

GMAT RC Practice Test 10

Question 1

Adapted from “Humming-Birds: As Illustrating the Luxuriance of Tropical Nature” in *Tropical Nature, and Other Essays* by Alfred Russel Wallace (1878)

The food of hummingbirds has been a matter of much controversy. All the early writers down to Buffon believed that they lived solely on the nectar of flowers, but since that time, every close observer of their habits maintains that they feed largely, and in some cases wholly, on insects. Azara observed them on the La Plata in winter taking insects out of the webs of spiders at a time and place where there were no flowers. Bullock, in Mexico, declares that he saw them catch small butterflies, and that he found many kinds of insects in their stomachs. Waterton made a similar statement. Hundreds and perhaps thousands of specimens have since been dissected by collecting naturalists, and in almost every instance their stomachs have been found full of insects, sometimes, but not generally, mixed with a proportion of honey. Many of them in fact may be seen catching gnats and other small insects just like fly-catchers, sitting on a dead twig over water, darting off for a time in the air, and then returning to the twig. Others come out just at dusk, and remain on the wing, now stationary, now darting about with the greatest rapidity, imitating in a limited space the evolutions of the goatsuckers, and evidently for the same end and purpose. Mr. Gosse also remarks, ” All the hummingbirds have more or less the habit, when in flight, of pausing in the air and throwing the body and tail into rapid and odd contortions. This is most observable in the *Polytmus*, from the effect that such motions have on the long feathers of the tail. That the object of these quick turns is the capture of insects, I am sure, having watched one thus engaged pretty close to me.”

The purpose of this passage is _____.

Possible Answers:

to propose a definitive experiment about what hummingbirds eat

to explain why one should feed a captive hummingbird insects and not flower nectar

to consider the opinions of scientists on what hummingbirds eat

to critique the opinions of other scientists

to discuss the *Polytmus*’ feeding habits

Question 2

Adapted from “Birds in Retreat” in “Animal Defences—Active Defence” in Volume Four of *The Natural History of Animals: The Animal Life of the World in Its Various Aspects and Relations* by James Richard Ainsworth Davis (1903)

Among the large running birds are forms, like the African ostrich, in which the absence of powers of flight is largely compensated by the specialization of the legs for the purpose of rapid movement on the ground. For straightforward retreat in open country nothing could be more effective; but another kind of

adaptation is required in birds like rails, which are deficient in powers of flight, and yet are able to run through thickly-growing vegetation with such rapidity as to commonly elude their enemies. This is rendered possible by the shape of their bodies, which are relatively narrow and flattened from side to side, so as to easily slip between the stems of grasses, rushes, and similar plants. Anyone who has pursued our native land-rail or corn-crake with intent to capture will have noted how extremely difficult it is even to get within sight of a bird of this sort.

Certain birds, unfortunately for themselves, have lost the power of flight without correspondingly increased powers of running, and have paid the penalty of extinction. Such an arrangement, as might be anticipated, was the result of evolution in islands devoid of any predatory ground-animals, and a classic example of it is afforded by the dodo and its allies, birds related to the pigeons. The dodo itself was a large and clumsy-looking species that at one time abounded in the island of Mauritius, which, like oceanic islands generally, possessed no native mammals, while its indigenous reptiles were only represented by lizards. The ubiquitous sailor, however, and the animals (especially swine) which he introduced, brought about the extinction of this helpless bird in less than a century after its first discovery in 1598. Its memory is now only kept green by a few contemporary drawings and descriptions, certain museum remains, and the proverb "as extinct as a dodo." A similar fate must overtake any organism suddenly exposed to new and unfavorable conditions, if devoid of sufficient plasticity to rapidly accommodate itself to the altered environment.

Which of the following best states the main idea of this passage?

Possible Answers:

The extinction of the dodo can be traced to human causes.

The African ostrich's strong leg muscles makes it well adapted to its environment.

Flightless birds sometimes develop strong running abilities, but if they don't, they may be threatened with extinction.

Flightless birds adapt to their particular surroundings.

Birds employ a variety of defenses for avoiding predators.

Question 3

Adapted from Volume Four of *The Natural History of Animals: The Animal Life of the World in Its Various Aspects and Relations* by James Richard Ainsworth Davis (1903)

The examples of protective resemblance so far quoted are mostly permanent adaptations to one particular sort of surrounding. There are, however, numerous animals which possess the power of adjusting their color more or less rapidly so as to harmonize with a changing environment.

Some of the best known of these cases are found among those mammals and birds that inhabit countries more or less covered with snow during a part of the year. A good instance is afforded by the Irish or

variable hare, which is chiefly found in Ireland and Scotland. In summer, this looks very much like an ordinary hare, though rather grayer in tint and smaller in size, but in winter it becomes white with the exception of the black tips to the ears. Investigations that have been made on the closely allied American hare seem to show that the phenomenon is due to the growth of new hairs of white hue.

The common stoat is subject to similar color change in the northern parts of its range. In summer it is of a bright reddish brown color with the exception of the under parts, which are yellowish white, and the end of the tail, which is black. But in winter, the entire coat, save only the tip of the tail, becomes white, and in that condition the animal is known as an ermine. A similar example is afforded by the weasel. The seasonal change in the vegetarian Irish hare is purely of protective character, but in such an actively carnivorous creature as a stoat or weasel, it is aggressive as well, rendering the animal inconspicuous to its prey.

Which of the following best expresses the main idea of the passage?

Possible Answers:

Increased defense is the only reason for an animal to change its fur color.

All animals that live in a changing environment change color.

Animals like the stoat, the weasel, and the Irish hare are better adapted to changing environments than to unchanging ones.

Certain animals change their fur color to be better predators or better at hiding.

The Scottish hare changes its fur color.