Book Review

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The Primate Fossil Record

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008
544 pp.; GBP 61.00/USD 95.00
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The Primate Fossil Record discusses primate origins from a morphological perspective and covers a wide range of specimens belonging to five of the main fossil groups for this order: prosimians, New World monkeys, Old World monkeys, hominoid primates and human ancestors. The vast majority of the 26 chapters in this volume are devoted to reviewing the fossil record; they are loosely organised in terms of geographical locations, taxonomic groups and time. One of the most valuable features of this book is the extensive bibliography, which covers many of the 'must read' publications on primate palaeontology, and therefore serves as a useful reference tool. Another excellent aspect of this book is its collection of quality photographs, which for the most part complement text descriptions of fossils. However, the book, unfortunately, does not contain any kind of tree diagram to organise the many specimens that are referenced. While this may seem like an impossible task, including a simplified diagram to organise these specimens would help to prevent the reader feeling buried in the sheer volume of this book. Moreover, I noticed that on a few occasions, authors fail to show consistency in taxonomic names being used across chapters (e.g. Hominidae), which may simply reflect uncertainties or disagreements about how to classify particular fossils, but nevertheless is confusing to the reader. The book also makes brief references to the climatic and geological changes that were taking place during the periods covered in chapters, but a more thorough review of this literature would have helped the reader place fossil morphology into a better ecological framework. Beyond these critiques, the book contains a number of excellent reviews on the recent and long-standing debates surrounding this field, which may serve as nice introductions for an advanced undergraduate or master's course.

Fossils are the ultimate answers to our evolutionary questions; thus, an organised and updated volume of the many specimens that have been discovered over the years is needed. *The Primate Fossil Record* manages to accomplish such a feat, and as such, I recommend it as a key reference for students and other scholars interested in anthropology and palaeontology.

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