Isisford claims naming rights on fossil

Fossils of the world’s most primitive modern crocodilian have been discovered near the town of Isisford.

The new fossil, named Isisfordia duncani, is described in the Proceedings of the Royal Society by an international team of palaeontologists, headed by Dr Steve Salisbury from The University of Queensland’s (UQ) School of Integrative Biology.

“The discovery in Queensland suggests that the ancestor of all living crocodilians was Australian,” Dr Salisbury said.

He said it had been a long-standing mystery as to where and when the immediate ancestors of modern-day crocodilians - crocodiles, alligators and gharials - came from.

“The appearance of Isisfordia signalled the dawn of crocodilians as we know them today,” he said.

“Living 98-95 million years ago, Isisfordia predates the first recorded appearance of alligators and gharials by almost 20 million years, and the first true crocodiles by over 30 million.

“The discovery of Isisfordia in Australia indicates that the precursors to all three groups of modern crocodilians may have originated in Gondwana, rather than Europe or North America, as was previously thought.”

Dr Salisbury said Isisfordia was small compared with the majority of its modern descendants and looked like a dwarf version of the American alligator, but with a much flatter and longer snout.

“Adults appear to have been just over a metre in length, and probably weighed no more than about three kilograms,” he said.

“It may only have been small by today’s standards, but it represents a very important phase in the evolutionary history of crocodilians.”

Discovered by former Deputy Mayor of Isisford Ian Duncan, after whom the new species has been named, the first fossils of Isisfordia were found in the mid-1990s in a dried-up creek bed on the outskirts of town. A display on Isisfordia will form the centrepiece of the Outer Barcoo Interpretation Centre in Isisford.