

AUSTRALIA'S UNIQUE ANIMALS

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How do creationists explain the origin and distribution of Australia's unique animals in terms of a young Earth and a worldwide flood?

Explaining the origin of Australia's marsupial population, and especially its uniqueness to that one isolated southern continent, is difficult for evolutionists and creationists alike. Marsupials such as kangaroos, opossums, wallabies, and koalas seem unusual, but monotreme (i.e., the echidna and the platypus) are even more puzzling. The main difference between marsupials and most other mammals centers on the reproductive system. Marsupials give birth prematurely and allow the fetus to develop in an external pouch. In other mammals, (excluding the monotremes, which lay eggs), the fetus develops within the uterus and is attached to, and nourished by, the placenta.

One of the most interesting fact about marsupials is that they nearly all have non-marsupial equivalents in other parts of the world (see Dobzhansky, et al., 1977, Figure 9.3, p. 267). The kangaroo has a similar role to the antelope roaming the African savanna. The wombat resembles a badger, and even has a backward-pointing pouch so that it will not fill with dirt while burrowing! There also are many small marsupials that have rodent counterparts. Evolutionists attribute such similarities to "parallel evolution" in both homology (being alike in form) and analogy (occupying a corresponding niche). That is, they believe that these marsupials and their placental peers developed independently; they share similar characteristics, but took two different paths to get there (see Simpson and Beck, 1965, pp. 499-501). A common ancestry, combined with similar forces of natural selection, evolutionists assert, will result in the same sort of changes through time. This common ancestor is thought to be the opossum because it is a marsupial, and is found in other areas of the world apart from Australia.

According to evolutionary theory, the opossum was a primitive mammal living 200 million years ago on a single southern land mass called Gondwanaland. When parts of this supercontinent divided into what are now

Australia and South America, the opossums were separated geographically. Over eons of time, so the story goes, the Australian descendants of the opossum developed into the various types of marsupials seen today. However, in South America, they "evolved" placentas and eventually migrated to North America and Eurasia.

These evolutionary ideas suffer from a number of problems, as listed below.

(1) There are no intermediate fossils ("transitional forms") showing the development of the marsupials from an opossum or opossum-like ancestor. Furthermore, to suggest that one type of mammal could arise by supposed evolutionary mechanisms is incredible enough, but the chances of having **both** placental and non-placental forms evolve in the same way, at the same time, and in different regions, are remote to say the least.

(2) The humble opossum has been nominated as the ancestor of all mammals because it is supposed to be so "primitive," having a relatively small brain and no "specialized" characteristics. But the opossum has thrived virtually unchanged in many parts of the world. In general, marsupials are often considered less "advanced" because they lack the complex internal reproductive system of placental mammals. However, they possess many other characteristics that could give them an edge over their placental counterparts. For instance, a female kangaroo can nourish two young ones of different ages at the same time, providing the appropriate formula from each teat. Unlike placental mammals, marsupials can suspend or abort the embryo deliberately if adverse conditions arise. And, of course, the pouch provides a superior place of protection for the young marsupial. Yes, marsupials are different, but they are not inferior.

(3) The distribution of marsupials is not well answered by evolutionary theories. According to Michael Pitman, "the most diverse fossil assemblies have been obtained from South America and, later (Pliocene), Australia" (1984, p. 206). That is, according to the fossil record, the marsupials already were well defined as a distinct group before the separation of Australia from other

continents. Thus, geographic separation cannot be as significant to their development as evolutionists like to think. An alternate, biblically based model is as follows:

(1) It is reasonable to suggest that God created the various kinds of marsupials. Hence, the many **varieties** of opossums, kangaroos, wallabies, and so on, most likely have arisen since the time of creation.

(2) There could be any number of reasons that God created both placental and non-placental forms. One possibility is that marsupials were created for a specific environment. For example, on the African savannas or North American plains, animals migrate to different areas according to the seasons, and range over huge tracts of land in search of better grazing. However, vegetation patterns in Australia do not allow such flexibility. The unique characteristics of marsupials that allow them to survive in a tough environment are indicative of good design, not blind evolution.

(3) Representatives of marsupial kinds went into the ark and were carried through the Flood. Any other varieties not in the ark became extinct with the Flood (they exist only as fossils).

(4) After the Flood, marsupials may have migrated to Australia across land connections or narrow waterways. Perhaps there is a supernatural element involving the second point made above. That is, God, having created specially equipped creatures, may have directed them to settle in Australia in particular. If God can arrange for all the animals to go to Noah (Genesis 6:20), then He very well could assist and direct them in their migration from Ararat once they left the ark (Genesis 8:17).

(5) There is no need to postulate immense periods of time for wholesale movement of animal kinds over the Earth. Initial studies by Richard Culp show that there are minimal differences between many North American, European, and Asian varieties of certain plant and animal species (Culp, 1988). The lack of dissimilarities, and the occurrence of unique animal or plant assemblages in various parts of the world (not just Australia), may be evidence for a rapid resettlement in relatively recent times. This would be consistent with the Genesis account.

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Originally Published In
Reason & Revelation
August 1989, 9[8]:29-30

ARTICLE REPRINT

Distributed by
Apologetics Press, Inc.
230 Landmark Drive
Montgomery, AL 36117-2752
(334) 272-8558