

ACT-like Reading Comprehension

7 Questions

The following excerpt is adapted from *Our Bird Comrades*, written by the American bird watcher Leander Keyser in 1907. After you read the passage, choose the best answer to each of the questions that follow. You may refer to the passage as you work on the questions.

A friend once told me of a letter he had received from a correspondent who is an enthusiastic botanist. The writer, having just returned from an excursion in which he found a flower that was
5 new to him, gave vent to his feelings of exultation by exclaiming, "Oh, the joy! The joy!" A like experience comes to the bird lover when he makes a new acquaintance in the feathered domain, no matter how many other observers
10 may have seen and studied the species. "A bird that is new to *me* is to all intents and purposes a new bird," is his self-complacent mode of reasoning, though it may not be distinguished for its logic.

15 After studying the birds in Ohio and Indiana for a good many years, I moved to eastern Kansas, where I lived for five and a half years. My rambles were by no means confined to the wooded bluffs and hollows that bound the
20 Missouri River on the west, for I also made excursions out upon the prairies of Kansas, over into the state of Missouri, and down into Oklahoma. And everywhere I carried my field glass with me and kept both eyes intent on the
25 birds. What a pleasure it was to ramble about in new fields and make acquaintance with new bird friends! There is not a very marked difference between the avifauna of eastern Kansas and Ohio, and yet there are some birds found in the
30 former state that are not met with in the latter—enough to keep the observer on the tiptoe of expectancy for several months.

One of my new acquaintances was a little bird which is known as the clay-colored sparrow. It
35 belongs to the same genus (*Spizella*) as the

chipping and field sparrows which are so well known in the East, but it has an individuality of its own. I stumbled upon it while pursuing my explorations near Peabody, far out on the level
40 prairie, where the species was abundant during the season of migration. As I was sauntering along a road, a peculiar croaking little trill greeted me from the hedge, sounding very much like the rasping call of certain kinds of
45 grasshoppers when they are suddenly startled and take to wing. But no insect had ever emitted quite such a sound in my hearing. This could not be an insect. It was worthwhile to look and make sure of the identity of the odd musician.

50 After some difficulty, I fixed my glass upon a number of little sparrows about the size of the chippies. They bore a close resemblance to that species too, save that the crown-piece and the general tone of the back were decidedly darker,
55 while the under parts were a good deal whiter. The clear, ash-colored cervical interval between the crown and the back and the distinct brown loreal and auricular space told me plainly who the little charmers were. Not at the moment,
60 however, for the birds were new to me, and I had to wait until I could consult my manual before I was able to decide that they were the clay-colored sparrows.

Their song is an odd vocal performance—a low,
65 croaking trill, preceded by a few longer notes, all delivered in the same key. It is, in fact, a contralto solo divided into brief stanzas, and easily might be mistaken for the grating buzz of an insect, especially if heard at a distance of a
70 few rods. It possesses little or no musical quality and is perhaps the most curious style of bird

minstrelsy with which I am acquainted. In comparison, the chippie's trill sounds loud and clear and bell-like, with a distinctly melodious quality of tone. The song of the little clay-colored sparrow is also marked by a kind of drawl, giving one the impression that the bird is just a little too lazy to exert himself; yet when you get him in the field of your glass and see him throw back his head, expand his throat and chest, and open his mandibles as wide as he can, you quickly decide that he is not the apathetic creature his desultory song would lead you to infer. It really is laughable, and almost pathetic, to note how much energy he expends in the production of his poor little aria.

Unlike the familiar chippie, he does not usually find a perch in plain sight, from which to rehearse his song, but keeps himself well hidden in the bushes or trees, darting into a hiding place as soon as he thinks himself discovered. The shy little imp prefers to put a screen of foliage or twigs between himself and the observer. Might his motto be, "Little birds should be heard and not seen"? I had quite a time making sure of him, but, as a pleasant compensation, when his identity was once settled, I could not well have mistaken him for another species, for he is a bird of real distinction.

1. It can be reasonably inferred from the first paragraph that:
 - A. it is more exhilarating to study botany than to study avifauna.
 - B. bird watchers are not adept at the skill of logical reasoning.
 - C. the first time someone observes a certain species of bird is an important experience.
 - D. the narrator has discovered new species of birds in the past.

2. The narrator states that, as compared to Ohio, eastern Kansas:
 - F. displayed more forests and hollows.
 - G. had a few species of birds that couldn't be found in Ohio.
 - H. proved to be a superior location for the study of birds.
 - J. did not have any new species of birds, although he always hoped to find one.

3. As stated in the passage, the narrator considers undiscovered birds to be:
 - A. unlikely to be found in eastern Kansas.
 - B. necessary for a financially profitable publication.
 - C. an opportunity to gain recognition for his life's study.
 - D. friends that he has yet to meet.

4. The main purpose of the statement about types of grasshoppers (line 45) is to:
- F.** describe the song of the clay-colored sparrow.
 - G.** give an example of a field sparrow's diet.
 - H.** point out that birds are not the only type of wildlife that interest the narrator.
 - J.** describe the types of insects that can be found on the prairie.
5. Which of the following details is used in the passage to indicate the distinction between sparrows and chippies?
- A.** The croaking and rasping sound
 - B.** The coloring of the crown-piece
 - C.** The amount of energy spent in song
 - D.** The tendency to hide in bushes and trees
6. The narrator describes the clay-colored sparrow's song as:
- F.** akin to that of a minstrel or bard.
 - G.** both loud and melodious.
 - H.** similar to the sound of an insect.
 - J.** distinctive for its humorous drawl.
7. The "pleasant compensation" mentioned in (line 96) consists of:
- A.** the satisfaction of easily recognizing a species of bird.
 - B.** the potential income from his discovery of a new species.
 - C.** the tendency to mistake this bird for a more valuable one.
 - D.** the coining of the phrase "Little birds should be heard and not seen".

Answer Key:

1.) C

2.) G

3.) D

4.) F

5.) B

6.) H

7.) A