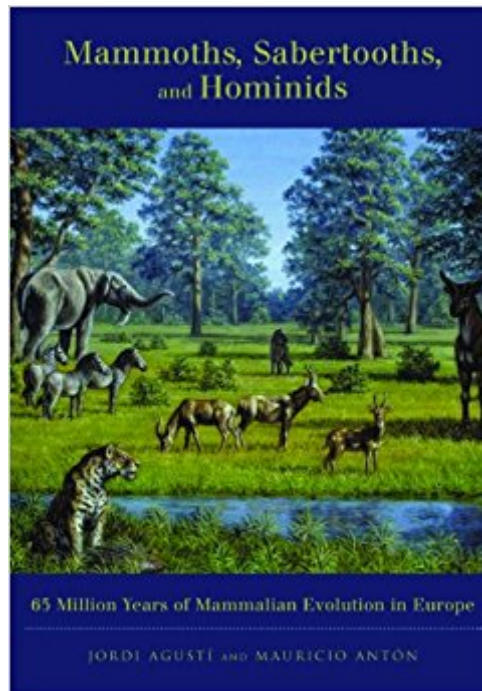


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Mammoths, Sabertooths, And Hominids: 65 Million Years Of Mammalian Evolution In Europe



Synopsis

Mammoths, Sabertooths, and Hominids takes us on a journey through 65 million years, from the aftermath of the extinction of the dinosaurs to the glacial climax of the Pleistocene epoch; from the rain forests of the Paleocene and the Eocene, with their lemur-like primates, to the harsh landscape of the Pleistocene Steppes, home to the woolly mammoth. It is also a journey through space, following the migrations of mammal species that evolved on other continents and eventually met to compete or coexist in Cenozoic Europe. Finally, it is a journey through the complexity of mammalian evolution, a review of the changes and adaptations that have allowed mammals to flourish and become the dominant land vertebrates on Earth. With the benefit of recent advances in geological and geophysical techniques, Jordi Agustí and Mauricio Antón are able to trace the processes of mammalian evolution as never before; events that hitherto appeared synchronous or at least closely related can now be distinguished on a scale of hundreds or even dozens of thousands of years, revealing the dramatic importance of climatic changes both major and minor. Evolutionary developments are rendered in magnificent illustrations of the many extraordinary species that once inhabited Europe, detailing their osteology, functional anatomy, and inferred patterns of locomotion and behavior. Based on the latest research and field work, Mammoths, Sabertooths, and Hominids transforms our understanding of how mammals evolved and changed the face of the planet.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I must confess feeling a bit unfair about giving this book bad press. First, as the other reviewers have mentioned, the illustrations are breathtaking (and yes, buy "The Big Cats and Their Fossil Relatives" as well). You don't have to be an evolution buff to enjoy Mauricio Ant3n's vivid drawings of monster pig entelodons, bizarrely pronged paleomerycids or huge-headed giant creodont predators. Another reviewer mentioned machairodonts; my personal favorites are the gorilla/horse-crossbreed-like chalicotheres. Second, the task of covering 65 myr of mammalian succession in a reader-friendly way is just about impossible; after all, we are talking about hundreds of genera known only by their latin names (and most paleontologists are oddly adverse to giving cool names like "Tyrannosaurus", sometimes they rather go for stuff like "Brachydiceratherium", "Paracynhyaenodon" or even "Parachleuastochoerus"). The book succeeds in compiling all of this chaos, and it contains an immense, invaluable amount of information. It is all in all a unique and beautiful work on an extremely interesting topic and heartily recommended on those grounds alone. However: Despite its popular format the text is unforgiving in its demands on the reader. Clearly one has to have a fair comprehension of geological epochs, but also quite specialized bio-jargon like "sclerophyllous", "fossorial" or "selenodont". Maybe I'm the dummy here, but sometimes I've been quite puzzled as to who exactly the intended audience is.

Written for the specialist or student in evolutionary biology and paleontology this book can nevertheless be studied by anyone who has an interest in these topics. For this reviewer, the main interest in this book was in the effect of climate on mammalian extinctions, with the hopes of shedding light on the current debate on climate change/global warming. Since the book is directed towards the specialist, the non-specialist will have to deal with a large amount of terminology, this arising mostly from the classification schemes used in paleontology and zoology. This reviewer found it helpful to use a few note sheets along the way to assist in remembering some of the scientific names of the major fauna that did exist in the time frame over which the book covers. Having some background in biology and geophysics will also help in the assimilation of the material in the book, particularly in cases where the authors are discussing dating techniques. There is no part of this book that is uninteresting, and the excellent plates and drawings in the book add to the pleasure in its perusal. And the book went beyond this reviewer's expectations regarding the effects

of climate change on mammalian extinctions: there are many examples discussed in the book and a few surprises, such as the assertion that the Mediterranean was completely desiccated around 6,000,000 years ago (the late Miocene). Early on though the authors caution the reader that even though much is known now regarding the time series of temperatures and oceanic changes throughout the last 65,000,000 years, one cannot conclude that there is an exact correlation between changes in climate and changes in mammalian ecosystems.

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