper, paired with the headline Meet the World's Biggest Snake. The design deliberately presents Titanoboa as something newly revealed or breaking into public awareness.

The cover is also a useful historical artifact of early 2010s magazine publishing. It promotes an expanded iPad edition for print subscribers, showing the coexistence of physical magazine distribution and emerging tablet based digital publishing.

Scientific and Historical Value

Titanoboa is important not only because of its size but because giant ectothermic vertebrates can provide clues about ancient environmental conditions. Research surrounding the animal contributed to debate about Paleocene tropical climate, reptile physiology and the structure of ecosystems only a few million years after the end Cretaceous extinction.

The issue therefore preserves a point where paleontology, herpetology, climate science, museum research and popular science communication intersected. For a collection focused on snake related periodicals, that

makes it a particularly strong example of how snake research can influence questions far beyond taxonomy or captive husbandry.

Issue Context

Smithsonian's April 2012 issue archive lists Monster Discovery as one of the issue's principal features. Other major stories in the same issue include reporting on Libyan women during the uprising against Muammar Qaddafi and a feature on Roberto Clemente. The presence of Titanoboa alongside history, politics, culture and biography illustrates the broad editorial setting in which the snake discovery was presented.

Website Category Placement

Field	Information
Primary section	Magazine Preservation
Country grouping	United States
Publication title	Smithsonian
Issue	April 2012
Snake related feature	Meet the World's Biggest Snake
Relevant article	Monster Discovery
Subject	Titanoboa cerrejonensis
Preservation emphasis	Paleontology, prehistoric snake evolution, public science communication and the transition between print and digital magazine publishing

Source Notes

Field	Information
Physical cover	Primary evidence for the magazine title, April 2012 date, cover headline, Smithsonian branding, website reference and iPad subscription promotion.
Smithsonian April 2012 issue archive	Independent confirmation that Monster Discovery by Guy Gugliotta was a principal feature of the April 2012 issue.
Smithsonian feature article	Independent evidence for Titanoboa's discovery context, approximate size, age, ecosystem and scientific significance.
Smithsonian Institution exhibition coverage	Independent evidence for the full scale Titanoboa model, Grand Central presentation, National Museum of Natural History exhibition and Smithsonian Channel program.

Research Cautions

- Masthead particulars: Pending research update. Issue specific editor, production staff, printer and circulation information should not be added without direct documentation.
- The cover phrase Meet the World's Biggest Snake is a promotional headline, not the title of the feature article.
- The feature article title is Monster Discovery. Smithsonian's website later presents the same reporting under the title How Titanoboa, the 40 Foot Long Snake, Was Found.
- Reported Titanoboa length varies among Smithsonian public materials because reconstructions and model dimensions differ. The April issue archive describes the animal as 40 feet long, while later exhibit coverage refers to a 48 foot model. The model length should not be treated as the exact biological length of the fossil animal.
- The issue is a general interest Smithsonian publication, not a specialist reptile magazine. Its inclusion in the collection is based on the prominence and scientific importance of the Titanoboa cover feature.