

Ancient humans mated with Neanderthals as recently as 45,000 years ago

Analyses of DNA found in human fossils from around [45,000 years ago] — the oldest known human remains in Europe — suggest that interbreeding between Homo sapiens and Neanderthals, who were on the fast track to extinction, occurred more commonly than has often been assumed, two new studies suggest.

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Remains of three H. sapiens individuals unearthed in Bulgaria's Bacho Kiro Cave yielded [nuclear DNA containing Neanderthal contributions of about 3 to 4 percent](#), says a team led by evolutionary geneticist Mateja Hajdinjak of the Francis Crick Institute in London.

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Further evidence of ancient interbreeding comes from a nearly complete human skull discovered in 1950 in a cave in what's now the Czech Republic. About [2 percent of the genes](#) in DNA from that fossil, identified as a female's, also come from Neanderthals.

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If H. sapiens and Neanderthals regularly interbred as the latter population neared its demise, then relatively large numbers of incoming humans accumulated a surprising amount of DNA from smaller Neanderthal populations, [evolutionary geneticist Charles] Lalueza-Fox suspects. After 40,000 years ago, additional migrations into Europe by people with little or no Neanderthal ancestry would have further diluted Neanderthal DNA from the human gene pool, he says.

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