

# A Similar Niche: Different Animal

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Let's play a little game called "guess the animal." This animal eats lots of grass. It has fur. Full grown, it can get to be a couple hundred pounds. It escapes predators with its incredible speed. If cornered, it may attack. It is hunted for its meat and hide. Millions of dollars are spent each year fixing the cars that collide with them. Farmers often get quite upset when these creatures eat their crops and pastureland.

What is it? Why, it's a kangaroo, of course. "Kangaroo?" you say, "The description sounds more like a white tailed deer to me." Both answers would be correct given the descriptions, and your answer was probably a pretty good indication of the hemisphere in which you live. For two animals that are so different in appearance and life, it is quite remarkable that they have so much in common.

Along with the facts that both animals are mammals, are similar in size, move quickly, and eat grass, they live in a similar niche. The niche of an animal is the particular place in which it thrives in the creation. They both exist in a place where there is enough space for a medium sized animal to get around quickly and enough grass and vegetation to eat year round. They generally have no trouble reproducing to fill that space because there are few predators large enough to catch and eat them.

Looking a bit more broadly at the various deer species, we find a whole range of deer ranging in size from a few pounds to a few hundred pounds. These deer all have a particular niche in the Northern Hemisphere. Similar niches in Australia, New Zealand, and New Guinea, however are filled not by creatures with hooves, antlers, and four walking legs, but rather by creatures that have pouches for their young and hop on two legs. These also range in size from the giant kangaroos to the wallabies. I find it quite fascinating that God has created creatures to fill very similar environments, but yet created them to be so different.

I have not studied these animals enough to know if a herd of kangaroos would thrive in Wisconsin or Michigan or if a herd of deer would thrive in Australia or New Zealand. I suspect that the kangaroo would have some trouble in the deep winter snow and that the deer would prefer a more dense vegetation and higher precipitation. The niches are similar, but different enough to prevent the deer from invading the niche of the kangaroo and the kangaroo from invading the niche of the deer.

Even though the niches are similar and the interaction of the deer with its environment is very similar to that of the kangaroo, the creatures have some fundamental differences. Both animals belong to the class Mammalia: they are warm blooded, have fur, and nourish their young with milk. But the class Mammalia is divided into three sub-classes which differ in the way that the young are born. These sub classes are: the Monotremata or egg-laying, the marsupial mammals which carry their young in pouches, and the placental mammals which carry their young in the womb for a longer period of time. Kangaroos belong to the category of marsupial animals. Deer belong to the placental mammals.

One major difference, then, between a deer and a kangaroo is the way in which they reproduce. A baby kangaroo is conceived within the mother, but after a few weeks, the tiny legless embryo is born and wriggles across the abdomen to the pouch where it attaches to a mammary gland and drinks milk for about 9 months before it emerges into the world. A baby deer is conceived within the mother and remains in the womb attached to its mother via the

umbilical cord and placenta. After about nine months, the baby deer is born into the world where it soon learns to walk and live.

When the godly scientist begins to analyze the comparison of the kangaroo and deer under the spectacles of Scripture, he sees something very different than the picture given by the ungodly scientist who looks through the spectacles of evolution. One thing that we notice is that all marsupials except the opossum, are native to Australia, New Zealand, and New Guinea. Through the spectacles of evolution, the ungodly scientist imagines that there was a time when perhaps all mammals laid eggs and then some species began to keep the eggs within themselves for longer periods of time. Some of these creatures lived in environments where it was to their advantage to keep the young within themselves and they survived as a species and evolved further. In time, continents became separated and the marsupial type mammals survived best in the lands around Australia while the placental type mammals survived best in the Northern Hemisphere.

Through the spectacles of Scripture, however, we see that God on the sixth day of creation created each creature after its kind. The kangaroo was always an animal with a pouch for its young and the deer was made to carry its young in the womb. God created each creature with its unique way of generating another of its own kind. We also see the flood and the command of God that the creatures go back into the world and fill every part: "Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth. And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him: Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark." Genesis 8:17-19. God so directed their movement and the formation of continents that the marsupial animals ate the grass on the more arid land of Australia and the placental deer ate the grass of the Northern Hemisphere.

The scientists continue to study the creatures of the world and are amazed at the features that they have to live and adapt to every corner of the earth. The godly scientist gives glory to God, but the ungodly scientist gives glory to his own theory of evolution. Let us also give glory to God who has in his infinite wisdom created creatures so similar, yet fundamentally distinct and diverse.

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