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August 14, 2014

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EARTH Magazine: La Brea climate adaptation as different as cats and dogs

Alexandria, Va.— The La Brea tar pits in downtown Los Angeles are a famous predator trap. For every herbivore, a dozen or more carnivores — saber-toothed cats and dire wolves chief among them — are pulled from the prolific Pleistocene fossil site. In fact, the remains of more than 4,000 dire wolves have been excavated, along with more than 2,000 saber-toothed cats. The sheer number of fossils allows researchers to ask population-level questions about the climate and environment as well as how these animals evolved.

Now, two new studies focusing dire wolves and saber-toothed cats are characterizing how the tar pits' two top predators coped with the warming climate toward the end of the last ice age, and the results are surprisingly dissimilar: While the wolves got smaller, the cats got bigger.

Read more about how the predators' physiologies adapted to changing climatic conditions in the August issue of EARTH Magazine: <http://bit.ly/1sZ1KJQ>.

For more stories about the science of our planet, check out EARTH magazine online or subscribe at www.earthmagazine.org. The August issue, now available on the digital newsstand, features stories about a new fossil dino dubbed the "chicken from hell" found in North and South Dakota's Hell Creek Formation, how people's perceptions of earthquake motion can depend on their motion, and the first direct evidence of water in the mantle's transition zone, plus much, much more.

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