

direct exposure to the sun's rays. If the hair has to go, then clearly there must be a very powerful reason for abolishing it. With few exceptions this drastic step has been taken only when mammals have launched themselves into an entirely new medium. The flying mammals, the bats, have been forced to denude their wings, but they have retained their furriness elsewhere and can hardly be counted as naked species. The burrowing mammals have in a few cases-the naked mole rat, the aardvark and the armadillo, for example-reduced their hairy covering. The aquatic mammals such as the whales, dolphins, porpoises, dugongs, manatees and hippopotamuses have also gone naked as part of a general streamlining. But for all the more typical surface-dwelling mammals, whether scampering about on the ground or clambering around in the vegetation, a densely hairy hide is the basic rule. Apart from those abnormally heavy giants, the rhinos and the elephants (which have heating and cooling problems peculiar to themselves), the naked ape stands alone, marked off by his nudity from all the thousands of hairy, shaggy or furry land-dwelling mammalian species.

At this point the zoologist is forced to the conclusion that either he is dealing with a burrowing or an aquatic mammal, or there is something very odd, indeed unique, about the evolutionary history of the naked ape. Before setting out on a field trip to observe the animal in its present-day form, the first thing to do, then, is to dig back into its past and examine as closely as possible its immediate ancestors. Perhaps by examining the fossils and other remains and by taking a look at the closest living relatives, we shall be able to gain some sort of picture of what happened as this new type of primate emerged and diverged from the family stock.

It would take too long to present here all the tiny fragments of evidence that have been painstakingly collected over the past century. Instead, we will assume that this task has been done and simply summarise the conclusions that can be drawn from it, combining the information available from the work of the fossilhungry palaeontologists with the facts gathered by the patient ape-watching ethologists.