

Middle and Recent Earth History

As You Read

What You'll Learn

- **Compare and contrast** characteristic life-forms in the Mesozoic and Cenozoic Eras.
- **Explain** how changes caused by plate tectonics affected organisms during the Mesozoic Era.
- **Identify** when humans first appeared on Earth.

Vocabulary

Mesozoic Era
Cenozoic Era

Why It's Important

Many important groups of animals, like birds and mammals, appeared during the Mesozoic Era.

The Mesozoic Era

Dinosaurs have captured people's imaginations since their bones first were unearthed more than 150 years ago. Dinosaurs and other interesting animals lived during the Mesozoic Era, which was between 248 and 65 million years ago. The Mesozoic Era also was marked by rapid movement of Earth's continents.

The Breakup of Pangaea The **Mesozoic** (meh zuh ZOH ihk) **Era**, or era of middle life, was a time of many changes on Earth. At the beginning of the Mesozoic Era, all continents were joined as a single landmass called Pangaea, as shown in **Figure 11**.

Pangaea separated into two large landmasses during the Triassic Period, as shown in **Figure 20**. The northern mass was Laurasia (law RAY zhuh), and Gondwanaland (gahn DWAH nuh land) was the southern landmass. As the Mesozoic Era continued, Laurasia and Gondwanaland broke apart and eventually formed the present-day continents.

Species adapted to the new environments survived the mass extinction at the end of the Paleozoic Era. Recall that a reptile's skin helps it retain bodily fluids. This characteristic, along with their shelled eggs, enabled reptiles to adapt readily to the drier climate of the Mesozoic Era. Reptiles became the most conspicuous animals on land by the Triassic Period.

Figure 20

The supercontinent Pangaea formed at the end of the Paleozoic Era. At the end of the Triassic Period, it began to break up into the northern supercontinent, Laurasia, and the southern supercontinent, Gondwanaland.

