

EARLY CRETACEOUS FOSSIL PLANTS OF THE ARARIPE BASIN, NORTHEAST BRAZIL: AN EXAMPLE OF MEASURES TO PROTECT FOSSILS AND SITES

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The Early Cretaceous beds of the Araripe Basin represent one of the most important fossil deposit in the world. Fossil plants make up an interesting part of specimens (not yet well studied) besides the famous fossil fish. Forms related to extinct conifers (Cheirolepidiaceae) and extant Gnetales are the most conspicuous elements among the fossil plants. In addition, there are pteridophyte fronds (Schizaeaceae), non-coniferous, non-euphoroid leaves (seed ferns?) and rare leaves with angiosperm features (like *Ficophyllum*; Nymphaeaceae).

Fossils of the Araripe Basin are being collected very intensively due to their beauty and excellent preservation. Therefore, measures and institutions are required to preserve the collecting areas as sites of scientific interest and to make certain that scientifically important specimens become available for study. One of the institutions supporting this goal is the Santana do Cariri Museum, directed by the Universidade Regional do Cariri. Its location in the Chapada do Araripe region itself is most important in this regard. One of the functions of the museum will be to stimulate and support scientific collections, and become a public repository for part of the materials collected. This museum will also be a resource to collectors by helping them in the identification of material. Actually, the museum already holds a small but significant collection.