

home bases, its dens became heavily infested with skin parasites. The use of the same sleeping places night after night is thought to have provided abnormally rich breeding-grounds for a variety of ticks, mites, fleas and bugs, to a point where the situation provided a severe disease risk. By casting off his hairy coat, the den-dweller was better able to cope with the problem.

There may be an element of truth in this idea, but it can hardly have been of major importance. Few other den-dwelling mammals-and there are hundreds of species to pick from-have taken this step. Nevertheless, if nakedness was developed in some other connection, it might make it easier to remove troublesome skin parasites, a task which today still occupies a great deal of time for the hairier primates.

Another thought along similar lines is that the hunting ape had such messy feeding habits that a furry coat would soon become clogged and messy and, again, a disease risk. It is pointed out that vultures, who plunge their heads and necks into gory carcasses, have lost their feathers from these members; and that the same development, extended over the whole body, may have occurred among the hunting apes. But the ability to develop tools to kill and skin the prey can hardly have preceded the ability to use other objects to clean the hunters' hair. Even a chimpanzee in the wild will occasionally use leaves as toilet paper when in difficulties with defecation.

A suggestion has even been put forward that it was the development of fire that led to the loss of the hairy coat. It is argued that the hunting ape will have felt cold only at night and that, once he had the luxury of sitting round a camp fire, he was able to dispense with his fur and thus leave himself in a better state for dealing with the heat of the day.

Another, more ingenious theory is that, before he became a hunting ape, the original ground ape that had left the forests went through a long phase as an aquatic ape. He is envisaged as moving to the tropical sea-shores in search of food. There he will have found shellfish and other sea-shore creatures in comparative abundance, a food supply much richer and more attractive than that on the open plains. At first