

Abstract for the general public (English)

Loris and pottos form a family of modern primates from Africa and Asia, the Lorisidae, characterized by their nocturnal lifestyle and slow-moving nature. While the study of the ecology, behaviour, and evolutionary relationships of modern lorises has received considerable attention in past studies, little is known about their fossil relatives. In part, this is due to the fact that fossil lorises have rarely been included in any analysis that aims to resolve the evolutionary relationships among primates. Understanding how fossil lorises relate to their living relatives is critical for explaining major trends in brain size or dietary habits in primate evolution. The main aims of this project are to resolve 1) the relationships between fossil and living lorises, using advanced phylogenetic methods; 2) where in the world lorises originated; 3) how quickly and early in primate evolution lorises obtained the modern morphological traits that characterize the family; 4) what the behaviour of ancient lorises was (i.e. did they depend more on visual cues or olfaction? How sensitive was their hearing?, etc.); and 5) what ancient lorises were best adapted to eat, using novel techniques for dietary reconstruction. These results will contribute, not only to filling an important gap in primate evolution, but also to the broader understanding of how modern groups of animals that today are characterized by having a low diversity but lived for a long time came to be.