

VERTEBRAL MORPHOLOGY OF *OPHTHALMOSAURUS NATANS* (REPTILIA: ICHTHYOSAURIA) FROM THE JURASSIC SUNDANCE FORMATION OF WYOMING.

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ABSTRACT

New ichthyosaur material, most likely *Ophthalmosaurus natans*, from the Sundance Formation of Natrona Co., WY preserves the posterior trunk and tail stock, allowing the construction of a composite vertebral column for the species. Although similar in body portions and count to the European species *O. icenicus*, shape differences in the vertebrae of the posterior trunk and anterior tail stock distinguish the two species. The column of the Sundance ichthyosaur displays much less regionalization than does that of *O. icenicus* and its vertebral profile suggests a locomotor style more similar to that of non-ophthalmosaurid parvipelvians than to that of *O. icenicus*. Characteristics of vertebral anatomy provide a morphological rationale for the taxonomic separation of *O. natans* and *O. icenicus*.