

History of Cenozoic Life

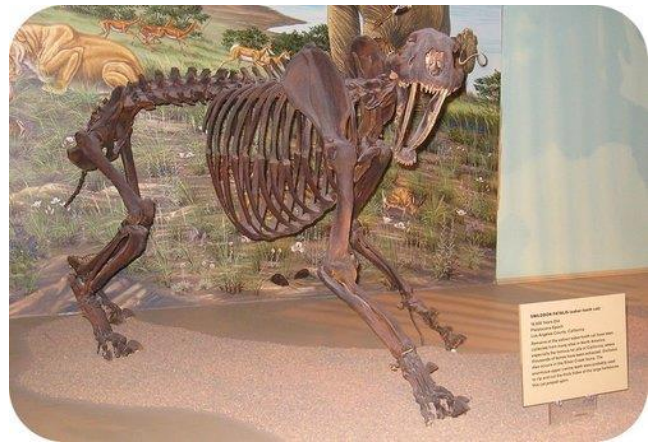
Cenozoic Life

The extinction of many species at the end of the Mesozoic left many niches available to be filled.

- Success of mammals is due to several of their unique traits.
 - Mammals are endothermic and have fur, hair, or blubber for warmth
 - Mammals can swim, fly, and live in nearly all terrestrial environments
 - Mammals initially filled the forests that covered many early Cenozoic lands
- Over time, forests gave way to grasslands, which created more niches for mammals to fill
- As climate cooled during the ice ages, large mammals were able to stand the cold weather, so many interesting megafauna developed.
 - Giant sloths
 - Saber-toothed cats
 - Woolly mammoths
 - Giant condors
 - Many other animals that are now extinct
- Many of the organisms that made up the Pleistocene megafauna went extinct as conditions warmed
 - Some may have been driven to extinction by human activities

Study Tip

Remember that the Cenozoic Era is also known as the “Age of Mammals.”



The saber-toothed cat lived during the Pleistocene.

Concept Check

- What are the Pleistocene megafauna and why were they so large?
- What characteristics do mammals have that allow them to fill so many niches?
- How does climate affect evolution?