

# CRETACEOUS SEAS

This large mural is an artist's depiction of three feeding **mosasaurs**—early marine reptiles that lived within the **Cretaceous** time period (144 to 65 million years ago) during the **Age of the Dinosaurs**. Mosasaurs were not dinosaurs, but marine reptiles distantly related to monitor lizards such as the Komodo Dragon. Mosasaurs shared the hostile Cretaceous ocean with other voracious predators equally large and dangerous—giant turtles, fish like *Xiphactinus*, sharks, plesiosaurs, and marine crocodiles. Giant flying reptiles with wingspans of more than 6 m soared overhead looking for prey. But none of these Cretaceous monsters was as successful as the mosasaurs.

Mosasaurs had a long, muscular, flattened tail that allowed them to ambush prey with rapid bursts of acceleration. Their slim bodies, covered in lizard-like scales, moved through the water in snakelike fashion. Paddle-like limbs helped with steering. Jaws were lined on each side with two rows of pointy, cone-shaped teeth.

The largest, most ferocious mosasaur was *Tylosaurus*, a deadly hunter with eyes for anything that moved. It grew up to 14-m long and feasted on a diet mainly of fish, but also including seabirds, sharks, plesiosaurs, and other mosasaurs. There is also evidence that some mosasaurs, especially the small young ones, were food for sharks.

Artist: unknown (painted in 1990)

Mural's original location: California Academy of Sciences — *Life Through Time Exhibit*  
Cretaceous Sea Monster background image in this panel is from National Geographic Society ©.