

Question 1

Correct answer:

to consider the opinions of scientists on what hummingbirds eat

Explanation:

When answering questions about a passage's purpose or main idea, it's important to pick an answer choice that is broad enough to encompass the entire passage. For instance, while the Polytmus' feeding habits are discussed in the passage, it can't be said to be the purpose of the passage, since it's only mentioned as a small detail. The passage can't be said to critique the opinions of other scientists, because for the most part, the author quotes findings by scientists with whom he does not disagree. A definitive experiment is never proposed, and captive hummingbirds are never discussed. The passage does provide the opinions of scientists on what hummingbirds eat; this accurately captures the intent of the entire passage, not just some of its parts, and doesn't state it too broadly.

Question 2

Correct answer:

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

Explanation:

When asked to identify a passage's main idea, it is important to pick out an answer choice to which all of the paragraphs can relate, but that is not too broad in including things that the passage does not discuss. Considering if each of the answer choices falls into one or another of these categories can help you narrow down your choices. For instance, "Birds employ a variety of defenses for avoiding predators" is far too broad to accurately describe this passage's main idea. The author only discusses flightless birds, not all birds. "Flightless birds adapt to their particular surroundings" cannot be correct either, as the first paragraph discusses this, but the second paragraph discusses a flightless bird that did not adapt to its surroundings. Since the second paragraph can't relate to this answer, it can't be the main idea of the entire passage. Two of the remaining answer choices can be discarded due to their being too detailed: "The African ostrich's strong leg muscles makes it well adapted to its environment" and "The extinction of the dodo can be traced to human causes." While the first of these choices is stated in the first paragraph and the second is stated in the second paragraph, neither relates to the other paragraph, or even adequately summarizes the entire paragraph in which it appears. This leaves us with one answer choice, the correct one: "Flightless birds sometimes develop strong running abilities, but if they don't, they may be threatened with extinction." Each of the two paragraphs can relate to this answer choice, but it doesn't include things that the passage doesn't discuss.

Question 3

Correct answer:

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

Explanation:

When answering questions about the main idea of a passage, it's important to pick out an answer choice to which each paragraph relates, but one that isn't too broad. Some of the answer choices to this question are too specific: "The Scottish hare changes its fur color" is, and we can tell because the first paragraph doesn't say anything about the Scottish hare, and the third paragraph only mentions it in its last line. "Increased defense is the only reason for an animal to change its fur color" should get your attention due to its use of the word "only"—did we hear anything in the passage about color-changing adaptations being used "only" for defense? No, we heard the opposite, in the passage's last line: "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." The language may be a bit dense here, but what the passage is saying is that the hare uses its color-changing adaptation for defense, but stoats and weasels use it for being better predators and sneaking up on their prey—definitely not a defensive use. Similarly, "All animals that live in a changing environment change color" is making a strong statement due to its use of the word "all." The passage gives us a few examples of animals that change that live in a changing environment and change their color, but this isn't enough for us to assume that all animals that live in changing environments act this way.