

Title: Taxonomic Failure: The Tarsier Dilemma

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Humans possess an inherent desire to make sense and order of the world around them, and when faced with something that doesn't fit neatly into their predetermined ideas, it causes both internal and external discord. A current topic of anthropological discussion that exemplifies this phenomenon is the tarsier debate, in which great uncertainty revolves around which suborder of primate tarsiers fit into taxonomically. The field of anthropology is a unique field of study because it is holistic and attempts to consider various perspectives in its approach to data collection and analysis. However, due to this flexible nature and the influence that perspective has on analyzing the data available, making a concrete determination for the correct classification of tarsiers is difficult, and may not be possible until a clear set of universally accepted criteria are developed. There currently exists two main methodologies for determining taxonomic classification: traditional and cladistic. The traditional method of analysis concludes that tarsiers are more closely related to prosimians, such as lemurs, while the cladistic method argues that tarsiers are more anthropoid in nature, similar to monkeys and apes. These opposing conclusions stem from different approaches when considering which characters are important to taxa placement, as well as how they define a taxon. Considering this variation in methodology and the resultant opposition that it creates, it then becomes important to determine whether having several methods of classification, and the benefits that come with the flexibility, is worth the constant debate that inevitably results when an outlier appears.

References

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