ICHTHYOSAURS.FOSSILS.IM

A name that didn't catch on

Proteosaurus came later, and almost won. Official wording says it didn't.

Sir Everard Home studied the Lyme Regis find in 1814. After studying another of Mary Anning's finds in 1819, official wording says, he "finally gave these animals the name Proteosaurus." "However, this name didn't catch on."

The official story	Official wording
1817	Scientists used Ichthyosaurus, "a name coined by our former Keeper of Mineralogy Charles Konig two years earlier in 1817." The name is spelled here as on that official page, without adding an umlaut.
Meaning	The discover page: Ichthyosaurus, meaning "fish reptile." The Mary Anning page: named Ichthyosaurus, or "fish lizard" — "though we now know it was neither fish nor lizard, but a marine reptile."
Not dinosaurs	"Though they're both reptiles and lived at the same time, dinosaurs aren't closely related to ichthyosaurs. The dinosaurs lived on land, whereas ichthyosaurs never left the water."
Later names	I. platyodon is now known as Temnodontosaurus, and I. tenuirostris as Leptonectes. Official wording estimates more than 100 species in total.

A short quiz

1. What happened to the name Proteosaurus?
2. Who coined Ichthyosaurus, and in which year?
3. Are ichthyosaurs dinosaurs, according to official wording?

Answers. It didn't catch on. Charles Konig, in 1817. No — they are not closely related, and ichthyosaurs never left the water.

Wording from the Natural History Museum pages "What is an ichthyosaur?" and "Mary Anning: The unsung hero of fossil discovery," checked 18 November 2026. ichthyosaurs.fossils.im is independent of the museum. Typographic sheet: no photographs inside.