



## Scientists Say Monkeys Sailed to South America

### How did monkeys travel to South America from Africa?

- 34 million years ago, the closest points of Africa and South America were only about 900 miles apart.
- Scientists believe the monkeys could have sailed across the Atlantic Ocean on rafts made of vegetation.

Fossilised monkey teeth, found in Peru, have led scientists to a most remarkable discovery. They think these creatures sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, from Africa to South America, 34 million years ago!

Scientists from the University of Southern California, USA, discovered the teeth while in the Peruvian Amazon, on the west coast of South America.

The teeth they unearthed were very similar to teeth found from monkeys in northern Africa that lived 23-56 million years ago. But, how did the monkeys get to South America? This is when the team started to have an idea.

One of the scientists, Professor Erik Seiffert, said he had been **doubtful** at first. After seeing very large chunks of trees and bushes forming rafts on a river, he began to **reconsider**.

"If a small primate caught a ride on a raft like this, it seems very plausible that they could make it such a long distance," said Professor Seiffert.

The tiny monkeys would have weighed around 350 grams. This is roughly the same weight as a can of soft drink. They may have been washed out to sea on rafts made of **vegetation**, while clinging to trees during a storm.

The journey across the Atlantic would have been **perilous** and long. However, it would be a much longer crossing if any monkeys were

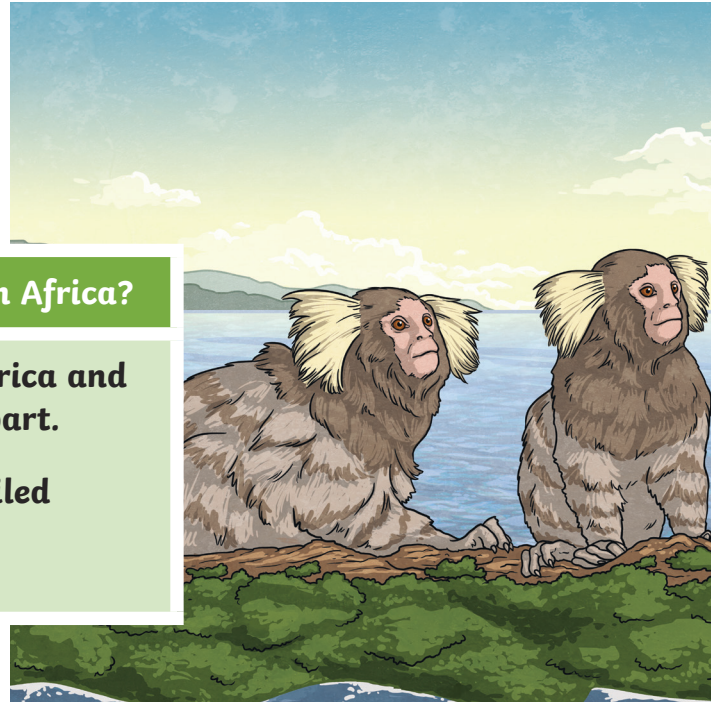


Illustration: Monkeys could have sailed on rafts.

to try it again today. 34 million years ago, the closest points of Africa and South America were about 900 miles apart. Continental drift has meant that Africa and South America have moved farther away. The closest points today are around 1800 miles apart.

These brave little monkeys have been named *Ucayalipithecus perdita*. Their name is a mixture of three things: the place name where they were discovered; the Greek word for monkey; and the Latin word for lost.

### Glossary

**doubtful** When a person is unsure or uncertain about something.

**reconsider** To consider again and change your mind.

**vegetation** All the plants or plant life of a place.

**perilous** Something that involves great risk or danger.