

These mammal-like reptiles appeared very early in the history of reptiles, before the Age of the Dinosaurs. In fact, it is a curiosity of geologic history that mammal-like reptiles of varying size and type dominated the land for close to 90 million years before the Age of the Dinosaurs (see figure 9.9). Why they were supplanted and almost totally extinguished by the dinosaurs is not clearly known. Apparently the *thecodonts*, the ancestors of the dinosaurs, devoured or displaced all but the smallest *therapsids*.

Fossil evidence indicates that the surviving rat-sized *therapsids*

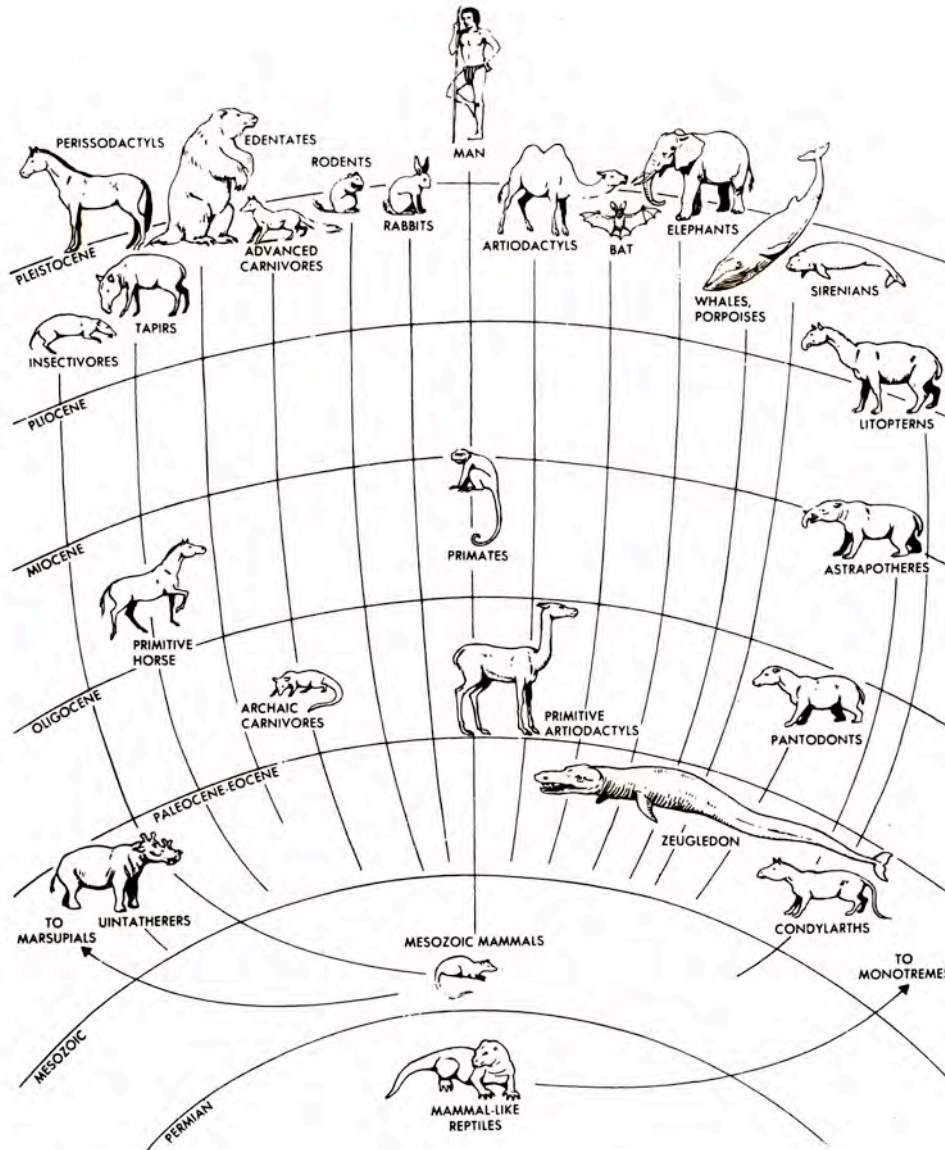


FIGURE 9.15.

Simplified phylogenetic chart of the placental mammals. This illustration also emphasizes the varied adaptations of the groups to different modes of life.