

## ORDER HYRACOIDEA

**Family PROCAVIIDAE**  
(Hyraxes or dassies)

Because of their relatively small size, crouched stance, and short tail, hyraxes have the outward appearance of rabbits. However, their structural features reveal similarities to proboscideans (p.264) (note recognition characteristics). This is a small order—it contains fewer than a dozen species in a single extant family.

The dentition of hyraxes is unusual. The upper incisor on each side resembles a short tusk-like canine. Although there are seven permanent cheekteeth in the upper and lower jaws, they erupt sequentially and are seldom all present at the same time.

Hyraxes generally occupy forests or rocky places and are nimble climbers.

Elastic pads richly supplied with sweat glands on the soles of the feet provide remarkable traction (the sweat glands also serve as an important means of heat loss). These mammals are herbivorous. They seek shelter among rocks or in hollows of trees.

Tree hyraxes are solitary and nocturnal. Rock and brush hyraxes live in colonies containing a few to hundreds of individuals; they are mostly diurnal. Individuals of different species (or genera) often share the same rockpile. They even bask and huddle together, activities which are important for temperature regulation in these mammals. Aside from short periods of feeding, rock hyraxes spend most of their time crouching motionless on rocks and seemingly staring directly into the sun, a habit made possible by a special

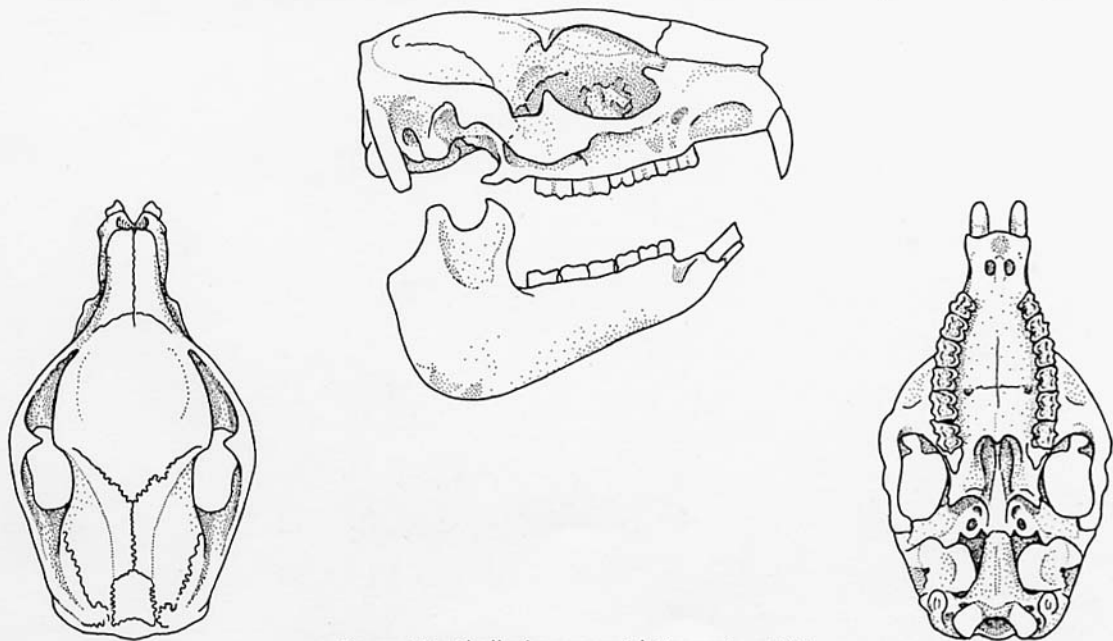


Figure 124. Skull of a procaviid (*Procavia*, x 1/2).

membrane (umbraculum) that shades the pupil of the eye (Walls, 1942). Hyraxes utter screams, whistles, and chattering sounds. These mammals seemingly breed year-round. Females usually bear one to three offspring.

Three genera, 11 species; Africa, Middle East.

#### Recognition Characters:

1. size medium (30-63 cm).
2. **tail very short.**
3. **soles of feet with large, elastic pads.**
4. digits syndactylous.
5. **nails on all digits except innermost toe of hindfoot, which bears a large claw.**
6. **interparietal bone well developed.** (Fig. 124).
7. **postorbital process well developed** (Fig. 124), **often forming complete postorbital bar.**

8. nasal opening of skull located at end of rostrum.
9. **jugal forming part of mandibular fossa.**
10. **upper incisor evergrowing, tusk-like** (Fig. 124), **composed chiefly or entirely of dentine.**
11. cheekteeth lophodont, relatively simple, becoming progressively more complex from front to rear.

Dental formula:  $\frac{1\ 0\ 4\ 3}{2\ 0\ 4\ 3} = 34$

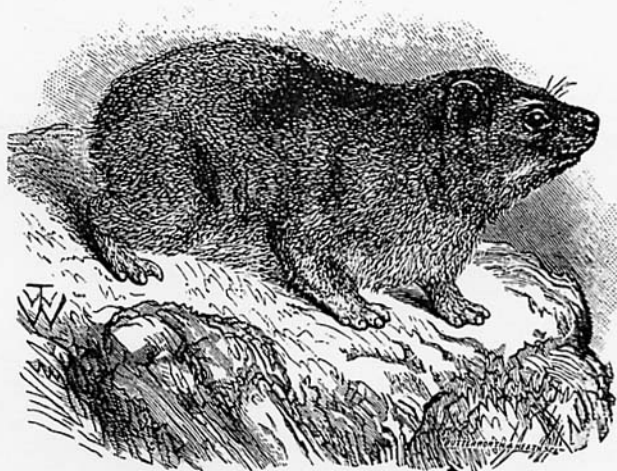
Compare with: Proboscidea.

#### Genera:

*Dendrohyrax* (3) - Tree hyraxes.

*Heterohyrax* (3) - Rock hyraxes.

*Procavia* (5) - Brush hyraxes.



Hyrax.