Preternatural Paleontological Palmistry

Preternatural Paleontological Palmistry

An Experiment in Dinosaur Aesthetics

Imagination and Identification at the Limits of Knowledge

by

Chris Wildrick

input/output press
Syracuse, NY

Chris wishes to thank everyone who played *Preternatural Paleontological Palmistry* in its many venues, including art galleries in New York, Illinois, Texas, and Wisconsin, the Museum of the Earth, and the New York State Fair.

Preternatural Paleontological Palmistry is an ongoing project conceived, performed, and presented in multiple formats and locations by Chris Wildrick, ©2005-2010.

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The typefaces used in the body of this book are Arno and **Futura**.
The charts also use Hoefler Text, **Futura Condensed**, and Century Gothic.

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INTRODUCTION

Chris is studying the role of dinosaurs in our culture. Each project in this series approaches this subject from a different angle. *Preternatural Paleontological Palmistry* seeks to find out what kinds of people like what kinds of dinosaurs.

Methodology

Chris attempted to intuit people's favorite dinosaurs by having them fill out a personality survey and reading their palm.

The form asked questions about their personality and also about their interest in and knowledge of dinosaurs. They would write the name of their favorite dinosaur on the back. (While all this was going on, Chris would wear blacked-out sunglasses so he couldn't see what they were writing.)

Chris would read their form, look at their palm, and then try to intuit their favorite dinosaur. He based his intuitions on his educated guesses about what kinds of dinosaurs they may have been aware of, what kinds of dinosaurs they might be attracted to based on what he could glean of their personality, and what their palm said about their identity. Chris can't read palms in the traditional "horoscope" sense, but he was able to get a sense of whether they were strong or weak, confident or nervous, blue or white collar, etc., all of which was more data to take into account.

It is important to note that Chris does not use the word "psychic" in regard to this project, which would imply some sort of supernatural powers. While psychics do use the word "intuition" in regard to their work, Chris uses it literally--using his knowledge and experience to see if he could make an educated guess about the answer.

He was successful 11.5% of the time!

Chris performed this project at Unit B art gallery in San Antonio, Texas, the science building and cafeteria at Lawrence College, Wisconsin, an art gallery in Carbondale, Illinois, the New York State Fair, the Redhouse art gallery in Syracuse, and the Museum of the Earth, mostly with adults.

Objectives

The ostensible goal was to see if Chris would be able to intuit people's favorite dinosaur. More importantly, it was a blind to find out what people's favorite dinosaurs are. This is a little different category from the most popular dinosaurs, because those could be more influenced by consumer culture. Favorite dinosaurs are dinosaurs that one has a deep innate relationship with, a desire for, an identification with.

In addition, it provided even more knowledge about exactly what kinds of people like exactly what kinds of dinosaurs, which gives us more insight into both people and dinosaurs.

The following sections of this book provide the original data supplied through the experiment, then analyze that data for answers to the above questions.

The Original Survey Form

This is the personality survey the participants filled out.

It is used to learn about their background vis a vis dinosaurs, plus some general personal information. It asks about favorite color since that is a standard (if highly subjective) window into one's personality (yellow=sunny and happy, etc.). It asks about whether one is a single child under the hypothesis that perhaps single children would be more likely to be solitary and bookish and more easily interested in dinosaurs (not true, it turns out).

The participants would write their favorite dinosaur on the back of the page behind the blacked-out spot on the bottom. The blacked-out space kept Chris from being able to read the name of the dinosaur through the paper.

MY INTUITION IS THAT YOUR FAVORITE DINOSAUR IS:

_____

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE FACILITATION OF INTUITION

Which of the following media has been your number one source for exposure to dinosaurs?

Books	Movies	Comics	Magazines
TV	Newspapers	Radio	Internet
Posters	Visual Arts	Plays	Oral Storytelling
Music	Trading Cards	Museums	Active Digs
Toys	Games	Food	Other _____

Is this source primarily scientific or entertainment? _____

Do you like stories or pictures of dinosaurs better? _____

How much do you like dinosaurs, from 1-5,
(1 being not at all, 3 being average, and 5 being fanatical)? _____

In what period of your life were you most into dinosaurs?
1-5, 5-10, 10-15, 15-20, 20-25,... _____

What is your favorite color? _____

Are you an only child? _____

PRETERNATURAL PALEONTOLOGICAL PALMISTRY

The Survey Results

Please feel free to unfold and examine the chart on the following page. It is unusually long. Thank you for exercising care while folding it back up into the book.

This chart lists all the data supplied by all the participants.

Under "Source of Exposure," "Kind of Source," and "Kind of Stimuli," the dark grey blocks denote that someone checked off that box as one of the main ways they have been exposure to dinosaurs. People could check off more than one box per category.

Under "Amount of Interest," the numbers range from 1 to 5, with 1 being no interest in dinosaurs at all, 3 being average, and 5 being head over heels obsessed with dinosaurs. The numbers are rendered in a grey scale that corresponds to their amount of interest (1 is printed in light grey and 5 in black) in order to help scan the graph even more easily.

The same is true for "Period of Interest."

"Favorite Colors" are colored in the color to make it simple to browse through.

The very few only-children are printed in black so they stand out.

Finally, the participants' actual favorite dinosaur is listed first, followed by Chris' intuited guess at what it might be. If he was correct, then it is printed in yellow for emphasis.

PRETERNATURAL PALEONTOLOGICAL PALMISTRY

Shane O'Mara

Species of Interest
Pleistocene
Holocene
Extinction
Ice Age
Extinction
Modern
Extinction
Pre-Anthropocene
Mass Extinction/Big Bang
Dodo
Passenger Lynx
Thylacine
Mass Extinction/Big Dig
Tuna
Bison
Mammoth
Sea Cow
Sea Lion
Sea Otter
Sea Turtle
Sea Urchin
Sea Star
Sea Cucumber
Sea Bass
Sea Anemone
Sea Slug
Sea Snail
Sea Horse

Subsets of the Survey Results

There are 27 charts that break the main chart down into thematic subsets. Many of these charts are quite large. Because of the pure quantity and bulk of these charts, they have not been included directly in this book, and instead are presented in a separate box as an addendum.

Please feel free to open the box, and to unfold and examine all of the charts in it. They are not bound, but are instead stacked loosely in the box. You can simply shuffle through them and take out the ones you wish to look at. They are not in any particular order.

Because of their unbound state and their unusual length, please exercise care while folding them out and then folding them back up into the box.

Each chart selects certain subsets of information from the main chart, thus bringing certain themes into clearer focus, such as "All the Dinosaurs Chris Correctly Intuited" or "People Whose Main Source of Exposure to Dinosaurs Is Books."

The subject of each chart is written at the top center of the chart.

Breakdown of the Survey Results

The following charts analyze the data in the main chart.

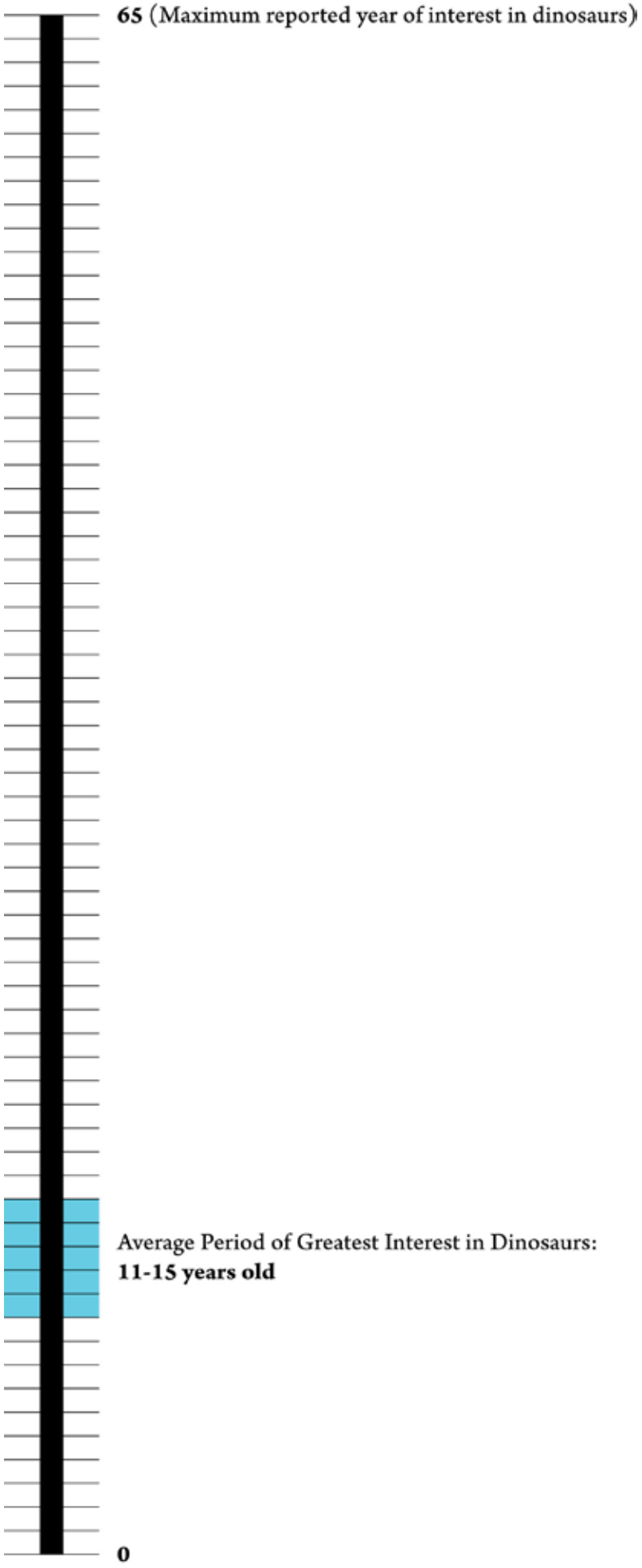
The first shows the participants' average (mean) age of greatest interest in dinosaurs, based on a scale of 1 through 65, which was the highest period listed.

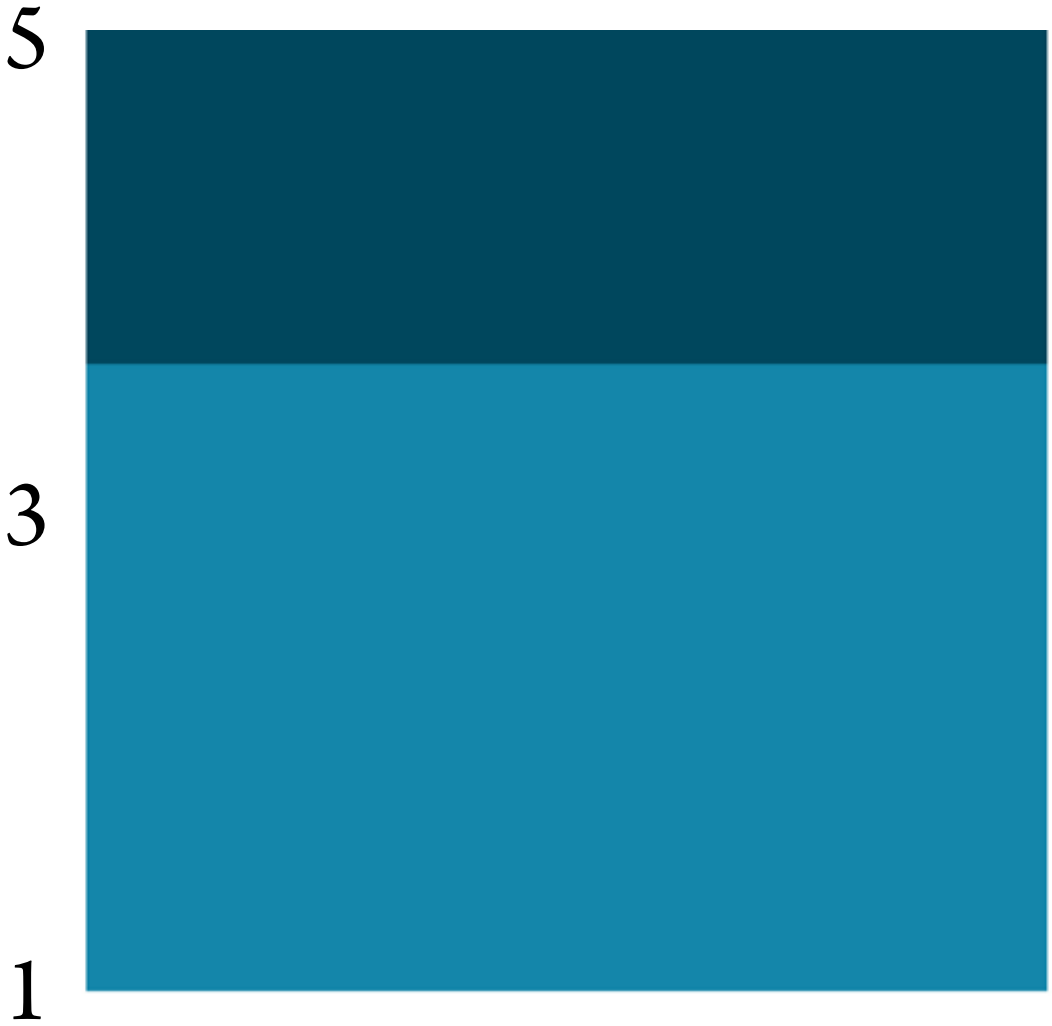
The second graph shows a block that is filled by the same percentage as the participants' average interest in dinosaurs (a glass more than half-filled, so to speak!).

The third and fourth graphs show people's favorite dinosaurs and the dinosaurs Chris intuited. They are both organized from the greatest number to the least. If a dinosaur is assigned a color in the first one, it keeps that same color in the second one, which help to see if some of them are in a different order from one chart to the other.

The fifth and sixth graphs show the dinosaurs Chris correctly intuited, and also show how many other dinosaurs of that species were someone else's favorites. In other words, it looks to see if Chris was any better at guessing one species over another.

The rest of the graphs are fairly self-explanatory.

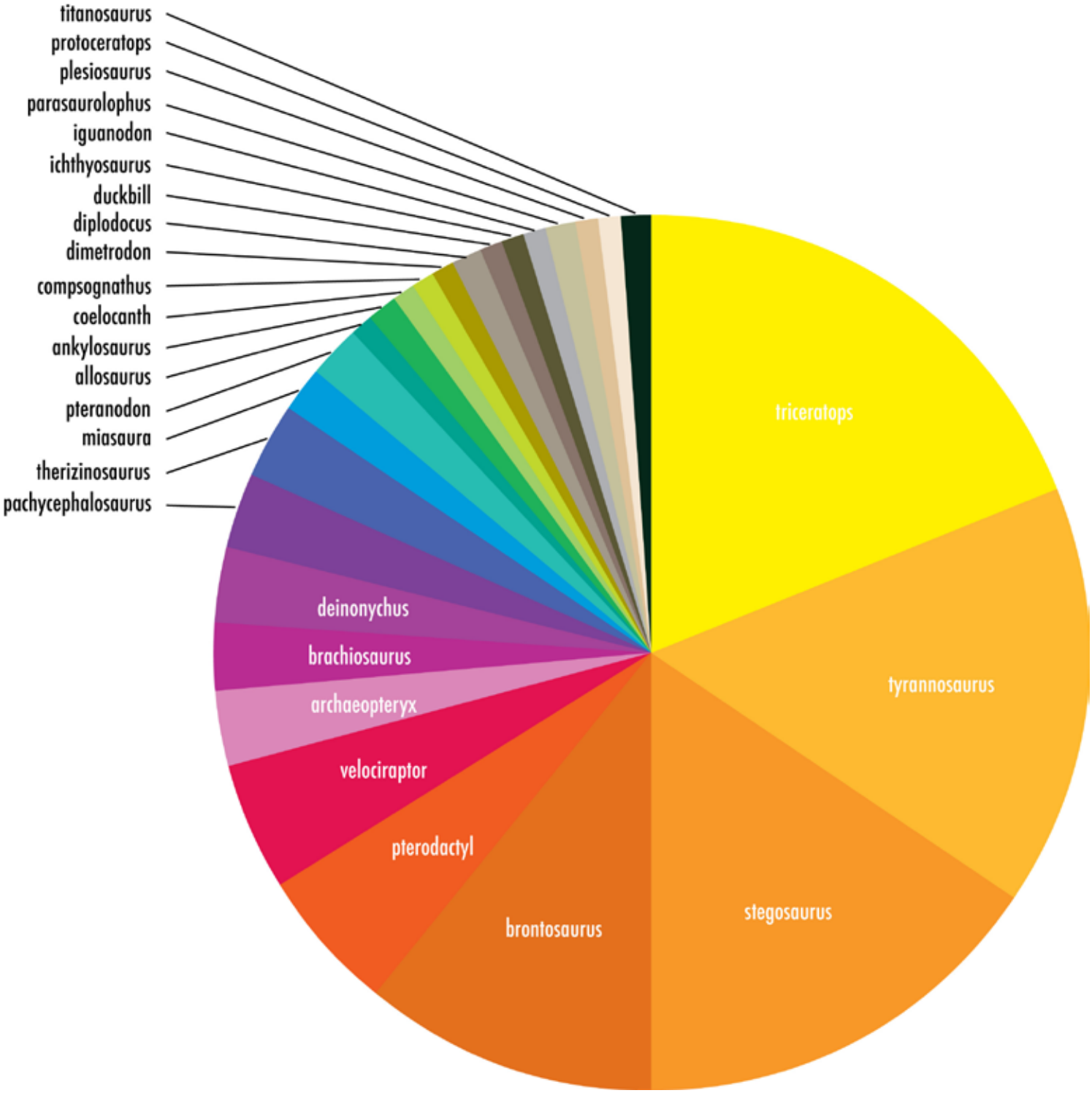

65 (Maximum reported year of interest in dinosaurs)
Average Period of Greatest Interest in Dinosaurs:
11-15 years old
0



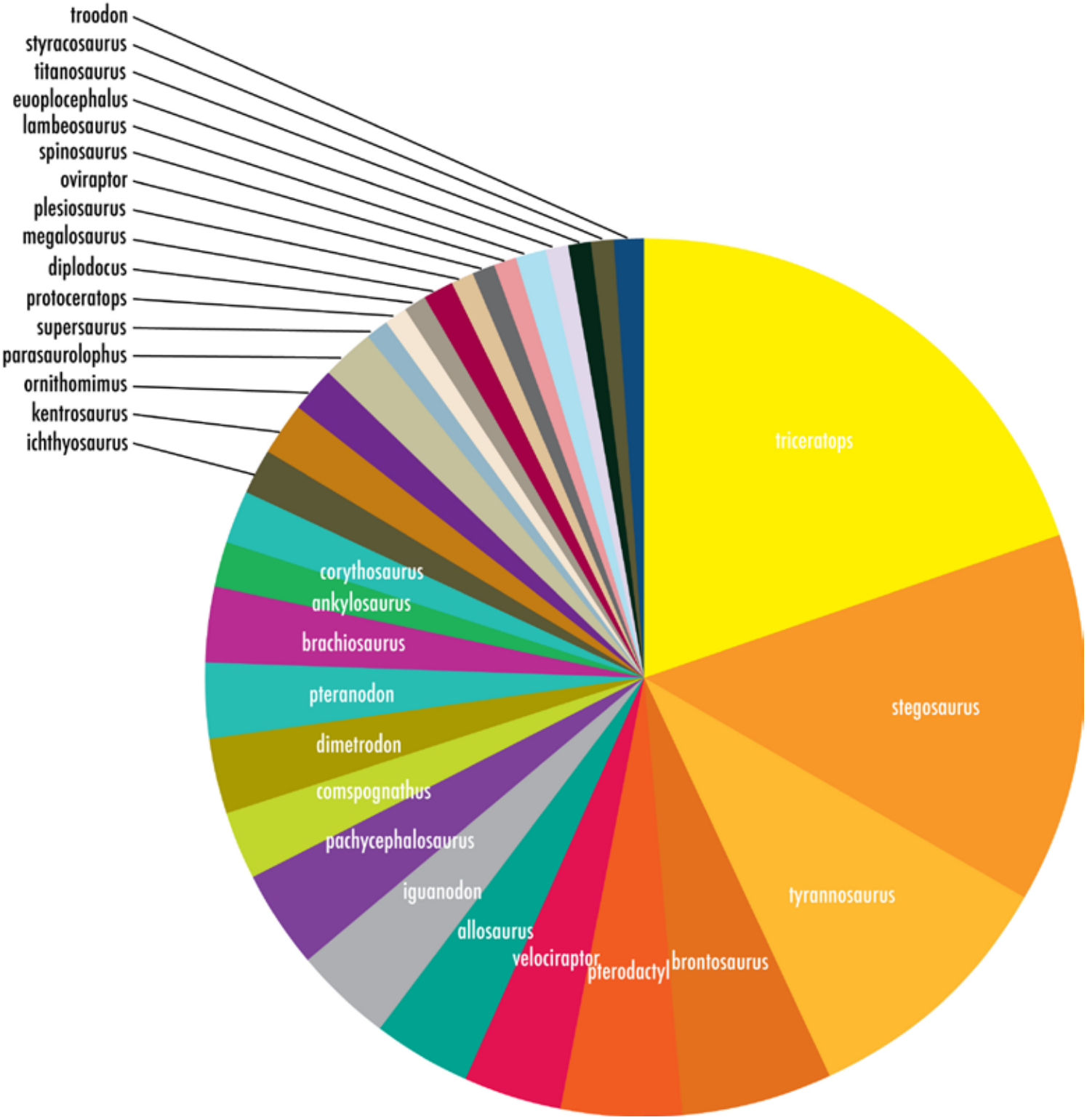
Average Level of Interest in Dinosaurs, from 1 to 5:

3.264583333

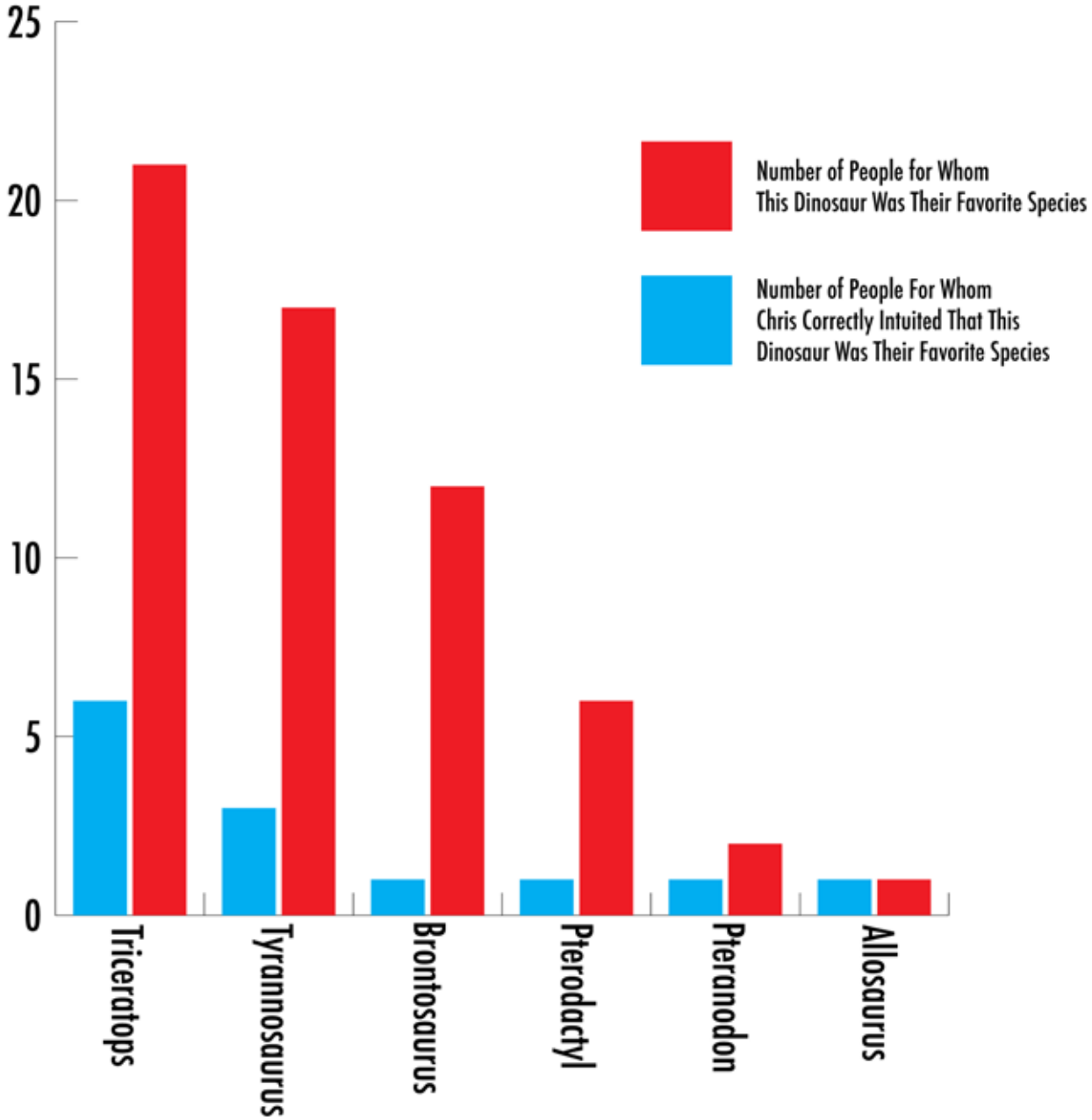
Participants' Favorite Dinosaurs



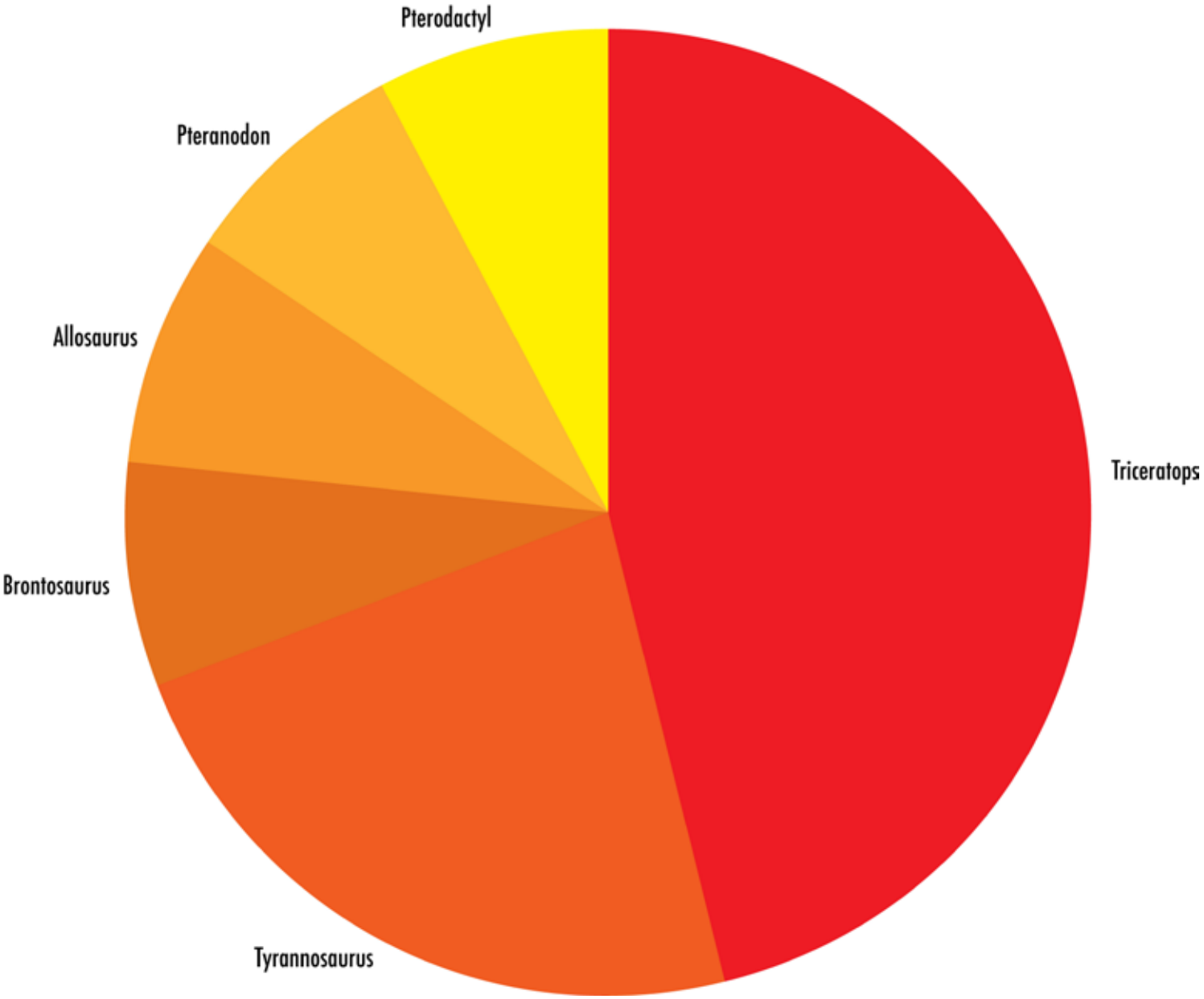
Chris' Intuited Dinosaurs



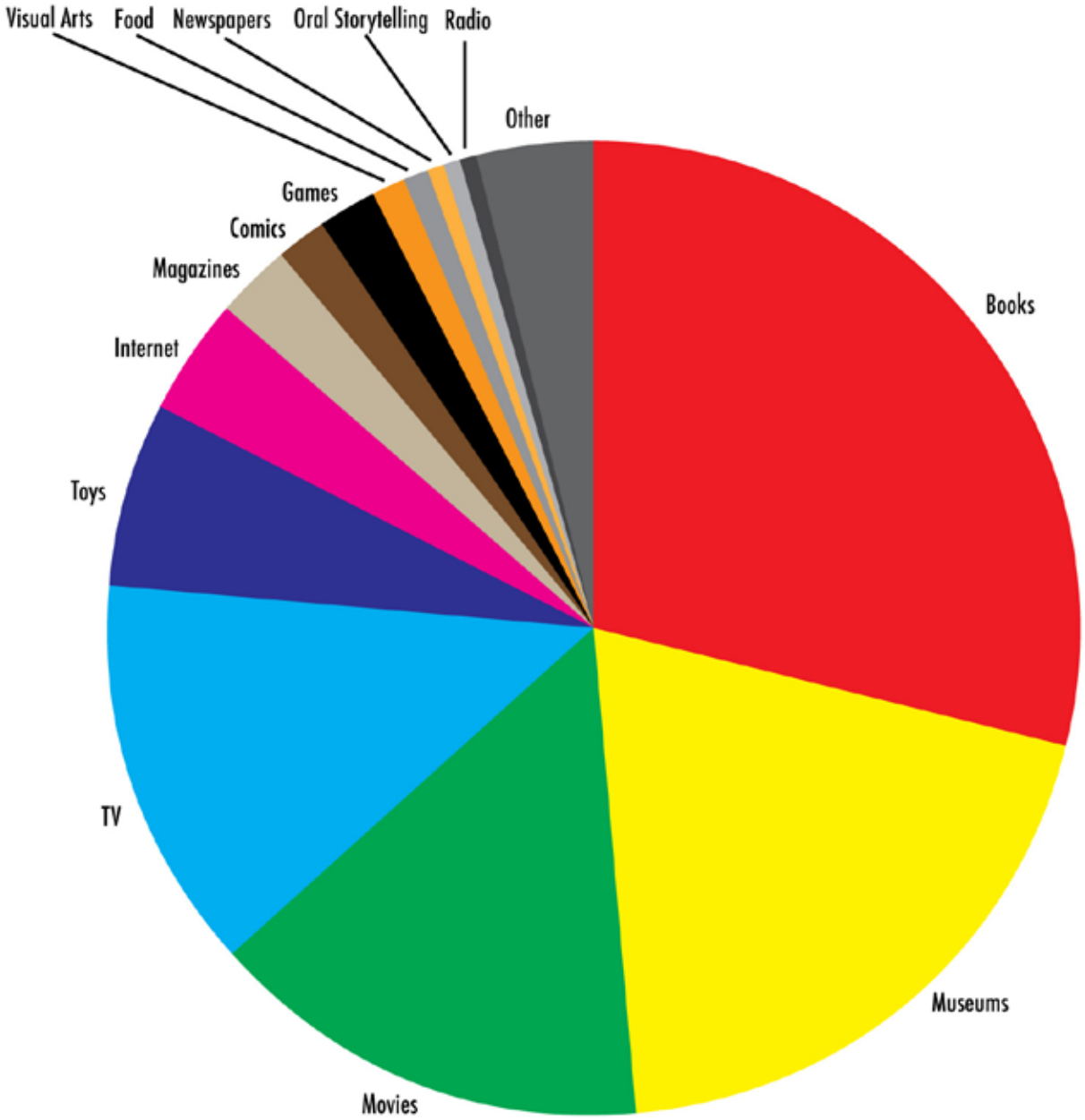
Comparison of the Number of Correct Intuitions per Species with the Total Number of Actual Favorites of Each Species



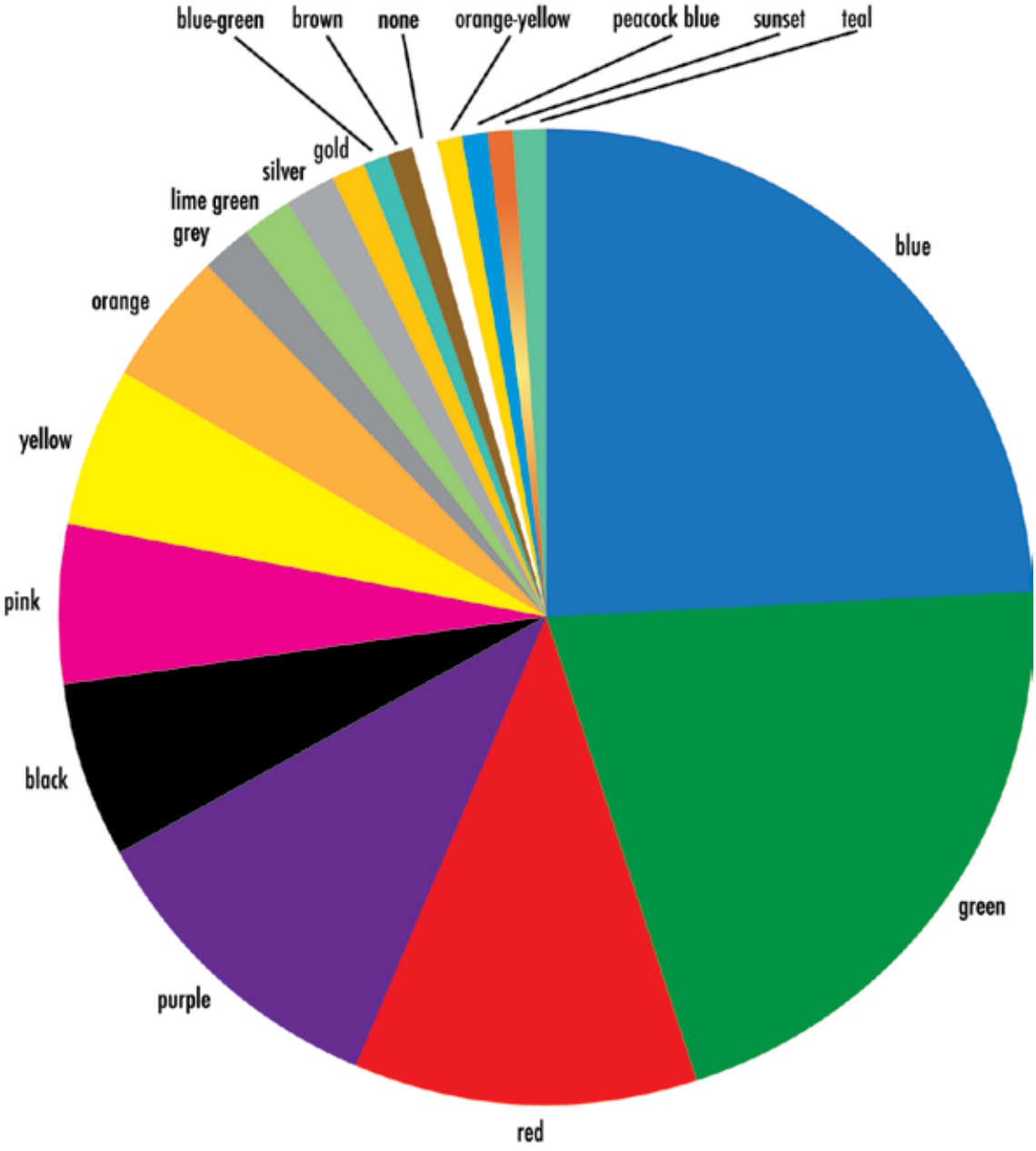
Number of Correct Intuitions per Species



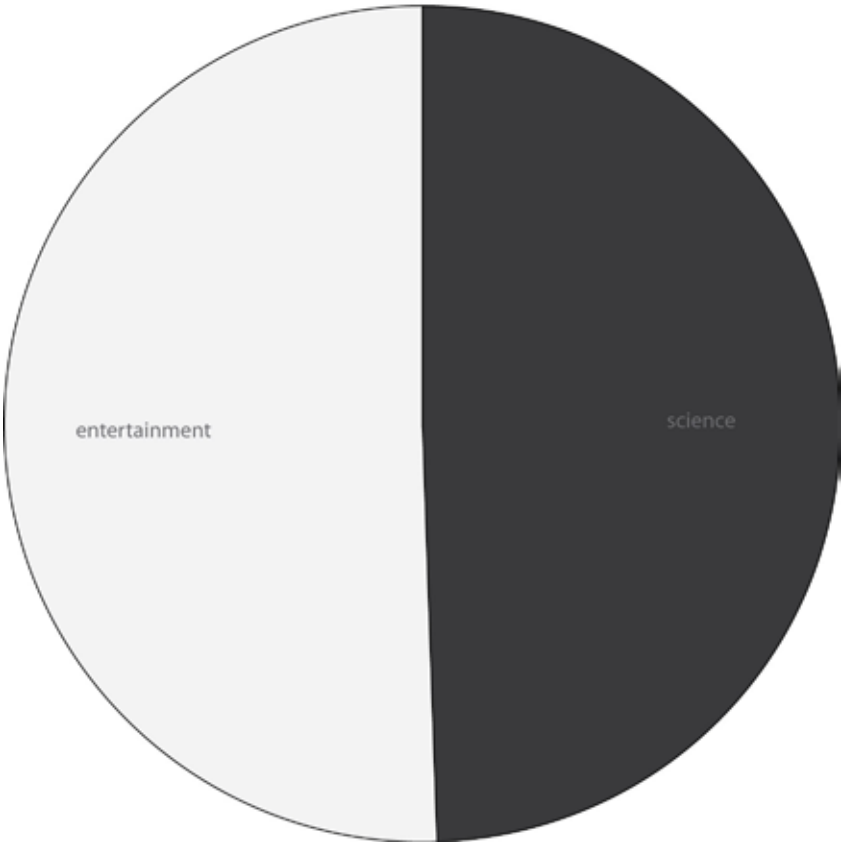
Most Popular Sources of Exposure to Dinosaurs



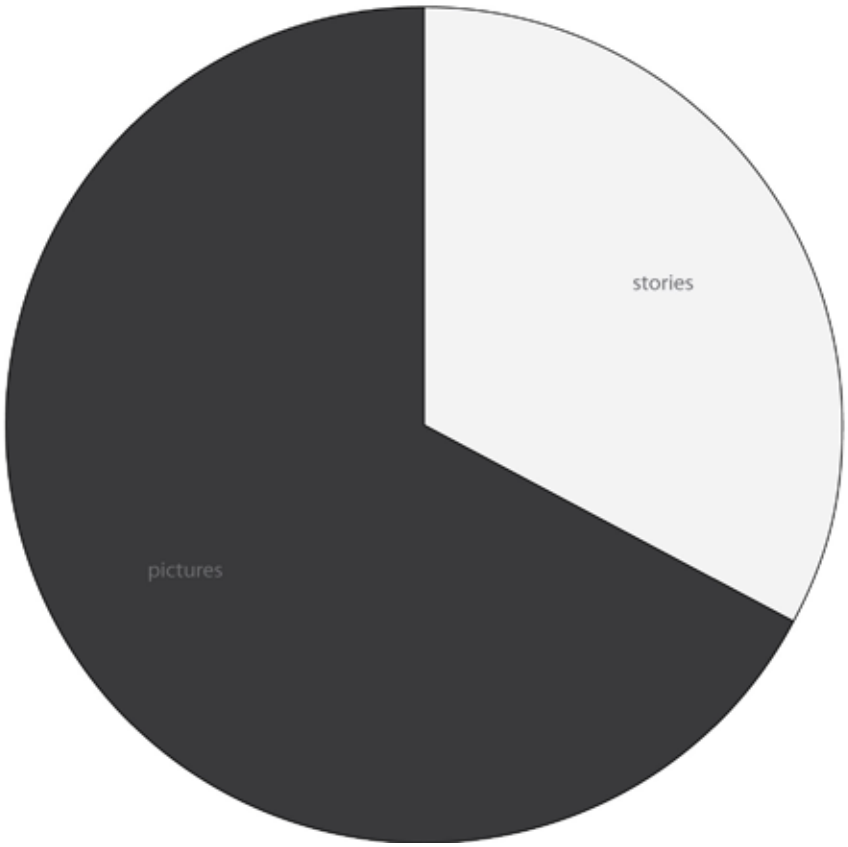
Favorite Colors of Participants



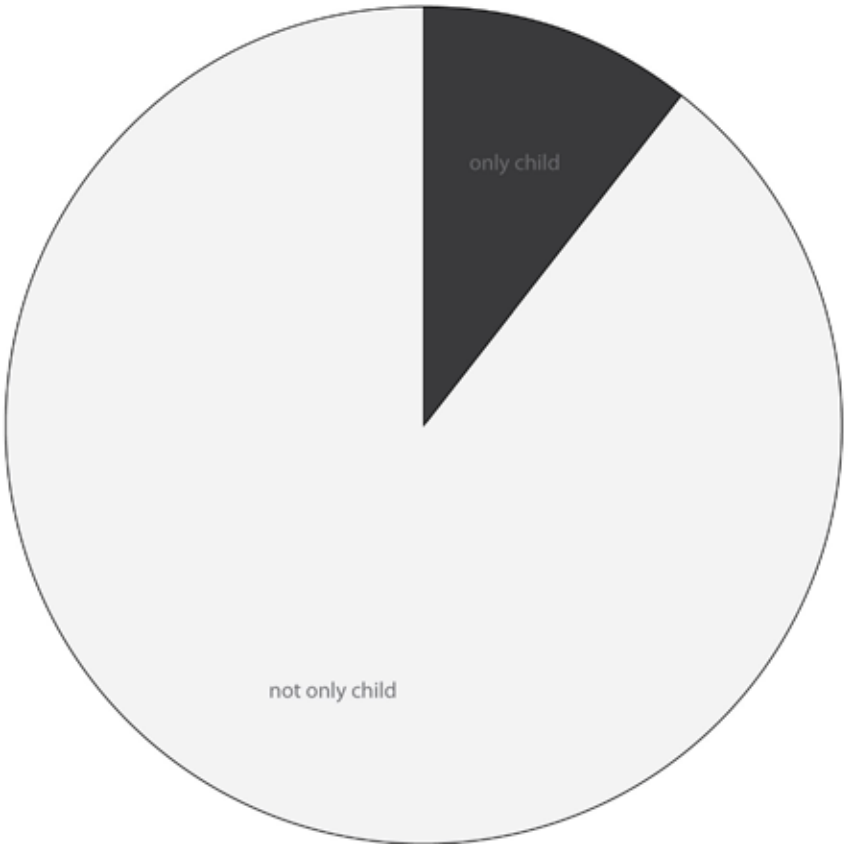
Primary Exposure to Dinosaurs: Science vs. Entertainment



Preferences for Stories vs. Pictures of Dinosaurs



Participants That Are an Only Child



Analysis of Results

Background
The interactive portion of this project was more performative than some of the others in this series, in the sense that when one was participating in it, it seemed like there was an active performance to watch and engage in, rather than simply a form to fill out or an object to make.

In this sense, it was more like *Walk the Walk* or *Talk the Talk*, in which the participants perform, than the form-filling *Dinosaur High School* or *Species-a-Rama!*, except that the performative roles were reversed, and Chris did the performing as he read the participant's palm.

However, this theatrical aspect of the piece was not the primary point of the project, it was simply a means to the end of collecting data about the participant. It did have a secondary role in which it helped Chris hone his knowledge about dinosaurs and his intuition about people's characters.

It did certainly create some memorable moments. One favorite was when a certain overly-cocky participant made a big deal about how the intuitive portion of the project was impossible, making impassioned speeches about how psychic powers are nonsense. Chris tried to explain that the project is not in any way based on a belief in psychic powers, but instead simply on the fact that if one has enough experience talking with people about their favorite dinosaurs, then one might be able to do a "cold reading" (the term for what a fortune teller is really doing) that assesses the participant's personality. Based on this cold reading, one might then guess the participant's favorite dinosaur with a degree of accuracy. Despite this explanation, the participant kept arguing that the whole idea was hogwash--but still wanted to do it in order to prove Chris wrong.

So, Chris put on his glow-in-the-dark, blacked-out, star-shaped sunglasses while the participant filled out the form. He read his palm while the participant grinned smugly, then quietly guessed "pterodactyl," which turned out to be the correct answer. The participant flipped out, insisting that Chris had somehow cheated, and never really fully accepted that Chris had been right. To the rest of the onlookers, however (because by this point quite a few people had gathered to watch), it was great theater.

No one, it should be said, was more surprised than Chris; while he got the answer right enough times to feel like he knew what he was doing, it was intermittent enough to make it feel like a real accomplishment when it happened.

Analysis of the Main Chart and Graphs
The first thing to look at, of course, is the information directly related to Chris' success (or lack of it)--the list of favorite dinosaurs and the list of Chris' intuited dinosaurs.

Triceratops turns out to be the most popular favorite dinosaur, something that would not be predicted from the rest of the data in this series. Usually Tyrannosaurus is at the top (except in *Skin & Bones I*). However, this is a slightly different kind of list. Instead of dealing with the popularity of dinosaurs in pop culture, it asks what each person's personal favorite dinosaur is. The most popular dinosaur in the culture may not be the dinosaur that is the favorite of most of the people in that culture for a variety of reasons. For instance, Bud Light may be the most popular beer in America, but that doesn't necessarily mean it is the favorite beer of the most people. They may buy it because of its price or availability or advertising or a need to lose weight. In the same way, it is possible that Tyrannosaurus is the most popular because it has the momentum of pop culture behind it, or

because everyone thinks it is the favorite dinosaur of everyone else, even if it's not.

Tyrannosaurus does come in second on the list, followed by Stegosaurus and Brontosaurus. Note that no one listed "Apatosaurus" as their favorite--everyone wrote it down as "Brontosaurus." This is interesting, because at least a certain percentage of the participants in other projects have always used the word Apatosaurus, so it's unclear why it was shut out of this project. In any case, because of the participants' preference for the old term, Chris always used the term "Brontosaurus" instead of "Apatosaurus" when making his intuitions.

Pterodactyl once again beats out Pteranodon, and Velociraptor once again is reasonably far down on the list, despite *Jurassic Park*. In fact, Deinonychus was the favorite of almost as many people as Velociraptor, which is surprising, since it doesn't get nearly as much press, since it doesn't share the sexy "-raptor" suffix.

Chris' list of intuited dinosaurs is actually a pretty good match for the list of actual favorites, in the sense that he guessed approximately the right kinds of dinosaurs and in the right numbers. He just guessed them for the wrong people!

Chris guessed Tyrannosaurus a little less than it is ranked. This was partly intentional. Chris guessed that Tyrannosaurus would be most people's favorite, so technically he could have just guessed Tyrannosaurus for everyone and gotten a better accuracy percentage. However, this wouldn't have been true to the idea of the piece, and to compensate, he actually chose it less than he normally might have.

What's impressive is that he even chose the approximately right selection of dinosaurs that were the favorite of only one person--one titanosaurus, one plesiosaurus, one parasaurolophus, etc.

One of the graphs above looks at the percentage Chris got correct out of any particular species. It shows that there is actually a degree of correlation between the number of people who had a specific dinosaur as their favorite and the number of times Chris was able to guess it, implying that, to an extent, Chris may have been picking up on the personality signals that are tied to a particular favorite dinosaur rather than guessing them by pure chance. It is fairly impressive, for instance, that Chris was able to correctly guess the one Allosaurus or one of the two Pteranodons.

When it came to sources of exposure, it was wonderful to see the strong influence of books and museums, if for no other reason than to know that people still read books and go to museums! They are also likely to be more accurate than some other forms of information about dinosaurs. When put together, TV and Movies become a very influential source, however. Interestingly, the internet was not a big factor. Since some of this data came from as long as five years ago, it is possible that since then more people have made the move to using the net, especially Wikipedia, but also paleontology-specific sites, as a primary source of information.

Fascinatingly, the sources for people's interest in dinosaurs are split almost exactly 50-50 between science and entertainment sources. Many more of them are image-based sources rather than stories, however. This is interesting insofar as it speaks to the other projects in this series. Many of the projects have determined that people's approach to answering questions is often based on using visual clues. It seems that this is yet another hint that people's interest in dinosaurs

is based on what they looked like, rather than what they did. What they did, after all, is basically just what any other animals did--their lives were no different than any contemporary animals. But they looked highly unusual! This may be part of the reason why the participants in *Dinosaur Duo* spent more time drawing the animals than writing a backstory for them.

There are plenty of dinosaur stories, from *Godzilla* to *Jurassic Park* to *Dinosaur Train*, but most of them are based on their looks, their powers, or on standard thriller movie plots. They are usually the bad guy, the device used to give our human narrators an interesting story. Narratively, they aren't much different from any other story. For example, *Raptor Red*, a fictional novel by paleontologist Robert Bakker, gets a lot of its experimental reputation precisely *because* it follows normal narrative conventions with a dinosaur as its main character--because it lets us see that it could just as easily be a story about a dog or an ostrich or a human.

The participants' favorite colors, in descending order, were blue and green, which made up the lions' share on their own, followed by red, purple, black, pink, yellow, and orange. While there is not a lot of available research for favorite colors across the general population, the results do seem to be approximately accurate, especially for the top two. This is a part of the form whose relevancy was often questioned during the project. As we will see, it does actually come into play.

There were very few participants who were an only child. Chris' original idea was that people who were an only child might have grown up geekier and more interested in dinosaurs, and thus their only-child status might be a clue for him to choose a more obscure species when he was trying to intuit their favorite dinosaur.

Analysis of the Subset Charts

The particulars of each chart will be described briefly. When an entry mentions that a group has more or less of a thing than normal, that means that its percentage of that characteristic is higher or lower than the percentage of that characteristic in the main chart. They are in no particular order.

<u>Dinosaurs Chris Correctly Intuited:</u>

Chris correctly intuited 11.5% of the participants' favorite dinosaurs, a fairly impressive feat--certainly better than pure chance, based on the variety of dinosaurs he offered as his intuitions.

Possibly the most interesting thing to be found in any of these charts is the fact that *all of the people whose favorite dinosaurs Chris correctly intuited said that their main source of exposure to dinosaurs came through Pictures*. It is far beyond random for this category to end up with a 100% Pictures response rate. This ties into the issue as discussed above. What does it mean that all the dinosaurs he intuited had a Pictures connection? Perhaps it means that Chris was best able to understand other people's thought processes if they, like he, thought in images.

This chart also has more Blues than normal, and only one only-child.

<u>Science as the Main Source of Exposure:</u>

This group's period of peak interest in dinosaurs is slightly older than usual, and has a correct intuition percentage that falls within the expected percentage, indicating that Chris did not have difficulties intuiting the favorite dinosaurs of scientifically-inclined people.

Entertainment as the Main Source of Exposure:
They had a slightly wider range of kinds of sources to dinosaurs, had slightly fewer only-children, and had a slightly older peak age of interest than normal. As with Science, Chris was able to intuit their dinosaurs at his normal rate.

Stories as the Main Source of Exposure:
This group had less "below average interest" scores than normal, meaning that they were in fact more interested in dinosaurs than the main population. They had a somewhat older peak age of interest and had slightly less only-children.

Significantly, Chris was able to intuit only one of their favorite dinosaurs, and that person listed *both* Stories *and* Images as main sources of dinosaur exposure.

Pictures as the Main Source of Exposure:
Chris guessed 16% of this group's favorite dinosaurs, which was all of the dinosaurs he correctly guessed. Otherwise, this subset is remarkably normal, statistically.

1 to 3 Level of Interest:
Their range of kinds of sources of exposure to dinosaurs was slightly less than normal, they had a somewhat younger peak age of interest than normal, and their rate of only-children was slightly lower than normal.

Chris was slightly better at guessing their favorite dinosaurs (15%) than normal. A few other indicators in these charts also show that Chris was better at guessing the dinosaurs of participants who stopped caring about dinosaurs at a younger age, perhaps because they chose their favorite dinosaurs from a simpler group.

3.1 to 5 Level of Interest:
They had a slightly older peak level of interest than normal, they had less Greens than normal, and Chris guessed slightly fewer of their favorite dinosaurs. Beyond the age issue, this is interesting, because it means Chris was better at guessing someone's favorite dinosaur if they didn't care about dinosaurs than if they did care. This also perhaps suggests that he did better because they chose their favorites from a simpler group, because they were less aware of other dinosaurs.

Peak Level of Interest in Dinosaurs from Ages 1-10:
They had a slightly less diverse range of kinds of sources of exposure to dinosaurs, they had slightly less interest in dinosaurs (see above), had slightly more only-children, and Chris did better than usual in guessing their favorite dinosaurs (17%).

Peak Level of Interest in Dinosaurs from Ages 11-20:
This group was slightly skewed towards Entertainment sources over Scientific sources, had a clearly greater interest in dinosaurs than normal, had less Greens, far less only-children, and only one correctly-intuited dinosaur, which was far below normal--and which correlates with the above-mentioned young age/low interest factors.

Peak Level of Interest in Dinosaurs from Ages 21 and Up:
This group had a wide range of kinds of sources of exposure to dinosaurs, had a clearly higher interest level in dinosaurs than normal and also had only one correct answer, which again makes sense in regard to the above factors.

Favorite Color Was Blue:
They had a much lower level of interest in dinosaurs--twice as many as usual had a "below average" level of interest. They had a younger peak level of interest, had more only-children,

and Chris correctly intuited slightly more of their favorite dinosaurs than usual.

Favorite Color Was Green:
They had a slightly higher interest in dinosaurs than usual, had a somewhat older peak level of interest, and, fascinatingly, there were no only-children among them. Chris fared slightly worse than normal when attempting to intuit their favorite dinosaur.

Favorite Color Was Anything Other Than Blue or Green:
They were more interested in dinosaurs than usual, but otherwise were statistically normal.

Main Source of Exposure Was Books:
These people also had a wide variety of other sources of exposure to dinosaurs--books were not their only source. They were less interested in dinosaurs than usual, had a slightly younger peak age of interest , liked Green less than usual, and Chris intuited slightly more of their dinosaurs than usual (15%), which again correlates with young age and low interest.

Main Source of Exposure Was Movies:
They were strongly correlated with Entertainment sources and Picture sources.

They were more interested in dinosaurs than usual, had a clearly higher peak age of interest than usual, liked Green less than usual, had fewer only-children than usual, and Chris guessed their dinosaurs slightly less than usual.

Main Source of Exposure Was Museums:
This group liked dinosaurs much more than usual, had fewer only-children, and Chris did slightly worse than usual guessing their favorite dinosaurs.

Main Source of Exposure Was TV:
This group correlated strongly with Entertainment sources. They liked dinosaurs more than normal, were slightly older, had less only-children, liked Blue less, and Chris did slightly better than normal guessing their dinosaurs. This is surprising, given their interest level in dinosaurs, and their peak age of interest, but perhaps the Blues cancelled that effect out.

This whole series of responses (Books, Movies, Museums, TV) is interesting, because it paints a clear picture that the people who were most interested in dinosaurs did not read books about them--they preferred a live, or at least moving, experience--once again reinforcing the visceral component of our fascination with dinosaurs.

Main Source of Exposure Was Something Else:
They had a higher interest in dinosaurs than normal.

Only-Children:
They were less influenced by TV or Movies, had a lower level of interest, were slightly younger, *didn't like Green at all*, and Chris was slightly worse than usual at guessing their favorite dinosaur.

Favorite Dinosaur Was Triceratops:
This group learned slightly less about dinosaurs through books, was heavily influenced by Pictures (which had a positive correlation for Chris to correctly intuit dinosaurs), and had a higher level of interest in dinosaurs than normal.

Chris correctly guessed Triceratops for 29% of them.

Favorite Dinosaur Was Tyrannosaurus:
This group also learned less about dinosaurs through books, were more influenced by Entertainment and Pictures, had a greater level of interest than normal, and less Greens.

Chris successfully guessed Tyrannosaurus for 18% of them.

Favorite Dinosaur Was Stegosaurus:
They had a younger peak level of interest than normal, were much more heavily influenced by Science sources, were influenced by Image sources, were less interested in dinosaurs than normal, and had more only-children than normal.

Chris did not correctly guess Stegosaurus for any of them. This is one of only two subsets within this whole project for which Chris did not get any correct, the other being Intuited Stegosaurs. This implies that Chris has some internal block about Stegosaurus, since otherwise he should have done better than normal, considering the positive correlation for correct guessing with Images and Low Interest.

Favorite Dinosaur Was Anything Else:
This group was normal statistically but Chris has less correct answers than normal (which makes sense since several of his correct answers were Triceratops and Tyrannosaurus).

Intuited Dinosaur Was Triceratops:
This group reached their peak level of interest in dinosaurs at a young age, and 27% of them were correct guesses. They do not share any major characteristics with the group that actually had Triceratops as their favorite.

Intuited Dinosaur Was Tyrannosaurus:
This group also reached their peak level of interest in dinosaurs at a young age, and 27% of them were correct guesses. They do not share any major characteristics with the group that actually had Tyrannosaurus as their favorite.

Intuited Dinosaur Was Stegosaurus:
This group was heavily skewed towards Entertainment sources. They had a far-below-average level of interest in dinosaurs, and none of the guesses were correct, despite the low level of interest. This group was directly opposite the group of actual favorite Stegosaurs on the issue of Entertainment.

Intuited Dinosaur Was Anything Else:
They had a higher level of interest in dinosaurs than normal, and only 6% of them were correct guesses.

Overview
The project worked well on multiple levels. It was an entertaining performative experience, it gathered data on favorite dinosaurs, and it honed Chris' experience at guessing favorite dinosaurs. The major factors that helped Chris intuit the participants' dinosaurs were a low level of interest in dinosaurs, a young peak age of interest in dinosaurs, a favorite color of Blue, being exposed to dinosaurs through Books and especially Pictures. The main hindrances were a high degree of interest in dinosaurs, an older peak age of interest in dinosaurs, a favorite color of Green, being an only child, and being exposed to dinosaurs through Movies and especially Stories.