

WHY DID *HOMO SAPIENS* SURVIVE

“If we went back 100 000 years ... there might have been as many as six different kinds of humans on the earth. All those other kinds have disappeared, and left us as the sole survivors.”

– Chris Stringer,
paleoanthropologist,
Natural History
Museum, London,
England

Humans have evolved over millions of years, constantly adapting to Earth’s changing environment. Scientists have placed our human ancestors in four major groups. Within each group are several species. The timeline on this page includes examples of species in each group.

For much of human existence, more than one human species lived on Earth at the same time. Today, the species called *Homo sapiens* (or *H. sapiens*) is the sole survivor. All humans on Earth belong to this species.

H. sapiens started evolving in Africa about 200 000 years ago. Many scientists believe that several human species, including *H. sapiens* and *Homo neanderthalensis*, evolved from an earlier species called *Homo erectus*, which became extinct. *H. erectus* had evolved from even earlier species that had also become extinct. **Q:** Examine the timeline. The skulls have been reconstructed by scientists from bones dug up at archaeological sites. What similarities and differences do you observe among the various species?



Species Example

Sahelanthropus tchadensis



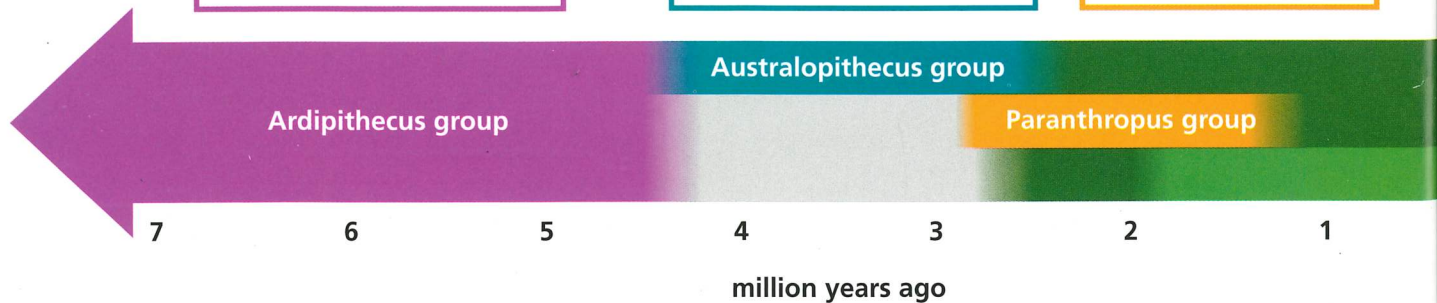
Species Example

Australopithecus afarensis



Species Example

Paranthropus boisei



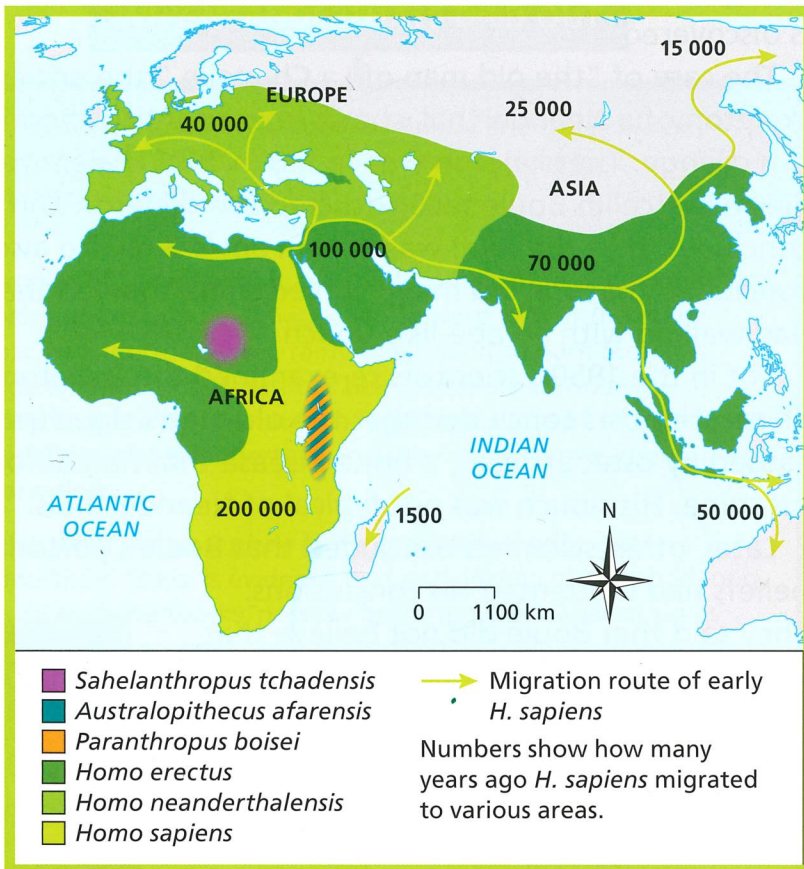
WHEN OTHER SPECIES DID NOT?

Where Early Human Species Developed and Lived

H. sapiens migrated out of Africa to Europe, Western Asia, and beyond. There, they encountered *H. neanderthalensis*, also known as **Neanderthals**. Today, scientific testing has revealed that many people from Europe and Western Asia contain traces of Neanderthal genes.

Q: What does this finding suggest about the way *H. sapiens* and Neanderthals interacted?

Between 40 000 and 25 000 years ago, *H. sapiens* became the only human species that survived. *H. sapiens* continued to migrate around the world and adapt to new environments.



Species Example

Homo erectus



Species Example

Homo neanderthalensis



Species Example

Homo sapiens

