9.4 Reading: Non-Fiction (KS2): 30-minute Pack

STA KS2.E-R2 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

Beavers Return to Britain

Source written for Revision Library (original, copyright-free). An information text about the reintroduction of beavers to the United Kingdom, written in the style of a KS2 non-fiction reading passage.

For over four hundred years, no beaver dam blocked a British stream. Wolves, wild boar and lynx had already vanished from the British countryside, and by the early sixteenth century the beaver had joined them, hunted to extinction for its thick fur, its meat and a musky substance called castoreum that people once used in medicines and perfume. Today, though, something remarkable is happening. Beavers are back, and rivers across the United Kingdom are slowly beginning to change shape once again.

A Long Absence

Britain's last wild beavers were wiped out by around 1526, according to most historians, although a few believe that small, hidden populations survived in remote parts of Scotland for a little longer. Without beavers, many rivers ran straight and fast, rushing floodwater downstream instead of holding onto it. Wetlands dried out, and the plants and animals that depended on slow, marshy water gradually disappeared too.

Nature's Engineers

Beavers earn their nickname of 'nature's engineers' because they reshape their surroundings more dramatically than almost any other wild animal in Britain. Using nothing but their teeth, their front paws and an instinct they are born with, beavers gnaw down small trees and drag branches, mud and stones into rivers to build dams. A single family of beavers can build a dam thirty metres long in just a few nights, and some determined colonies have built dams that stretch for hundreds of metres.

How Beavers Change a River

A beaver dam slows the flow of water, creating a calm pond behind it where the beavers build a domed home called a lodge. The entrance to a lodge is always underwater, which keeps foxes and other predators out. Behind each dam, the pond spreads sideways into the surrounding land, forming shallow pools and soggy wetland. This might sound messy, but it is exactly what many other species need. Frogs, dragonflies, otters and wading birds all move into beaver wetlands within a year or two, and fish often thrive in the cool, oxygen rich pools that dams create.

Why Beavers Matter

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Beaver dams do more than provide a home for wildlife. During heavy rain, a dam acts like a natural brake, holding back water that would otherwise rush downstream and flood towns and farmland. During dry spells, the same pond releases water slowly, keeping streams flowing when they might otherwise run dry. Scientists studying a beaver site in Devon found that a single family of beavers reduced the height of floodwater reaching a nearby village by nearly a third. Beaver ponds can also trap mud and pollution before it reaches rivers further downstream, so the water flowing out the other side is often cleaner than the water that flowed in.

The Return

The first beavers to return to the British countryside in centuries were spotted living wild on the River Otter in Devon in around 2008, most likely descendants of animals that had escaped from captivity nearby. Rather than removing them, conservationists asked to study the beavers instead, and in 2020 the government agreed that they could stay permanently. Since then, beavers have been carefully reintroduced to sites in Scotland, Wales and several counties in England, always released under licence and closely monitored by scientists. Not everyone has welcomed their return; some farmers worry about flooded fields and blocked ditches, so conservation groups now work closely with landowners to manage the dams that cause problems while leaving the rest of a beaver's engineering well alone.

Looking Ahead

Four hundred years after the last splash of a beaver's tail disappeared from British rivers, the sound is being heard again. Whether this quiet, hardworking animal can fully reclaim its place in the British countryside still depends on people, but for the rivers, and for the wildlife sheltering within them, the return of the beaver is already making a difference.

Fact File: The Eurasian Beaver

- Latin name: Castor fiber

- Typical weight: up to 30 kg, about the same as a large dog

- Diet: bark, leaves, water plants and grasses (beavers do not eat fish)

- Top swimming speed: about 8 km/h

- Tail: flat, scaly and paddle shaped; used for swimming, steering and as a warning signal when slapped hard on the water

1 Look at the opening paragraph (before the first subheading). Find and copy one word that means 'died out completely'.

.....

(1)

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2 According to the paragraph headed 'A Long Absence', in around what year were Britain's last wild beavers wiped out?

(1)

3 Tick the river where beavers were first spotted living wild again, according to the paragraph headed 'The Return'.

- [ ] A) River Otter
- [ ] B) River Thames
- [ ] C) River Severn
- [ ] D) River Tweed

4 Look at the paragraph headed 'Nature's Engineers'. Find and copy one word that means 'bite something again and again to wear it away'.

(1)

5 Look at the final paragraph, headed 'Looking Ahead'. Explain how the writer's choice of language creates a hopeful tone about the future of beavers in Britain. Refer to at least two examples from the text.

(3)

6 Explain two reasons why the writer might have chosen to present some information in a separate 'Fact File' box rather than within the main paragraphs.

(2)

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7 'Not everyone has welcomed their return' (paragraph headed 'The Return'). What does this sentence suggest about the wider debate around beaver reintroduction? Use two pieces of evidence from the text to support your answer, and explain what they show.

(3)

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8 Compare how the writer presents beavers in the opening paragraph with how they are presented in the final paragraph, headed 'Looking Ahead'. Identify one similarity and one difference in tone or focus, using evidence from the text.

(3)

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9 In the paragraph headed 'Nature's Engineers', the writer calls beavers 'nature's engineers'. Explain the effect this phrase has on the reader.

(2)

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10 Tick two statements below that are TRUE, according to the text.

- ☐ A) Britain's wild beavers were wiped out during the twentieth century
- ☐ B) A beaver lodge always has its entrance underwater
- ☐ C) Beavers eat fish as their main food
- ☐ D) Beaver dams can help keep streams flowing during dry weather

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11 Number these events 1 to 4 to show the order in which they happened, according to the text: 'Beavers were reintroduced to sites in Scotland, Wales and England'; 'Wild beavers were wiped out in Britain'; 'The government agreed that the River Otter beavers could stay permanently'; 'Beavers were spotted living wild on the River Otter'.

(1)

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12 Look at the paragraph headed 'The Return'. What impression does the writer give of how people feel about beavers coming back? Use two pieces of evidence from the text to support your answer.

(3)

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13 According to the paragraph headed 'Nature's Engineers', how long a dam can a beaver family build in just a few nights?

(1)

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14 Based on what you have read, what do you think might happen if beavers continue to spread to more rivers across the UK in the next ten years? Give a reason for your answer, using evidence from the text.

(2)

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15 Summarise the whole text in no more than three sentences, showing how the situation for beavers in Britain has changed between the sixteenth century and today.

(3)

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16 List four animals named in the paragraph headed 'How Beavers Change a River' that move into beaver wetlands.

(a) First animal **(1)**

(b) Second animal **(1)**

(c) Third animal **(1)**

(d) Fourth animal **(1)**

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17 Using the paragraph headed 'A Long Absence' and the paragraph headed 'How Beavers Change a River', give two differences between what rivers were like without beavers and what they are like when beavers build dams.

(2)

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18 Look at the paragraph headed 'Why Beavers Matter'. What can you tell about the effect beaver dams have on flooding? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

(2)

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19 Summarise, in your own words, three ways that beaver dams help the environment or people, using the paragraphs headed 'How Beavers Change a River' and 'Why Beavers Matter'.

(3)

20 The text is organised using subheadings such as 'A Long Absence' and 'Nature's Engineers'. Explain two ways these subheadings help the reader.

(2)

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Mark scheme · 9.4 Reading: Non-Fiction (KS2): 30-minute Pack

Question 1

extinction copied correctly (cao); also accept vanished, which the paragraph also uses of animals that were lost from Britain — **B1**

Answer: **extinction**

Question 2

1526 or around 1526 (awrt 1526) — **B1**

Answer: **around 1526**

Question 3

A ticked only (cao) — **B1**

Answer: **A**

Question 4

gnaw copied correctly (cao) — **B1**

Answer: **gnaw**

Question 5

identifies an example, e.g. 'the sound is being heard again', and explains that it suggests beavers are returning/succeeding after a long absence — **B1**

identifies a second example, e.g. 'quiet, hardworking animal' or 'already making a difference', and explains the positive impression this creates — **B1**

overall comment on tone, e.g. the present tense and positive word choices together create an optimistic, hopeful ending (oe) — **B1**

Answer: **Phrases such as 'the sound is being heard again' and 'already making a difference' use hopeful, present-tense language to suggest beavers are successfully returning, creating an optimistic ending.**

Question 6

presents key facts (e.g. weight, diet, Latin name) so they can be found and checked quickly, rather than searched for within continuous prose (oe) — **B1**

visually breaks up the text and separates factual data from the explanatory narrative, making the whole text easier and more inviting to read (oe) — **B1**

Answer: **A Fact File lets the reader find key facts quickly without searching through the paragraphs, and it visually breaks up the text, keeping data separate from the flowing narrative.**

Question 7

suggests that beaver reintroduction is controversial/not everyone agrees with it (oe) — **B1**

evidence and explanation: 'some farmers worry about flooded fields and blocked ditches', showing that beavers can cause practical problems for landowners — **B1**

evidence and explanation: 'conservation groups now work closely with landowners to manage the dams that cause problems', showing that compromise and management are needed to balance different views — **B1**

Answer: **The sentence shows the return of beavers is controversial: farmers worry about flooded fields and blocked ditches, so conservation groups now work with landowners to manage problem dams, showing a need for compromise between wildlife benefits and practical concerns.**

Question 8

similarity identified with evidence, e.g. both refer to the same long absence, using 'over four hundred years' and 'Four hundred years' (oe) — **B1**

difference identified, e.g. the opening is more factual/historical, listing reasons beavers were hunted, whereas the final paragraph is more emotive/hopeful (oe) — **B1**

evidence for the difference, e.g. 'already making a difference' or 'quiet, hardworking animal' shows a warmer, more celebratory tone than the opening's factual list of causes of extinction — **B1**

Answer: **Similarity: both paragraphs mention the same four-hundred-year absence. Difference: the opening paragraph is more factual and historical, listing reasons beavers were hunted, while the final paragraph is warmer and more hopeful, celebrating their return with phrases like 'already making a difference'.**

Question 9

compares beavers to human engineers or builders (oe) — **B1**

emphasises the skill or deliberate, careful way beavers construct dams, making the reader admire/respect them rather than see them as ordinary animals (oe) — **B1**

Answer: **The phrase compares beavers to skilled human builders, making the reader admire how deliberately and cleverly they construct their dams.**

Question 10

B ticked (cao) — **B1**

D ticked (cao) — **B1**

Answer: **B and D**

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Question 11

all four events numbered correctly in order: wiped out (1), spotted on the River Otter (2), government agreement (3), reintroduced across the UK (4) (cao) **B1**

Answer: **1 = Wild beavers were wiped out in Britain; 2 = Beavers were spotted living wild on the River Otter; 3 = The government agreed the River Otter beavers could stay permanently; 4 = Beavers were reintroduced to sites in Scotland, Wales and England.**

Question 12

overall impression that feelings are mixed/not everyone agrees (oe) **B1**

evidence of a positive response, e.g. conservationists asked to study the beavers rather than remove them, and the government let them stay permanently **B1**

evidence of concern, e.g. 'some farmers worry about flooded fields and blocked ditches' **B1**

Answer: **The writer suggests reactions are mixed: conservationists welcomed the beavers and the government let them stay, but some farmers are concerned about flooding and blocked ditches.**

Question 13

thirty metres / 30 m (cao) **B1**

Answer: **thirty metres (30 m)**

Question 14

a sensible prediction, e.g. more wetlands/wildlife habitats could form, flooding could be reduced in more places, or disagreements with some farmers could increase **B1**

a reason linked to evidence in the text, e.g. dams have already created new wetland habitats and reduced flood height in Devon, or some farmers already worry about flooded fields **B1**

Answer: **Accept any sensible, text-supported prediction, e.g. more wetlands and wildlife habitats could appear and flooding could be reduced further, though conflicts with some farmers might also grow.**

Question 15

beavers were hunted to extinction in Britain by around the sixteenth century (oe) **B1**

beavers returned naturally/were reintroduced from around 2008 and were allowed to stay permanently from 2020 (oe) **B1**

beavers now bring benefits such as new wetland habitats and reduced flooding, although not everyone welcomes their return (oe) **B1**

Answer: **Beavers were hunted to extinction in Britain by the sixteenth century, then returned from around 2008 and were allowed to stay permanently from 2020, and today they bring benefits like new wetlands and less flooding, even though some farmers still have concerns.**

Question 16

(a) frogs (oe; the four animals may be given in any order) **B1**

(a) Answer: **frogs**

(b) dragonflies (oe; the four animals may be given in any order) **B1**

(b) Answer: **dragonflies**

(c) otters (oe; the four animals may be given in any order) **B1**

(c) Answer: **otters**

(d) wading birds (oe; the four animals may be given in any order) **B1**

(d) Answer: **wading birds**

Question 17

without beavers rivers 'ran straight and fast, rushing floodwater downstream'; with beaver dams the water is slowed and forms a calm pond (oe) **B1**

without beavers 'wetlands dried out'; with beaver dams shallow pools and soggy wetland form, supporting wildlife (oe) **B1**

Answer: **Any two of: rivers ran fast and straight before, but dams slow the water and form ponds; wetlands used to dry out, but beaver wetlands are wet and support wildlife.**

Question 18

beaver dams reduce or hold back floodwater / lessen the height of flooding (oe) **B1**

evidence, e.g. a dam 'acts like a natural brake' or 'reduced the height of floodwater reaching a nearby village by nearly a third' **B1**

Answer: **Beaver dams hold back floodwater and reduce how high floods rise, e.g. reducing floodwater height near a Devon village by nearly a third.**

Question 19

provide a home/habitat for wildlife such as frogs, otters or wading birds (oe) **B1**

reduce or slow flooding by holding back water (oe) **B1**

keep streams flowing in dry weather / clean the water by trapping mud and pollution (oe, accept either point; any three different valid points from the key earn the three marks, in any order) **B1**

Answer: **Any three of: beaver wetlands give wildlife a home; dams reduce flooding by holding back water; ponds keep streams flowing in dry spells; dams trap mud and pollution, cleaning the water.**

Question 20

they break the text into clear sections/topics, making it easier to read (oe) **B1**

they help the reader find or locate a particular piece of information quickly, or show how the writer's ideas are organised in order (oe) **B1**

Answer: **Subheadings break the text into clear topics and let the reader find specific information quickly, while also showing how the writer's ideas develop in order.**

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