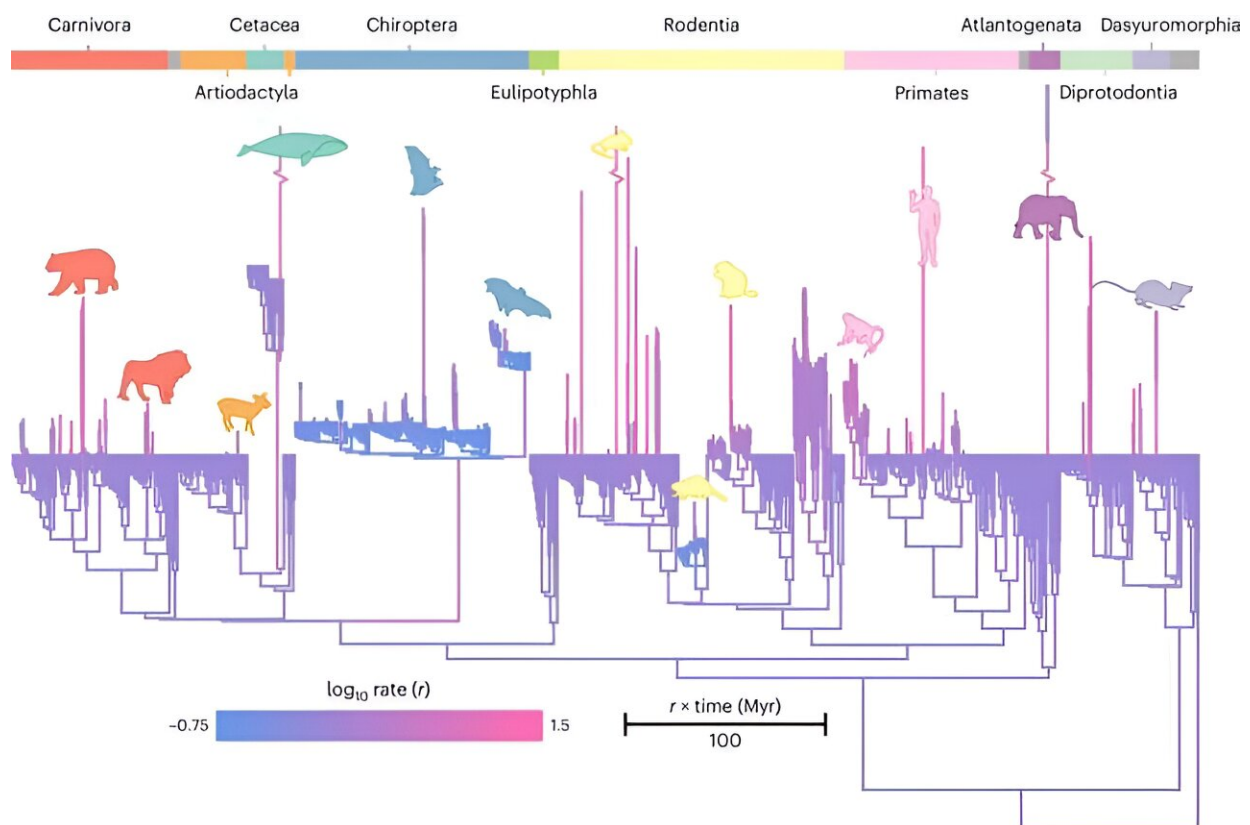


Best of Last Week—Brain riddle solved, AI-assisted stories are better, gene behind neuro-disorders found

July 15 2024, by Bob Yirka



Rates of relative brain mass evolution. Credit: *Nature Ecology & Evolution* (2024). DOI: 10.1038/s41559-024-02451-3

It was a good week for biology research as an international team of

geneticists and AI experts reframed the narrative of Neanderthals and other ancient humans through their study of the [history of genetic intermingling](#)—adding what they describe as whole new chapters to the shared hominin history. Also, a combined team of evolutionary researchers from the University of Reading and Durham University claimed to have [solved the brain size riddle](#). They found evidence that the largest animals do not have proportionally bigger brains—except for humans. And a team of climate researchers in the U.S. announced [the first local extinction](#) due to sea level rise in the U.S. The Key Largo tree cactus, which lived near the sea in the Florida Keys, has disappeared.

In technology news, a team of chemists and engineers at Northwestern University moved closer to [producing green hydrogen](#) via water electrolysis. They combined complementary electron and X-ray-based characterization techniques. And a team of roboticists at Tencent Robotics X, in China, introduced a new framework for [enabling animal-like agile movements](#) in four-legged robots. They also demonstrated its superiority by implementing it in a quadruped called MAX. Also, a team of engineers at the University of Texas at Austin developed a new [carbon storage technology](#) that they claim is the fastest of its kind. And a team of researchers from the University of Exeter Business School and Institute for Data Science and Artificial Intelligence working with the UCL School of Management, conducted a study involving 600 volunteers and found that [stories written with AI assistance](#) are more creative, better written and more enjoyable than those written by humans alone.

In other news, a large team of medical researchers at the University of California, San Francisco, and CellSight Technologies found that patients who develop long COVID show signs of [uncharacteristic immune cell activity](#) in many of their organs, and some have traces of SARS-CoV-2 RNA in their guts for up to two years after their initial infection. Also, a team of medical researchers at the Water Technology

Center in Karlsruhe, Germany, found that Europe's drinking water is [contaminated by "forever chemicals."](#) And finally, an international team of medical researchers found a gene whose variants potentially [cause neurodevelopmental disorders](#) in hundreds of thousands of people around the world.

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