



Figure 3. The fact that South America was once an isolated island continent makes it an ideal laboratory for the study of dispersal patterns. The first stratum of South American land mammals consists of early groups, either indigenous or of unknown origins, that radiated to fill niches and adaptive zones within the continent. By contrast, stratum 2 consists of waif dispersants that arrived across water barriers in the Oligocene. Stratum 3 shows the impact of the land bridge, with the appearance of 16 new families. Some Cricetidae and Procyonidae were included among these "walkers," although other Procyonidae, and perhaps other Cricetidae as well, certainly arrived earlier by water.