

# Asian Swan Song

## Zuniceratops

**Order** Ornithischia

**Suborder** Ceratopsia

**Superfamily** Ceratopsoidea

**Size** 6–8 ft (1.8–2.4m),  
1,000 lbs (450kg)

**Size comparison** Shetland pony

**Diet** plants

**Age** Late Cretaceous,  
90 million years ago

**Distribution of Fossil**

Moreno Hill Formation, New Mexico

**Cool Fact**

- *Zuniceratops* was discovered in New Mexico in 1996 by 8-year-old Christopher Wolfe.

Zuniceratops-like animals probably evolved in Asia and dispersed to what is now western North America.



North polar view of earth when early ceratopsians were evolving (about 100 million years ago). The easiest migration pathway into North America was via the Bering Land Bridge into modern day Alaska. Map from series "Paleogeography and Tectonics in Deep Time" © 2016 Colorado Plateau Geosystems Inc.

In Asia, an early ceratopsoid dinosaur, *Turanoceratops*, evolved large brow horns (**fig. c, green**) about 90 million years ago. Not long after, *Turanoceratops*-like dinosaurs dispersed across the Bering Land Bridge to Laramidia (now western North America), and evolved into a pony-sized form called *Zuniceratops*.

Geographically isolated from one another, Asian and North American ceratopsids followed vastly different evolutionary paths. Native Asian ceratopsians continued to thrive, but may have never gotten bigger than a goat or more ornamented than *Zuniceratops*.

In North America, a remarkable evolutionary explosion took place. By 83 million years ago, true ceratopsids (animals more closely related to *Triceratops* than *Zuniceratops*, characterized by a complex dental arrangement) were well established in Laramidia.

***Zuniceratops* displays classic ceratopsid features—like large horns over its eyes and a large frill—but lacked the complex dental structure of the latter. It is a perfect transitional fossil and thus classifies outside of true ceratopsids as a ceratopsOID.**

