

environment gave them a rude shove into the great open spaces would they be likely to move. Unlike the early mammalian explorers, they had become specialised in forest existence. Millions of years of development had gone into perfecting this forest aristocracy, and if they left now they would have to compete with the (by this time) highly advanced ground-living herbivores and killers. And so there they stayed, munching their fruit and quietly minding their own business.

It should be stressed that this ape trend was for some reason taking place only in the Old World. Monkeys had evolved separately as advanced tree-dwellers in both the Old and the New World, but the American branch of the primates never made the ape grade. In the Old World, on the other hand, ancestral apes were spreading over a wide forest area from western Africa, at one extreme, to south-eastern Asia at the other. Today the remnants of this development can be seen in the African chimpanzees and gorillas and the Asian gibbons and orang-utans. Between these two extremities the world is now devoid of hairy apes. The lush forests have gone.

What happened to the early apes? We know that the climate began to work against them and that, by a point somewhere around fifteen million years ago, their forest strongholds had become seriously reduced in size. The ancestral apes were forced to do one of two things: either they had to cling on to what was left of their old forest homes, or, in an almost biblical sense, they had to face expulsion from the Garden. The ancestors of the chimpanzees, gorillas, gibbons and orangs stayed put, and their numbers have been slowly dwindling ever since. The ancestors of the only other surviving ape-the naked ape-struck out, left the forests, and threw themselves into competition with the already efficiently adapted ground-dwellers. It was a risky business, but in terms of evolutionary success it paid dividends.

The naked ape's success story from this point on is well known, but a brief summary will help, because it is vital to keep in mind the events which followed if we are to gain an objective understanding of the present-day behaviour of the species.