

Taxonomy is a system used by scientists to classify all living things, past and present, with a hierarchy of Latin names, and to depict the biological relationships among them. Human beings are known by the familiar term *Homo* (“man” or “human”) *sapiens* (“wise”). In taxonomic terminology, “homo” is our genus, and “sapiens” is our species within that genus.

*Sapiens* emerged about 200,000 years ago but other species of humans date back almost three million years. They long ago went extinct, like *Homo habilis*, who made and used stone tools.

A few human species, however, co-existed with *Sapiens*, as *Homo neanderthalensis* did until about 40,000 years ago. Then they too died out, perhaps losers in competing with *Sapiens* for resources, or even killed off by them, but not before cross-species mating left a trace of Neanderthal DNA in our genes.

Scientists do not all agree on many aspects of human evolution. But everyone agrees that today *Sapiens* is the only living species of human.

Or is it?