



The Red Ape: Orang-Utans and Human Origins

By Jeffrey H. Schwartz

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Boston, 1987, 8vo t.tela con sovr. ill. col. pp. XII-337 con fig. n.t. + 8 tav. f.t.

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The Red Ape: Orang-Utans and Human Origins By Jeffrey H. Schwartz Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2721776 in Books
- Published on: 1987-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Binding: Hardcover
- 337 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

For more than a century, it has been generally accepted that chimpanzees and gorillas are the closest living relatives of humankind. A common ancestor "the missing link" has been elusive ("Lucy" and other fossil hominids have turned out to be dead ends in the evolutionary chain). Schwartz, a physical anthropologist at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, challenges standard thinking with a radical thesis: our nearest evolutionary relative is the orang-utan, native to Borneo and Sumatra. His arguments are based on morphological similarities, sexual physiology and behavior, molecular studies. He has constructed an elegant, though highly technical, detective story that gives the reader a minicourse in comparative anatomy and evolutionary science. Schwartz discusses and criticizes the work of other scientists in the field, leaving us with the impression that paleoanthropology is in the throes of upheaval. Readers who like to pursue questions of our origins, who followed the Lucy fracas, will want to read this. Illustrated.

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From Library Journal

Anthropologist Schwartz, stating that "Our closest living relative is the orangutan," and not the great apes, lays out evidence for and against his controversial views and reviews some of the history of evolutionary theory. Schwartz's description of the unraveling of the Piltdown Man hoax is quite readable. Lay readers will enjoy his ingenious analogy using the mirror scene in the Marx Brothers' movie Duck Soup to explain why biochemists find it so hard to track evolutionary changes in nucleotides. Nevertheless, most portions of The Red Ape are technical (e.g., those explaining how biochemical analysis of DNA is used to measure evolutionary distance between species). A book for specialists and knowledgeable amateur anthropologists, suitable for academic and larger public libraries. Laurie Tynan, Huntingdon Cty. Lib., Pa.

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