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THE HABITAT (THE SOUTHERN OCEAN)

The fossil history of albatrosses is so fragmentary that it remains uncertain where or when the group arose. No fossil fragment that even might be an albatross is any older than about 32 million years. Several albatross species closely resembling modern mollymawks (and roughly comparable in size) roamed the North Pacific and the North Atlantic oceans during the Middle Miocene some 16 million years ago, but a mere handful of similar fossils of approximately the same age have been found in Australia and New Zealand. It thus seems nearly certain that the earliest albatrosses did not live in the Southern Ocean, yet the Southern Ocean is where the ultimate extension of the unique 'albatross' way of life arose. Notwithstanding the presence of albatrosses elsewhere in the world, there is a limited but legitimate sense in which the albatross lifestyle reaches its extreme development only in the Southern Ocean (although nearly approached in the North Pacific).

The Southern Ocean formed during the break-up of the ancient supercontinent Gondwana. Around 100 million years ago, the last of the major fragments – what is now Australia – detached and left what is now