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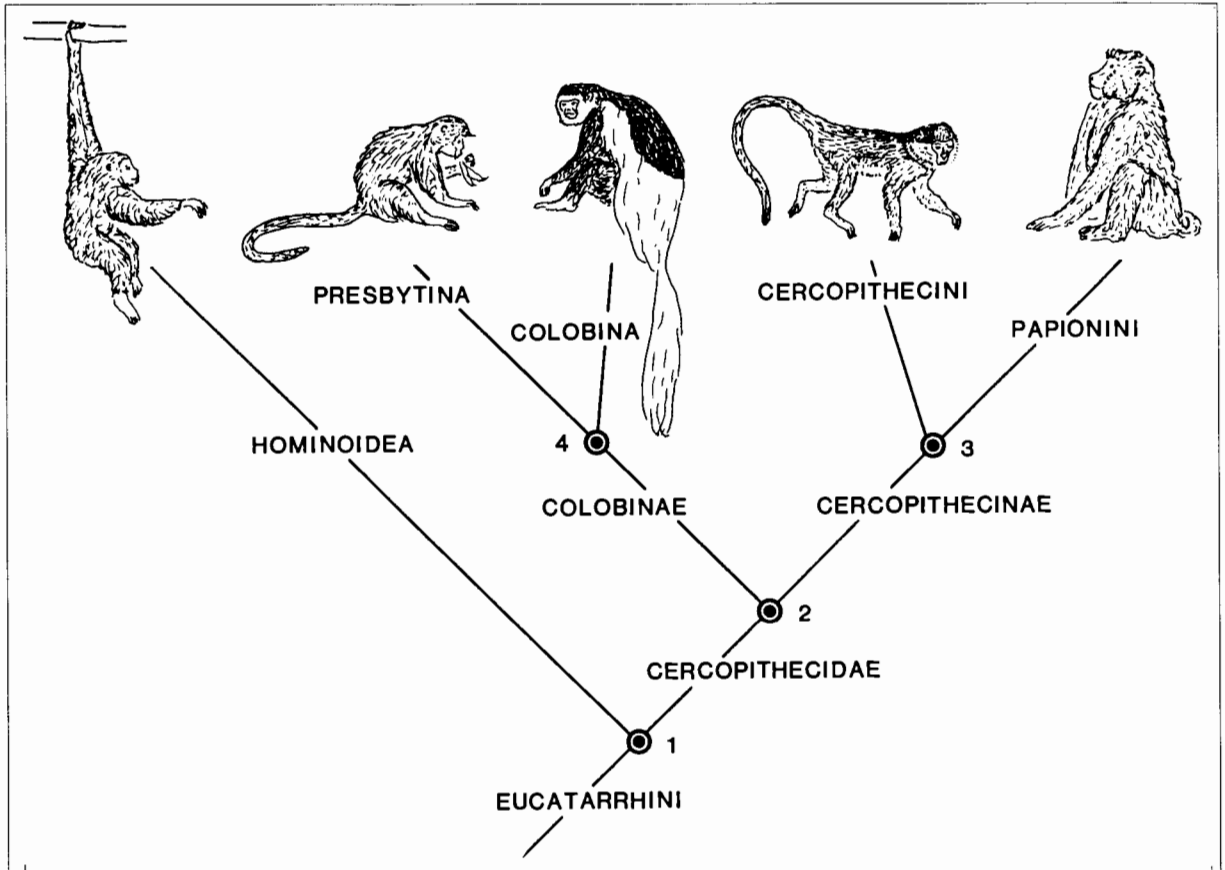
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Cercopithecoidea

One of the two extant superfamilies of Old World anthropoids (Catarrhini), including the family Cercopithecidae (Old World monkeys). Although cercopithecoids are termed *monkeys*, they are not closely related to the platyrrhine monkeys of the New World but instead are the sister taxon of the Hominoidea (apes and humans). Together, the hominoids and the cercopithecoids form a monophyletic subgroup of the catarrhines, here termed eucatarrhines. The common ancestor of hominoids and cercopithecoids was probably an animal similar to the Oligocene Propliopithecidae or the Miocene Pliopithecidae. It was suggested previously that the Cercopithecoidea should also include the extinct Italian Miocene family Oreopithecidae, based on perceived similarities of the dentition to cercopithecids. This hypothesis has been rejected by more detailed analyses of the postcranium and skull (and, to some extent, the teeth) of *Oreopithecus*, now placed as a subfamily of Hominidae. Similarly, it has been suggested at times that the Eocene-Oligocene North African Parapithecidae were the direct ancestors of the Cercopithecidae. Although this group can be recognized as of monkey *grade* and may share a few morphological similarities with cercopithecids, the parapithecids are best interpreted as archaic anthropoids, the sister-taxon to Catarrhini plus Platyrrhini.

Since there is only one family recognized within Cercopithecoidea, this taxon is equivalent to Cercopithecidae, and the name rarely needs to be employed. Within Cercopithecidae, three subfamilies are usually recognized: Cercopithecinae (the cheek-pouched macaques, baboons, and relatives) Colobinae (leaf-eating colobus, langurs, and allies), and Victoriapithecinae (extinct archaic cercopithecids of the African Miocene). Some authors have argued that the last of these is the sister-taxon to the first two and should be ranked as the separate family Victoriapithecidae. This would give greater meaning to the concept Cercopithecoidea, with two included families, but here only subfamily rank is accepted.

See also Anthropeoidea; Ape; Catarrhini; Cercopithecidae; Cercopithecinae; Colobinae; Eocatarrhini; Eucatarrhini;



Cladogram of relationships among the higher taxa of Cercopithecoidea, with sketches of representative animals. Courtesy of E. Strasser.

Hominoidea; Monkey; Oreopithecus; Parapithecidae; Pliopithecidae; Primates; Propiopithecidae; Teeth; Victoria-pithecinae. [E.D.]

Further Readings

Delson, E. (1992) Evolution of Old World monkeys. In R.D. Martin, D. Pilbeam, and J.S. Jones (eds.): Cambridge Encyclopedia of Human Evolution. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 217–222.