FACT SHEET: Pteranodon

NAME: PTERANODON (ter-AN-oh-don), meaning: "Winged and Toothless"
SIZE: 25 - 35 foot wingspan, 6 feet long (the size of a bus), weighed 35 pounds
TYPE OF DIET: Carnivore (fish, shellfish, insects, worms)
WHEN: Late Cretaceous period (85 million years ago)
WHERE: England (United Kingdom), Kansas (North America)

Pteranodons and Pterodactyls were not actually dinosaurs. They belonged to a group of flying reptiles called pterosaurs. But pterosaurs have a lot in common with dinosaurs. They lived during the same time and were also reptiles. But Pteranodon spent most of its time in the air. The earliest pterosaurs weren’t very large. They weighed about 35 pounds and their bodies were about the size of a crow. Later, they grew to be about 6 feet long and had a 25-foot wingspan. This is the length from the tip of one wing to the other. A Pteranodon’s wingspan was larger than any bird living today.

The bones in a Pteranodon’s wing look very different from those of bats and birds we know today. The fourth finger grew into a very long, strong bone. It held a tough layer of skin called a membrane that grew all the way down to the top of its legs. This is how the Pterodactyl got its name, which means “wing finger”. They had hollow bones, so they were very light. They had almost no tail and very small bodies.

Pteranodons were covered with very small, soft feathers called “down”. They had large brains and could see very well. They had sharp claws on their fingers that they used to grab their food. Although they had no teeth, Pteranodons were carnivores. They hunted for fish by flying low over oceans and lakes. They may have hunted like pelicans, scooping fish straight out of the water and swallowing them whole. They also ate shellfish - such as mussels and crabs - as well as insects and worms.