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Early Primate Evolution: Lessons from Extant Small Arboreal Mammals?

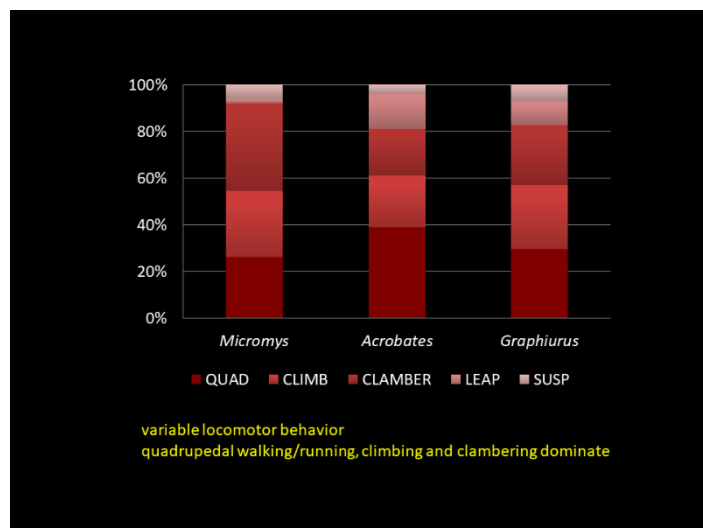


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The main theories of early primate evolution posit that ancestral primates were small-bodied, arboreal mammals that were able to exploit the fine branches of tree peripheries and bushes by establishing a firm pedal contact on the available diverse substrates. The scarcity of the fossil record and the understanding of morpho-functional links imposes the use of extant models to simulate past events.



In this context, I present the study of the locomotor behavior, gait analysis, and pedal utilization in an array of small arboreal mammals (treeshrews, marsupials, rodents). The arboreal behavior of these phylogenetically diverse small mammals provides important information for understanding the flexible pathways that mammals have adopted to adapt to the arboreal constraints. Ultimately, this information may shed some light into the interpretation of some morpho-behavioral complexes that are shared by primates.

Dionisos Youlatos is an internationally renowned zoologist notably working on extant Asian colobines with special emphasis on how locomotion contributed to niche segregation. He uses a wide variety of mammalian species to model arboreal niches and then discusses the evolution of primates through Cenozoic times. Dionisos Youlatos notably contributed to the field of paleoprimatology with key-studies on the locomotion of ecology of *Mesopithecus*, the most European dispersed monkeys during the late Miocene.