

Primates and snakes, 75 million years of deadly dialog?



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Social 3pm SCEN 502

Seminar 3:30pm SCEN 604

In this public lecture I describe an emerging theory that: 1) As constricting predators, ~75 million years ago (mya), and as venomous adversaries beginning ~50 mya, snakes have influenced the evolution of primates, especially in terms of the neurobiology of vision and fear. 2) The origins of venomous front-fangs radically changed encounters with snake predators, such that visually, acoustically, cognitively sophisticated birds and primates promoted evolution of serpentine defensive displays and mimicry. 3) As weapon-wielders, primates in particular might have affected snake evolution, including favoring Africa and Asia origins of the only long-distance weaponry among all serpents. These long-term, bi-directional evolutionary relationships both challenge and inspire efforts to conserve snakes.