

A reading comprehension exercise for students of Agriculture and Biology, UR.

Topic: Human Involvement in Biological Diversity

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the text carefully to enable you do the tasks following.

Man and Biological Diversity

The human species came into being at the time of the greatest biological diversity in the history of the Earth. Today, as human populations expand and alter the natural environment, they are reducing biological diversity to its lowest level since the end of the Mesozoic era, 65 million years ago. The ultimate consequences of this biological collision are beyond calculation, but they are certain to be harmful. That, in essence, is the biodiversity crisis.

The history of global diversity can be summarized as follows: after the initial flowering of multicellular animals, there was a swift rise in the number of species in early Paleozoic times (between 600 and 430 million years ago), then plateaulike stagnation for the remaining 200 million years of the Paleozoic era, and finally a slow but steady climb through the Mesozoic and Cenozoic eras to diversity's all-time high. This history suggests that biological diversity was hard won and a long time in coming. Furthermore, this pattern of increase was set back by five massive extinction episodes. The most recent of these, during the Cretaceous period, is by far the most famous, because it ended the age of the dinosaurs, conferred hegemony on the mammals, and ultimately made possible the ascendancy of the human species. But the Cretaceous crisis was minor compared with the Permian extinctions 240 million years ago, during which between 77 and 96 percent of marine animal species perished. It took 5 million years, well into Mesozoic times, for species diversity to begin a significant recovery.

Within the past 10,000 years biological diversity has entered a wholly new era. Human activity has had a devastating effect on species diversity, and the rate of human-induced extinctions is accelerating. Half of the bird species of Polynesia have been eliminated through hunting and the destruction of native forests. Hundreds of fish species endemic to Lake Victoria are now threatened with extinction following the careless introduction of one species of fish, the Nile perch. The list of such bio-geographic disasters is extensive.

Because every species is unique and irreplaceable, the loss of biodiversity is the most profound process of environmental change. Its consequences are also the least predictable because the value of Earth's biota (the fauna and flora collectively) remains largely unstudied and unappreciated; unlike material and cultural wealth, which we understand because they are the substance of our everyday lives, biological wealth is usually taken for granted. This is a serious strategic error, one that will be increasingly regretted as time passes. The biota is not only part of a country's heritage, the product of millions of years of evolution centered on that place; it is also a potential source for immense

untapped material wealth in the form of food, medicine, and other commercially important substance.

Source: <http://gmclub.com/forum/bio-diversity>

Task 1.

Mark TRUE (T) or FALSE (F) for each sentence in accordance with the text.

1. Biological diversity is largely a process of historical fluctuations.
2. Most marine mammals became extinct during the cretaceous era.
3. The disappearance of fish species in Lake Victoria is due to overfishing.
4. Plants and animal life in a country is specifically the country's heritage.
5. Highest rate of diversity was observed in Mesozoic / Cenozoic times.

Task 2.

Find words or expressions in the text above that are synonymous with the following.

1. Start (something new)
2. Caused by humans
3. Destructive
4. Blossom
5. Die out
6. Non-renewable
7. Dominance

Task 3.

Match the following topics 1 - 5 to the suitable paragraph. One topic is not used.

1. Inherent dangers of recent developments.
2. Ups and downs of biodiversity.
3. Human in time.
4. Latest developments in biodiversity.
5. Negative impacts of human development.

Key:

Task one: 1.T 2. F 3. F 4. F 5. T

Task two: 1. Enter (v.) 2. Human-induced 3. Harmful 4. Flower (v.) 5. Perish (v.)
6. Irreplaceable 7. Ascendancy

Task 3. 1. 4 2. 2 3. 1 4. ---(not used) 5. 3

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