

Re: Baboons

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Bill writes:

*>But remember that the advantage of coyotes over wolves is only after the
>appearance of farming technology and the subsequent high human population
>density. Before that time, wolves dominated in arboreal ecosystems while
>coyotes only dominated in desert and range ecosystems. So fertility alone
>is not the answer. I am also not so sure that superior intelligence alone
>would give an advantage to early hominids.*

Rick Potts of the National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian) argues that humans are essentially a weed species, a lineage that prospers(ed) during times of environmental disturbance. Here's a part of the abstract that he provided for a recent talk that he gave at the 2004 Astrobiology Science Conference a few weeks ago:

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The evolution of human beings can be considered an odd and unrepeatable phenomenon, making it difficult to draw general principles of evolution, applicable broadly to life's origin and evolution, from our own evolutionary history. One possible exception is the evolution of adaptability. Dramatic expansion in the hominin ability to interact with environments was expressed as a small population of tropical African apelike creatures eventually gave rise to a single species, *Homo sapiens*. The idea to be examined is that the major features of human evolution arose not from the challenges of the African savanna, ice-age Europe, and any other single array of habitat conditions, but rather from the dynamic and unstable qualities of environments.

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In a few more weeks, we'll have his talk (and slides) up on the internet so that you may watch it directly.

Wirt Atmar