ARIS ACADEMY · NSW SELECTIVE TEST PRACTICE

# Reading

Centre sample · 1 passage, 5 questions, worked answers

This sample contains one reading passage with 5 questions, in the style of the Reading section of an Aris practice paper. Worked answers are at the back. In the current NSW Selective Test, Reading has 17 question groups, 38 responses and 45 minutes. Allow about 10 minutes for this sample.

**Instructions:** Read the passage carefully, then answer Questions 1 to 5. Circle the letter of the best answer. You may look back at the passage as often as you like.

## The Cliff Dwellers of the City

Aris practice passage · AI-assisted · introductory scene imagined

Imagine a ledge high above a busy Sydney street. Outside an office window, a peregrine falcon tears strips of meat from a pigeon and feeds her chicks. To the office workers behind the glass, it is an astonishing sight. To the falcon, the building is simply a cliff.

Peregrine falcons are built for speed. When hunting, they fold their wings and dive towards their prey in a move called a stoop, reaching speeds of more than 300 kilometres per hour. This makes them the fastest animals on Earth. They catch other birds in mid-air, and in the wild they usually nest on high cliff ledges, safe from most predators.

Across Australia and around the world, peregrines have begun moving into cities. Tall buildings and bridges offer ledges that closely resemble cliff faces. Cities also provide an abundant food supply: pigeons, starlings and other city birds are plentiful all year round. Some city pairs return to the same building to raise their chicks for many seasons.

City lights can give peregrines extra hunting opportunities. Some hunt migrating birds after dark, when artificial light makes their prey easier to see. Night hunting is not unique to cities, but well-lit streets can make urban hunting easier.

Life in the city is not without danger. Chicks learning to fly can crash into windows or become stranded below their nests. In some cities, volunteers watch the known nest sites and arrange help for young falcons that are stranded or injured.

The move to the city is a remarkable change for a bird that nearly disappeared from some regions. In the twentieth century, the pesticide DDT made peregrine eggshells dangerously thin, and falcon numbers crashed in many countries. Pesticide restrictions and conservation work helped populations recover. Today, the sight of a peregrine stooping between skyscrapers shows that wildlife can adapt in surprising ways, if people leave room for it.

**Question 1**

According to the passage, where do peregrine falcons usually nest in the wild?

**A.** In hollows inside old trees

**B.** In burrows on open ground

**C.** On high cliff ledges

**D.** In caves near the sea

**Question 2**

The passage says that hunting falcons dive "in a move called a stoop". As it is used in the passage, a "stoop" is:

**A.** a high-speed hunting dive

**B.** a platform built for nesting

**C.** a loud warning call

**D.** a way of carrying food to chicks

**Question 3**

Why do tall city buildings suit peregrine falcons?

**A.** They are warmer than natural cliffs.

**B.** They keep the falcons safe from storms.

**C.** They are built close to pigeon farms.

**D.** They have ledges high above the ground, like the cliffs the falcons use.

**Question 4**

The passage mentions volunteers who watch nest sites mainly to show that:

**A.** peregrine falcons are dangerous to people in cities

**B.** people are helping the city falcons survive

**C.** fallen chicks cannot survive without zoos

**D.** most city falcon nests fail every year

**Question 5**

What is the main idea of the passage?

**A.** Peregrine falcons are the fastest animals on Earth.

**B.** DDT almost destroyed peregrine falcon populations.

**C.** Peregrine falcons have adapted to city life after a difficult history.

**D.** Office workers enjoy watching falcons feed their chicks.

# Worked answers (for tutors)

### Question 1

This is a literal detail question. The answer is stated directly in the second paragraph:

> "*in the wild they usually nest on high cliff ledges*"

- **A, B, D.** Tree hollows, burrows and sea caves are never mentioned.
- **C. Correct.** Stated word for word in the passage.

**Answer: C**

### Question 2

This is a vocabulary in context question. The sentence itself defines the word: the falcons "fold their wings and dive towards their prey in a move called a stoop, reaching speeds of more than 300 kilometres per hour".

- **A. Correct.** The definition sits inside the same sentence: a dive at very high speed while hunting.
- **B, C, D.** Nesting platforms, warning calls and carrying food appear nowhere in the description of the stoop.

**Answer: A**

### Question 3

This question asks you to connect details stated in the passage. The third paragraph explains the similarity between buildings and natural nesting places:

> "*Tall buildings and bridges offer ledges that closely resemble cliff faces.*"

Combined with the earlier fact that wild falcons nest on high cliff ledges, the buildings suit them because they offer similar high ledges.

- **A, B.** Warmth and storm protection are never mentioned.
- **C.** The passage says cities are full of wild pigeons and starlings, not pigeon farms.
- **D. Correct.** It joins the two clues exactly.

**Answer: D**

**Question 4**

This question asks why the author included a detail. The volunteers watch nests and arrange help for stranded or injured young falcons. That is an example of people actively helping the falcons, straight after a paragraph about city dangers.

- **A.** Nothing in the passage says falcons are dangerous to people.
- **B. Correct.** Arranging help for stranded or injured birds supports their survival.
- **C.** Zoos are never mentioned.
- **D.** The passage gives no figures on nest failure; this goes beyond the text.

**Answer: B**

**Question 5**

This is a main idea question. The right answer must cover the whole passage, not just one part.

- **A.** Speed is one detail in paragraph two only.
- **B.** DDT is one paragraph; most of the passage is about city life.
- **C. Correct.** Every paragraph supports it: the city move, why cities suit falcons, the dangers, and the recovery from the DDT era.
- **D.** The office workers appear in one sentence at the start; enjoyment is not the point of the passage.

**Answer: C**

**Teaching tip:** Train students to test main idea answers against every paragraph. If an option only fits one paragraph, it is a detail, not the main idea.

**Answer key: Q1 C · Q2 A · Q3 D · Q4 B · Q5 C**

Factual references: Australian Museum, "Peregrine Falcon"; Cornell Lab, "Peregrine Falcon Life History"; Natural History Museum, "Peregrine falcons are the top birds in town"; Berkeley News, "And they're off!" (2024). Aris wording, revised with AI assistance; not a reproduced published article.

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