

VOA Special English Science Report

EARLIEST PRIMATE

This is Bill White with the VOA Special English Science Report.

Scientists say they have found evidence of the earliest known animal whose existence led to the development of monkeys, apes and humans.

The animal was extremely small, about the size of a human finger. It lived 45 million years ago in a rain forest in what is now China. It probably slept during the day, and searched for food at the tops of trees at night. It ate insects and fruit.

Scientists from the United States and China reported their discoveries of foot bones from three tiny animals in the *Journal of Human Evolution*. They also made a separate report in the publication *Nature*. It discussed fossils from one of the three creatures. Scientists named the creature Eosimias, or “dawn monkey.” The scientists discovered Eosimias teeth and jaw bones in 1994.

Foot and leg bones of the animals were found in a limestone mine at Shanghuang, about 160 kilometers west of Shanghai. More Eosimias remains were found along the Yellow River in the central Chinese province of Shanxi.

The scientists said Eosimias and the two other tiny animals lived together at the time when an important change in animal development took place. Eosimias appears to be the animal from which two separate groups of creatures developed 40 to 50 million years ago. One group

later developed into monkeys, apes and humans. The other became what scientists call “lower animals” that live today, such as lemurs.

An examination of Eosimias’ foot bones shows that the animal was an extremely early example of creatures that could walk on four legs, much like present day monkeys. The two other tiny creatures could not walk. They jumped from one tree to another. Their long bones helped them do this.

These discoveries seem to support a new scientific idea about where human ancestors first appeared on Earth. They suggest that the earliest monkeys first appeared in Asia, not in Africa as had been thought. Many scientists now say this new evidence means that the earliest human ancestors developed in Asia, then moved to Africa, where the first humans appeared. The oldest remains of human ancestors ever found were discovered in Africa. They are between two million and four million years old.

This VOA Special English Science Report was written by Nancy Steinbach. This is Bill White.

Source: Voice of America, 3/30/2000