

Shuvuuia deserti

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- About 70 million years ago, in present **Mongolia and northern China**, a pint-sized nocturnal predator called *Shuvuuia deserti* lived.
- The name *Shuvuuia* is derived from the Mongolian word *shuvuu* meaning “bird”.
- It was a **pheasant-sized, two-legged Cretaceous Period dinosaur** weighing about as much as a small house cat.
- It **lacked strong jaws and sharp teeth** unlike many carnivorous dinosaurs, but had a bird-like and lightly built skull and many tiny teeth like grains of rice.
- It belonged to a **group called alvarezsaurus** which had nocturnal vision very early in their lineage, but super-hearing took more time to evolve.
- *Shuvuuia deserti*, or **“desert bird”** is the only known species in this group.
- It had **visual and auditory capabilities** akin to a barn owl, indicating it **could hunt in total darkness**.
- It had a very wide scleral ring, indicating an **extra-large pupil size** that made its eye a specialized light-capture device.
- Unlike birds, it had **short but powerful arms** ending in a single large claw, good for digging.
- *Shuvuuia* is unique among non-avian theropods in the skull’s ability to perform **pyrokinesis**, that is, it could flex its upper jaw independently of its braincase.
- Contemporary genera included **Velociraptor and Protoceratops**.