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A new genus of eutherian mammal from the Early Cretaceous of Transbaikalia, Russia

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Eutherian (placental) mammals are the dominant group of modern mammals, with very good Cenozoic and reasonable complete Late Cretaceous fossil record. However, the earliest, Early Cretaceous history of this important group is still inadequately known. Until recently, the only undisputed Early Cretaceous eutherian was *Prokennalestes* Kielan-Jaworowska & Dashzeveg, 1989, represented by two species from the Aptian-Albian of Mongolia (see also Beliajeva et al. 1974 and Sigogneau-Russell et al. 1992). Recent discoveries both in North America (Cifelli 1999) and Asia (Averianov & Skutschas l999,2000a, b) demonstrate greater diversity of earliest eutherians, or their closest relatives, than previously recognized. We describe here a new taxon, *Murtoilestes* gen. n., from the Early Cretaceous of Siberia. *Murtoilestes* gen. n. presents an unusual combination of primitive and derived characters compared with *Prokennalestes* and North American *Montanalestes* Cifelli, 1999, which indicate that the early evolutionary history of eutherian mammals was complex and is poorly understood.

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