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A Better Climate for Human Evolution

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Evidence from fluvio-lacustrine sediments in ten separate basins in the Ethiopian and Kenya rifts suggests there were five protracted humid periods during the Late Cenozoic; at ca. 4.5, ca. 3.5, 2.7-2.5, 1.9-1.7, and 1.1-0.9 million years before present. These wet periods are coeval with known increases of aridity in parts of North West and North East Africa, indicating significant regional shifts in African climate. These three East African wet periods correspond to major global climatic changes as well as maxima in eccentricity and thus precession, suggesting a combined global and local causation. These climatic changes were important for the speciation and dispersal of mammals and hominids in East Africa as it implies that key steps in human evolution occurred during relatively humid periods in a region containing extensive deep lakes.