5.2 Reading: Non-Fiction (KS3): 1-hour Pack

about 60 minutes

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

The Beaver Is Back: Why Britain's Rivers Are Changing

Source written for Revision Library (original, copyright-free). A non-fiction feature article in the style of a broadsheet newspaper's environment section, written for KS3 English study purposes. All names, quotations and events are invented for teaching purposes.

Paragraph 1

At dawn on a quiet stretch of the River Otter in Devon, the water ripples strangely against the current. A brown shape slides beneath the surface, leaving barely a ring behind. Wait a moment, then a broad, flat tail slaps the water with a sound like a dropped plank. The beaver, absent from British rivers for over four hundred years, has come home.

Paragraph 2

Hunted to extinction in the sixteenth century for its fur, meat and a musky secretion once used in perfume, the Eurasian beaver vanished from the United Kingdom long before anyone thought to count how many were left. Today, thanks to a series of licensed reintroduction projects, an estimated 500 wild beavers now live across England and Scotland, with hundreds more in fenced enclosures awaiting release.

Paragraph 3

Ecologists describe beavers as a 'keystone species', meaning their presence reshapes the whole habitat around them. A single family can fell dozens of small trees in a year and dam narrow streams with sticks, mud and stones, creating ponds and wetlands that did not exist before. Dr Priya Nandakumar, who has studied a beaver colony in Cornwall since 2019, puts it simply: 'They are the only animal apart from us that engineers its own landscape. Give them a stream and they will build you a wetland for free.'

Paragraph 4

That wetland, researchers say, does far more than provide a home for beavers. Ponds behind beaver dams slow the flow of floodwater, catching it upstream of towns and villages during heavy rain. They filter out soil and farm chemicals before they reach rivers, and they store water that keeps streams flowing during dry summers. A three year study on the River Otter recorded a 30 per cent increase in fish numbers and a doubling of some insect species once beaver ponds had formed.

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Paragraph 5

Not everyone is celebrating. For farmers whose fields border the new wetlands, a beaver dam can mean a flooded crop or a collapsed riverbank. 'I do not doubt the science,' says arable farmer Gethin Marsh, whose land lies beside a beaver enclosure in Somerset, 'but nobody asked me before the water rose over my winter wheat. Wildlife charities talk about the whole catchment. I am left totting up the cost of one field.' Compensation schemes exist, but farmers argue they are slow, underfunded and unevenly applied across the country.

Paragraph 6

There is also a quieter worry among river managers: once beavers are released into open water rather than fenced enclosures, they cannot be easily contained. Dams appear where nobody planned for them, sometimes beside roads, railway culverts or drainage systems that were never designed with a rodent engineer in mind. Local councils have had to develop entirely new guidance for what one report drily called 'beaver related infrastructure conflict'.

Paragraph 7

The government's response, published last year, allows licensed releases to continue while requiring management plans for problem sites and a compensation fund for affected landowners. Conservation groups call this a cautious but welcome step; farming unions call it a start, not a solution. Both sides agree on one thing: the beaver is not going away again.

Paragraph 8

Perhaps that is the real lesson of the River Otter. Britain has spent centuries removing the animals and processes that once shaped its landscape, then spending millions trying to recreate their effects with concrete, pumps and planning committees. Now, in a damp corner of Devon, a slap of a tail on water suggests there might have been a cheaper way all along.

1 Read paragraphs 1 and 2 of 'The Beaver Is Back'. List four details about the beaver from these paragraphs.

(4)

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2 According to paragraph 2, approximately how many wild beavers now live in England and Scotland?

(1)

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3 Look again at paragraph 3: 'puts it simply: they are the only animal...'. What is the correct name for the punctuation mark used to introduce this quotation?

- ☐ A) colon
- ☐ B) semicolon
- ☐ C) comma
- ☐ D) dash

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4 Look again at paragraph 1. Identify one word or short phrase that suggests the beaver's return is quiet or cautious.

(1)

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5 Look again at paragraph 3. Explain what the term 'keystone species' means, using evidence from the paragraph to support your answer.

(2)

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6 Look again at paragraph 1: 'a quiet stretch of the River Otter'. What word class (part of speech) is the word 'quiet' in this sentence?

- ☐ A) noun
- ☐ B) adjective
- ☐ C) verb
- ☐ D) adverb

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7 The writer uses direct speech (quotations) from named people at two points in the article. Give two examples of direct speech from named people and explain one effect of using direct speech.

(3)

8 Look again at paragraph 1: 'a broad, flat tail slaps the water'. Identify the verb and explain the effect it creates.

(2)

9 Summarise, in your own words, the concerns that farmers have about beaver reintroduction, as described in paragraphs 5 and 6.

(4)

10 Look at paragraphs 5 and 6. For each statement, decide whether it is True or Not Given according to the text.

(a) Beaver dams can cause farmland to flood. **(1)**

(b) All farmers affected by beaver reintroduction have received full compensation. **(1)**

(c) Beaver dams have appeared near roads and drainage systems. **(1)**

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11 Look again at paragraph 4. Explain why the writer includes the figure 'a 30 per cent increase in fish numbers' and the effect this has on the reader.

(2)

12 Look again at paragraph 3, focusing on the words used to describe Dr Priya Nandakumar's view of beavers. How does the writer use language here to present beavers as impressive?

(4)

13 Look again at paragraph 6: 'what one report drily called beaver related infrastructure conflict'. Explain what the word 'drily' suggests here and the effect this has on the reader.

(2)

14 How does the writer structure the whole text to take the reader from the beaver's return on the River Otter to a wider argument about Britain's landscape?

(6)

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15 A reader says: 'This article is written to convince us that reintroducing beavers is entirely a good thing.' Evaluate how far you agree with this statement, using evidence from across the whole text.

(8)

16 Compare how the writer presents the views of Dr Priya Nandakumar (paragraph 3) and Gethin Marsh (paragraph 5).

(5)

17 Explain how the final paragraph (paragraph 8) links back to the opening paragraph, and what effect this has on the reader.

(4)

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18 Write an article for your school website in which you argue for or against introducing a wildlife reintroduction scheme (for example beavers, red squirrels or ospreys) in your local area. You could write about the benefits, the risks, or both, and try to persuade your readers to share your view. Write about 350-450 words.

(24)

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Mark scheme · 5.2 Reading: Non-Fiction (KS3): 1-hour Pack

Question 1

identifies one true detail from paragraphs 1-2, e.g. the beaver is seen at dawn on the River Otter, Devon — **B1**

identifies a second true detail, e.g. it has a broad, flat tail that slaps the water — **B1**

identifies a third true detail, e.g. beavers were absent from British rivers for over 400 years — **B1**

identifies a fourth true detail, e.g. beavers were hunted to extinction for fur, meat and a musky secretion used in perfume (oe) — **B1**

Answer: **Any four of: seen at dawn on the River Otter, Devon; has a broad, flat tail; absent from British rivers for over 400 years (since the sixteenth century); hunted to extinction for fur, meat and a secretion used in perfume.**

Question 2

states 500 (accept 'about/approximately 500') — **B1**

Answer: **About 500 wild beavers.**

Question 3

selects A (colon) — **B1**

Answer: **A) colon**

Question 4

gives one word or short phrase suggesting the beaver's return is quiet or cautious, e.g. 'slides beneath the surface', 'ripples strangely', 'barely a ring behind' (oe) — **B1**

Answer: **For example: 'slides beneath the surface' (or any equivalent quotation implying quietness/caution).**

Question 5

shows basic understanding that a keystone species is one whose presence changes/shapes its environment — **B1**

develops this with reference to the text, e.g. beavers reshape habitats by building dams and creating wetlands (oe) — **B1**

Answer: **A keystone species is an animal whose presence reshapes the whole habitat around it; the text explains that beavers do this by damming streams and creating ponds and wetlands that did not exist before.**

Question 6

selects B (adjective) — **B1**

Answer: **B) adjective**

Question 7

identifies one example of direct speech, e.g. Dr Priya Nandakumar's quotation in paragraph 3 — **B1**

identifies a second example, e.g. Gethin Marsh's quotation in paragraph 5 — **B1**

explains one effect of using direct speech, e.g. it adds authority/credibility or makes the human cost feel personal and immediate (oe) — **B1**

Answer: **Examples: Dr Priya Nandakumar (paragraph 3) and Gethin Marsh (paragraph 5). Effect: direct quotation from named individuals adds authenticity and authority, and lets the reader hear both an expert and an affected farmer in their own words.**

Question 8

identifies the verb 'slaps' — **B1**

explains its effect, e.g. it is a forceful, almost onomatopoeic word that creates a vivid, sudden sound image, contrasting with the quiet build up (oe) — **B1**

Answer: **'Slaps' is a strong, almost onomatopoeic verb that creates a sudden, forceful sound image, contrasting sharply with the quiet stillness described earlier in the paragraph.**

Question 9

Level 1 Basic, list-like points, largely lifted from the text, with little own-words summary. — **1-2**

Level 2 Several distinct, developed points in the student's own words, showing clear understanding of the range of farmers' and councils' concerns. — **3-4**

Indicative content:

- Beaver dams can flood fields and crops, causing financial loss.
- Dams can damage or collapse riverbanks.
- Farmers feel they were not consulted before beavers were released nearby.
- Compensation schemes are described as slow, underfunded and inconsistently applied.
- Once released into open water, beavers cannot be contained, so dams appear unpredictably.
- Dams sometimes affect roads, railway culverts or drainage systems, creating new problems for councils.

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Question 10

(a) True, with reference to Gethin Marsh's flooded winter wheat **B1**

(a) Answer: **True**

(b) Not Given, as the text only reports that farmers describe compensation as slow, underfunded and unevenly applied; it does not say whether every farmer has been fully compensated **B1**

(b) Answer: **Not Given (the text says compensation schemes are slow, underfunded and unevenly applied, not that all farmers are fully compensated)**

(c) True, with reference to dams beside roads, culverts or drainage systems **B1**

(c) Answer: **True**

Question 11

identifies that the statistic (30 per cent increase in fish numbers) is used as factual/scientific evidence **B1**

explains that this gives the claim about beavers' benefits credibility/authority, making the case seem proven rather than opinion **B1**

Answer: **The precise statistic makes the claim that beaver ponds benefit wildlife seem evidence based and credible, rather than just the writer's opinion.**

Question 12

Level 1 Identifies a word or phrase with limited or no comment on its effect. **1-2**

Level 2 Explains, with relevant quotation, how the writer's choice of language presents beavers as impressive, showing clear understanding of at least one method (e.g. metaphor, direct quotation, word choice). **3-4**

Indicative content:

- The verb 'engineers' compares the beaver to a skilled human professional, suggesting deliberate skill rather than instinct.
- The phrase 'only animal apart from us' elevates the beaver, placing it close to humans in ability.
- The direct quotation from a named expert ('Dr Priya Nandakumar') adds authority and scientific credibility to the claim.
- The informal phrase 'for free' frames the beaver's work as an economic service, appealing to a practical, modern audience.
- The imperative structure 'Give them a stream and they will build you a wetland' has a confident, almost promotional tone.

Question 13

identifies that 'drily' suggests a wry, deadpan or understated sense of humour **B1**

explains the effect: it hints at the writer's/report's ironic amusement at official language being used for an unusual problem **B1**

Answer: **'Drily' suggests a wry, deadpan humour, showing that even the official report finds the situation a little absurd, which adds a gently ironic tone to an otherwise serious point.**

Question 14

Level 1 Simple, general comments on structure, e.g. 'it starts with a story and ends with an opinion', with little reference to specific paragraphs. **1-2**

Level 2 Clear identification of structural features and shifts, with some reference to specific paragraphs and their effect on the reader. **3-4**

Level 3 Perceptive analysis of sequencing across the whole text, showing how the writer moves the reader from narrative to evidence to counter-argument to reflection, with a clear sense of the overall structural effect (e.g. the circular return to the opening image). **5-6**

Indicative content:

- Opens with a narrative, scene-setting hook (paragraph 1) to engage the reader before any argument begins.
- Zooms out into historical background and statistical evidence (paragraphs 2-4) to build the case for beavers.
- Shifts tone with 'Not everyone is celebrating' (paragraph 5), introducing a deliberate contrast/counter-argument.
- Widens further into policy and infrastructure concerns (paragraphs 6-7), broadening the debate beyond farmers alone.
- Closes by returning to the opening image of the tail slapping the water (paragraph 8), creating a circular structure.
- The final paragraph widens the argument from one river to the whole of Britain's landscape, giving the piece a reflective, thought-provoking ending.

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Question 15

Level 1 Simple, general agreement or disagreement with little evidence from the text. **1-2**

Level 2 Some relevant evidence used to support a judgement, but evaluation is mostly descriptive rather than critical. **3-4**

Level 3 Clear, supported evaluation using evidence from more than one part of the text, showing awareness of both supportive and critical material. **5-6**

Level 4 Perceptive, well-evidenced evaluation that weighs the text's balance critically, considering how structure, quotation and word choice combine to shape the reader's overall impression, and reaches a convincing, justified conclusion. **7-8**

Indicative content:

- The text does give space to critical voices: 'Not everyone is celebrating' and Gethin Marsh's quotation present a genuine counter-argument.
- However, the article opens and closes with positive, almost celebratory imagery of the beaver's return, framing the overall argument in its favour.
- The expert quotation (Dr Nandakumar) is placed early and presented very positively ('engineers', 'for free'), shaping the reader's first impression before any criticism appears.
- Criticism of compensation schemes ('slow, underfunded and unevenly applied') could be read as an implicit criticism of policy rather than of beavers themselves.
- The final paragraph explicitly argues that reintroduction may be 'a cheaper way' of managing the landscape, tipping the conclusion towards a pro-beaver stance.
- A well-argued answer might conclude that the article is genuinely balanced in the space it gives to objections, but that its structure and final reflection ultimately lean towards support for reintroduction.
- Answers may reasonably argue either that the piece is balanced or that it is subtly persuasive, provided the judgement is supported with evidence.

Question 16

Level 1 Simple, general comment on one speaker with little or no comparison. **1**

Level 2 Clear comparison of tone or content between the two speakers, with some supporting quotation. **2-3**

Level 3 Perceptive comparison of how language and framing present each speaker's perspective differently, well supported by precise quotation and terminology. **4-5**

Indicative content:

- Nandakumar is presented in a confident, expert tone, using assured, almost celebratory language ('the only animal apart from us').
- Marsh is presented in a personal, frustrated tone, using direct, conversational language ('nobody asked me').
- Marsh's quotation includes a concession ('I do not doubt the science, but...') which contrasts his acceptance of expertise with his personal grievance.
- The contrast between 'the whole catchment' (broad, scientific framing) and 'the cost of one field' (narrow, personal framing) highlights the difference in scale between the two perspectives.
- The writer's choice to place the expert view first and the farmer's view later may itself suggest a structural favouring of the scientific perspective.

Question 17

Level 1 Identifies a simple link between the paragraphs with limited comment on effect. **1-2**

Level 2 Clearly explains the link (repeated image/circular structure) and its effect on the reader, e.g. giving the article a satisfying or thought-provoking sense of closure. **3-4**

Indicative content:

- Both paragraphs feature the image of a tail slapping the water, creating a circular structure.
- The repetition shifts the image from a literal event (paragraph 1) to a symbolic reflection (paragraph 8).
- This circular structure gives the article a sense of closure and unity.
- The final rhetorical suggestion ('a cheaper way all along') invites the reader to reflect on the whole argument rather than simply ending the account.

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Question 18

Content and organisation (AO5)

Level 1 Limited or simple ideas, mostly relevant to the task; little sense of audience or purpose; organisation is minimal, with few structural or discourse features.	**1-4**
Level 2 Some appropriate ideas and register; attempts to engage the reader; some structural features (paragraphs, a clear opening/closing) are used, though not always effectively.	**5-8**
Level 3 Clear, relevant ideas matched to audience and purpose; consistent register for an article; secure paragraphing and some deliberate structural/rhetorical features (e.g. rhetorical question, direct address).	**9-12**
Level 4 Convincing and engaging ideas, skilfully matched to audience and purpose; sophisticated control of register and tone; a range of structural and rhetorical features used deliberately for effect throughout.	**13-16**

Technical accuracy (AO6)

Level 1 Frequent errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar that sometimes hinder meaning; simple sentence forms and limited vocabulary range.	**1-2**
Level 2 Reasonably accurate spelling and punctuation with some variety of sentence forms; vocabulary is generally appropriate.	**3-4**
Level 3 Mostly accurate spelling, punctuation and a range of grammatical structures used for effect; increasingly wide and appropriate vocabulary.	**5-6**
Level 4 Consistently accurate spelling and a wide range of punctuation used for deliberate effect; extensive and ambitious vocabulary; a variety of sentence structures used confidently and accurately.	**7-8**

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