

China, 125 million years ago: The Yinxian Formation in the province of Liaoning dates from the beginning of the Cretaceous period. Fine grained lake bed sediments preserved plants, mammals and reptiles in fine detail, including soft tissue features such as fur. This has revealed, among other things, that the smallest dinosaurs had feathers.

Plants of the Early Cretaceous were similar to those of the Jurassic and

would have included plum-fruited fir, baldcypress and ginkgos. The climate seems to have been humid and mild.

In this scene the tiny, feathered dinosaur *Microraptor* hungrily watches a trio of baby psittacosaurus while their mother takes a defensive stance. Overhead fly a pair of *Confuciusornis* – primitive birds with claws on their wings. Some *Confuciusornis* (the males?) had two long tail feathers.

