Book Review

Ian Tattersall

The Primates of Madagascar

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Ian Tattersall has produced a volume which is unique in the primatological literature of the last two decades: a comprehensive biological precis of a single group of primates, the lemurs of Madagascar. The book consists of eight chapters encompassing the taxonomy, morphology, phylogeny, ecology, and behavior of extant Malagasy lemurs and their sub-fossil kin. It also includes a brief but informative summary of the discovery and naming of various lemur species.

The bulk of the book contains descriptive reference material, notably in the chapters on alpha taxonomy and on morphology and adaptation. The former is exceedingly thorough; for each plausible taxonomic group at or below the species level, Tattersall supplies nomenclatural synonymies, local names, a summary of pelage and external characters, selected skeletal dimensions and body weights, geographical range, and karyological information. This section of the book should supersede Hill's earlier effort to compile such data. The chapter on morphology and adaptation is similarly thorough, although a specialist might note some lacunae in the morphological descriptions; for example, no mention is made of Seligsohn's monograph on strepsirhine molar morphology, or Boskoff's study of reproduction in *Lemur variegatus*.

Undoubtedly the most controversial section of the book is one of its shortest chapters, Phylogeny and Classification. As Tattersall notes, one of the most striking characteristics of lemur morphology in general is the high degree of parallelism exhibited by Malagasy primates. Given these circumstances, no phylogenetic hypothesis is likely to provide a very satisfactory account of the distribution of taxonomic features. Tattersall opts for a daring evolutionary scenario which proposes a late Cretaceous or early Tertiary origin for strepsirhine primates, with much of the diversification of the Malagasy lemurs occurring off-island. Readers with sharp ears may be able to hear the screams issuing from the laboratories of conservative evolutionary biologists.

Tattersall's evolutionary scenario may in fact prove to be correct, since there is no fossil or paleobiogeographical evidence which would conclusively refute it; one wishes, however, that he would have spent a few pages discussing the alternatives to his ideas.

In any case, that section of the book represents a minor fraction of Tattersall's work, and should not detract from its obvious merits. This volume provides a wealth of morphological data which, by itself, should make this the standard reference work for lemur biology in the next few years. It opens the gate for further studies of the alpha taxonomy of Malagasy lemurs, an area which has been sorely neglected in the rush to identify broader degrees of evolutionary relationship among strepsirhines. Perhaps most importantly, Tattersall's study underscores the remarkable diversity exhibited by the least primate of living primates, and points out that our opportunities to learn more about this adaptive array are rapidly dimming. *The Primates of Madagascar* may be the best, but the last, authoritative study of the biology of living lemurs.

R.H. Eaglen, San Juan, P.R.