

The Raccoon Dog

The raccoon dog of Vatera (*Nyctereutes megamastoides*) was much larger than the raccoon dog of today (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*). Two million years ago, raccoon dogs lived all over Europe and Asia. They disappeared from Europe when the wolf (*Canis lupus*) came to Europe, some time at the end of the Pliocene. That means that sites with fossils of wolf are younger in age than those with raccoon dog remains. Vatera is such an older site. At present, raccoon dogs are typical for East Asia. They have recently been introduced into Europe, where they were released in the wild to establish a new fur animal in the wild. However, it established itself too easily and became really successful. The raccoon dog is a member of the dog family (Canidae), which includes the dogs, wolves, foxes, and some extinct wolf-like animals. The lineage of the raccoon dogs diverged from the other canids somewhere during the Miocene (7-10 million years ago). Raccoon dogs have nothing to do with raccoons (*Procyon lotor*), even though they are somewhat alike. The most obvious difference is that raccoons have dark bands on the tail. The Badger and Otter In the forest of Vatera two million years ago, a badger (*Meles thoralis*) hunted for small prey. There was also another member of the mustelid family, which lived along the riverside. It has not been described further, but it may have been an otter.