

Darwinius masillae - Re-classified



19 May 2009, The newly discovered fossil of Ida, *Darwinius masillae*, was hailed as the fossil equivalent of a "Rosetta Stone" for understanding the critical early stages of primate evolution. (The Guardian newspaper). Researchers believed that it came from the time when the primate lineage, that diversified into monkeys, apes and ultimately humans, split from a separate group that went on to become lemurs and other less well known species. Due to the importance of this fossil as a 'missing link' in human evolution, it received news coverage, journal articles, book references, a television program aired on BBC1, and there is even a website dedicated to the find, idafossil.co.uk.

A Sky One news coverage presented the fossil as "described by experts as the "eighth wonder of the world"", and researchers have said that proof of this transitional species finally confirms Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Journal papers have been written on the find, the initial one being published in *PLoS ONE*, entitled '*Complete Primate Skeleton from the Middle Eocene of Messel in Germany: Morphology and Paleobiology.*', (a 27 page report of the find including in depth analysis of bone structure, radiographic comparisons, CT reconstruction of teeth, comparisons of vertebrae and eye positioning). In a David Attenborough-narrated BBC programme, the fossil was revealed in high quality virtual reality. It was also mentioned that, Ida bears "a close resemblance to ourselves", with nails instead of claws, a grasping hand and an opposable thumb - like humans and some other primates. But he said some aspects of the teeth indicate she is not a direct ancestor - more of an "aunt" than a "grandmother".

There was some speculation on the find, since no-one could access the initial article until after a press conference and the unveiling at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, by the city's mayor. Speculation included Dr Henry Gee, a senior editor at the journal *Nature*, said the term itself was misleading and that the scientific community would need to re-evaluate its significance.

21st October 2009 - After the hype and speculation over the find, the news and TV coverage, a second news article was released in New York - The Science Writer Malcolm Ritter, said "Remember Ida, the fossil discovery announced last May with its own book and TV documentary? A publicity blitz called it "the link" that would reveal the earliest evolutionary roots of monkeys, apes and humans. Experts protested that Ida wasn't even a close relative. And now a new analysis supports their reaction. In fact, Ida is as far removed from the monkey-ape-human ancestry as a primate could be, says Erik Seiffert of Stony Brook University in New York." The UK update was released on Yahoo News, with an article entitled; Ida fossil 'not the missing link', and an article published in *Nature* read "A 37-million-year-old fossil primate from Egypt, described today in *Nature*¹, moves a controversial German fossil known as Ida out of the human lineage, reclassifying the find to "belong to ancestors (adapiforms) of today's lemurs and lorises."

With all the hype the media made over the initial find and it's 'missing link' status, minimal coverage was regarding the real results! This is one example where a fossil is initially given the title 'missing link' or 'ancestor' then later re-classified, but since no-one is aware that it has been

re-classified scientists, textbooks and evolutionists can still quote the find when speaking about human evolution.