A diversity burst of crabs and squat lobsters around 100 million years ago

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The Cretaceous (145-66 million years ago) was one of the time periods in which dinosaurs roamed the earth’s continents. In the oceans, creatures such as various types of squids, fishes, clams, and decapods (crabs, lobsters, shrimp etc.) thrived. The latter group appeared to be very diverse in the Late Jurassic (150 million years ago), especially in and around coral reefs. A new locality in a quarry in northern Spain now suggests that also the mid-Cretaceous (100 million years ago) was a period with a high diversity of decapods. The crabs and squat lobsters were found in a coral reef environment. A preliminary count of the species collected in the field in 2008 and 2009 yielded a species number of about 30. This could be the richest decapod locality in the Cretaceous. Apparently, corals were able to host many different species, possibly because a coral reef provided many different sources of food and a shelter. Today’s coral reefs also exhibit many decapod species. Due to global warming the coral reefs are thought to decline and, therefore, the decapod populations within those reefs might be in danger.