







10 WEIRDEST THINGS EVOLUTION LEFT IN YOUR BODY

Humans have been walking the Earth for around 200,000 years. During that time we have adapted to all sorts of conditions and environments. Some of these adaptations have hung around long after they were needed.

Words: Catherine E. Offord



1

COCYX

Before you were born, you had a tail—albeit only for a few weeks. All mammals develop a tail as embryos in the womb, but humans (except in a few very rare cases) lose it again before birth. The coccyx, or tailbone, at the bottom of your spine is this tail's last remnant.

2

THIRD EYELID

In the corner of your eye, next to the tear duct, is the remnant of a third eyelid technically known as the plica semilunaris. In many reptiles and birds, and some mammals, this translucent "mictitating" (blinking) membrane can be drawn horizontally across the eye for moisturization, extra protection or to remove debris. In humans, it plays more minor roles, such as assisting tear drainage.



3

WISDOM TEETH

Most people only become aware of their wisdom teeth thanks to toothaches in their late teens and early twenties. So-called because of their delayed appearance, these extra molars were probably used by our large-jawed ancestors to grind up raw plant material. Nowadays, our wisdom teeth are virtually useless, and their

4

JACOBSON'S ORGAN

Jacobson's organ, also called the vomeronasal organ, is an important smell sensor in many animals, from elephants to salamanders. Some studies suggest humans have a remnant of this organ at the back of the nose, but as there are no nerves connecting it to the brain, it's unlikely to play a role in our sense of smell.

8

DARWIN'S POINT

Around a quarter of the population has a small bump on the upper, inside edge of each ear, known as Darwin's point after its description in Darwin's *The Descent of Man*. The position of the bump matches the location of more prominent points in the ears of many of our primate cousins, providing yet another sign of our common



6

PALMARIS LONGUS

Around 85 percent of people have a palmaris longus, a vestigial muscle running from the elbow to the heel of the hand. In some primates, this muscle assists climbing, while in cats and other predators, it retracts the claws. You can test if you have it by flexing your wrist and touching your fifth finger to your thumb—if it's there, it will pop up.



7

GOOSEBUMPS

Goosebumps appear when you're frightened, or a bit chilly, thanks to tiny muscles called arrector pili surrounding hair follicles in your skin: when these muscles contract, your hairs stand up. In humans, such hair-raising has little effect, but it could have made our furrier ancestors appear larger when threatened, and would have provided insulation in cold weather by slowing airflow over the skin.

5

PALMAR GRASP REFLEX

Place an object in the hand of a baby under five months old, and the fingers will automatically close around it with a surprisingly strong grip. This reaction, known as the palmar grasp reflex, is a throwback to hairier times, when babies of our predecessors would have clung to their mothers by gripping their body hair.

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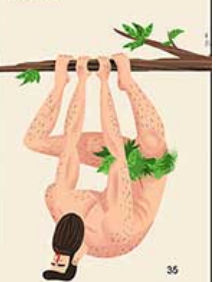
AURICULARIS MUSCLES

If you've ever seen someone wiggle their ears, you've seen them use a set of vestigial muscles called the auricularis muscles. Cats, dogs and many other mammals use these muscles to reorient their ears and focus their hearing. Humans' ancestors all but lost this ability, making the muscles good for little more than the occasional party trick.

10

PLANTARIS MUSCLE

The plantaris is a small muscle that plays such a minor role in humans that around 10 percent of the population doesn't have it at all. Situated behind the knee, this muscle connects to the ankle via a long tendon that, in our more flexible primate relatives, can be used to make the foot grasp branches or pick up objects.



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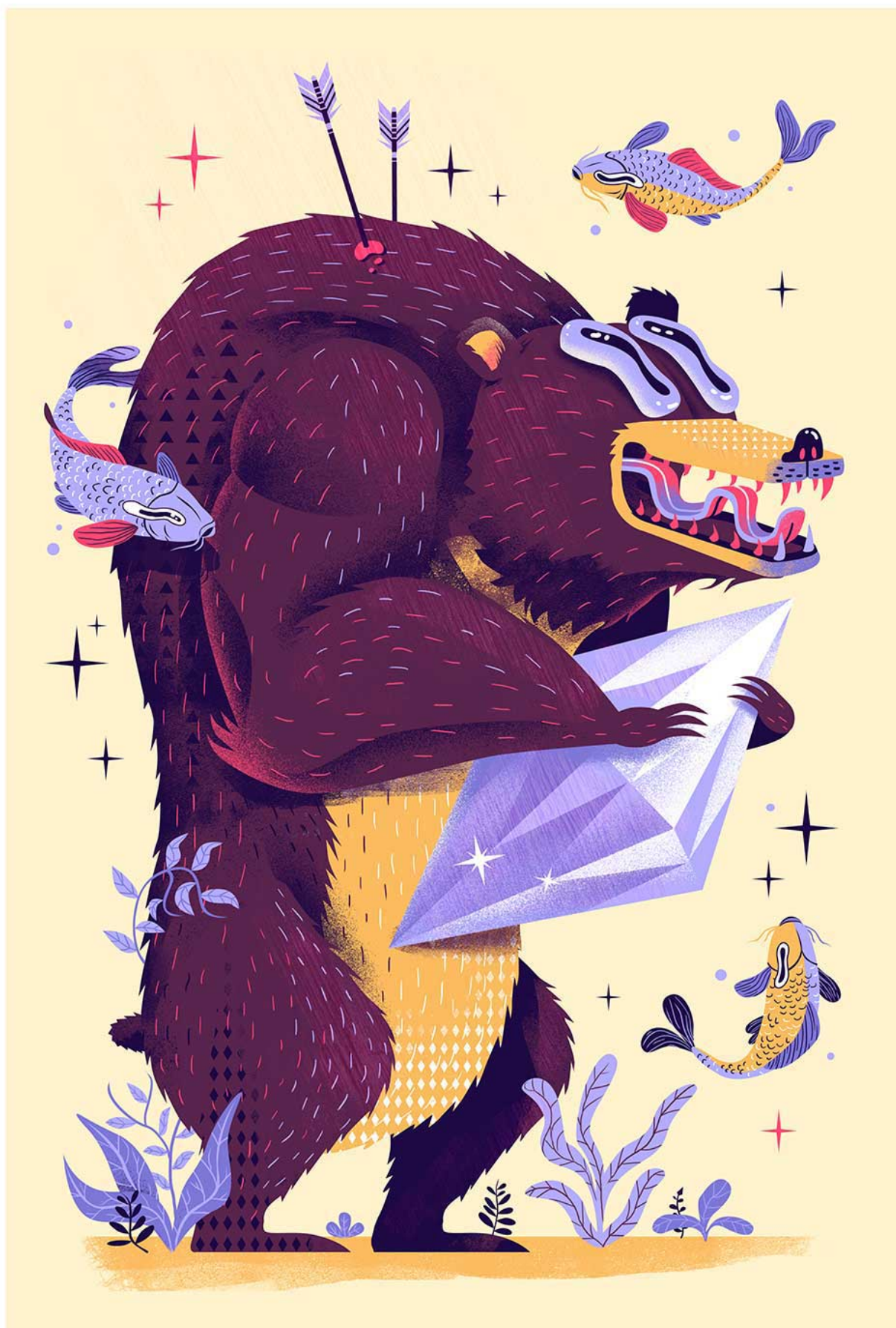
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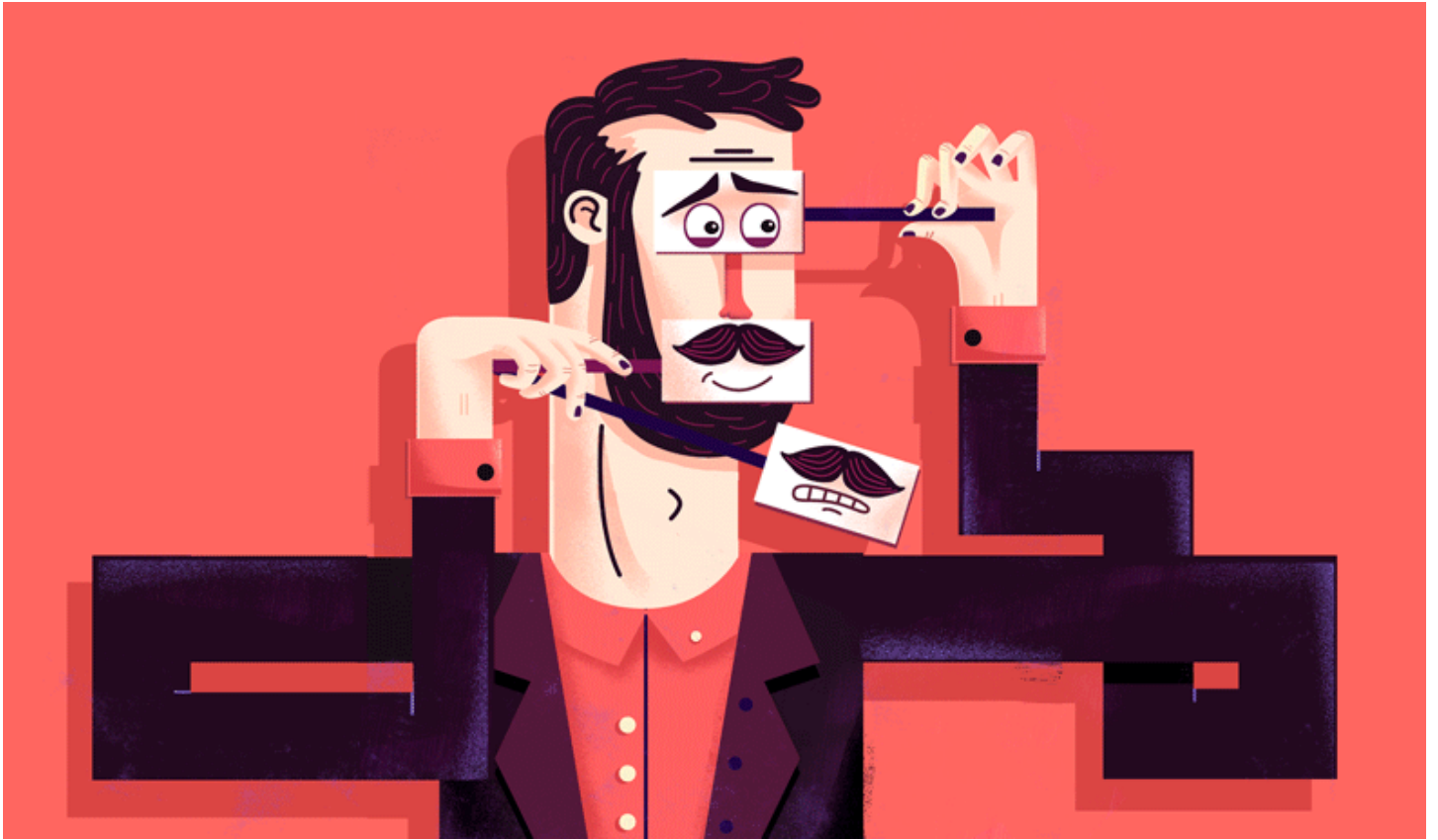






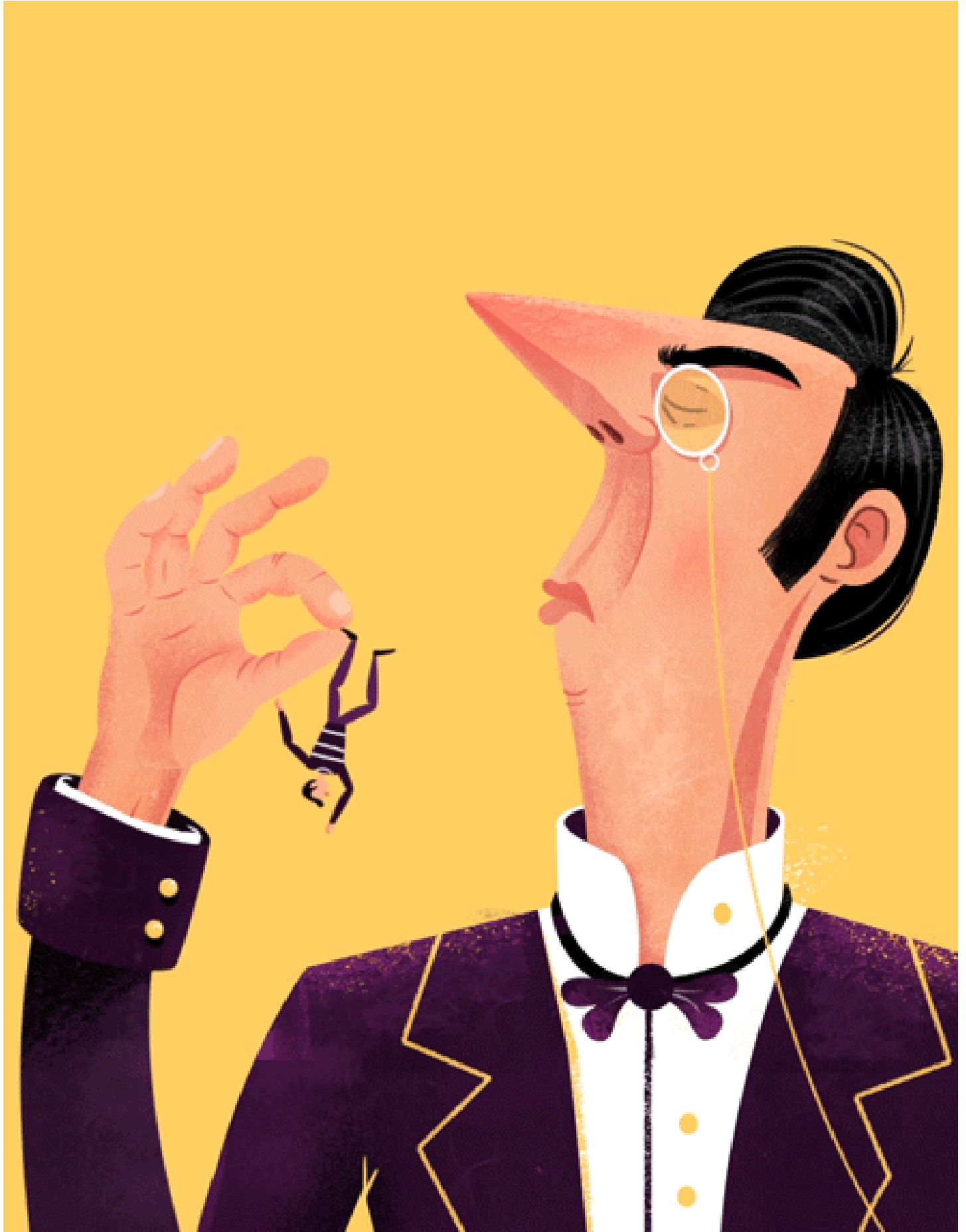
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