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Raccoons have a vast transcontinental distribution, occurring throughout most of North America and Central America. They are found from southern Canada all the way to Panama, as well as on islands near coastal areas. They occur in each of the 49 states of the continental United States. Although raccoons are native only to the Western Hemisphere, they have been successfully transplanted to other parts of the globe. Following a decline to a relatively low population level in the 1930s, raccoons began to prosper following their 1943 breeding season. A rapid population surge continued throughout the 1940s, and high numbers have been sustained ever since. By the late 1980s, the number of raccoons in North America was estimated to be at least 15 to 20 times the number that existed during the 1930s. By now, their numbers have undoubtedly grown even more, as they have continued to expand into new habitats where they were once either rare or absent, such as sandy prairies, deserts, coastal marshes, and mountains. Their spread throughout the Rocky Mountain West is indicative of the fast pace at which they can exploit new environments. Despite significant numbers being harvested and having suffered occasional declines, typically because of disease, the raccoon has consistently maintained high population levels. Several factors explain the raccoon's dramatic increase in abundance and distribution. First, their success has been partially attributed to the growth of cities, as they often thrive in suburban and even urban settings. Furthermore, they have been deliberately introduced throughout the continent. Within the United States, they are commonly taken from one area to another, both legally and illegally, to restock hunting areas and, presumably, because people simply want them to be part of their local fauna. Their appearance and subsequent flourishing in Utah's Great Salt Lake valley within the last 40 years appears to be from such an introduction. As an example of the ease with which transplanted individuals can succeed, raccoons from Indiana (midwestern United States) have reportedly been able to flourish on islands off the coast of Alaska. The raccoon's expansion in various areas may also be due to the spread of agriculture. Raccoons have been able to exploit crops, especially corn but also cereal grains, which have become dependable food sources for them. The expansion of agriculture, however, does not necessarily lead to rapid increases in their abundance. Farming in Kansas and eastern Colorado (central and western United States) proceeded rapidly in the 1870s and 1880s, but this was about 50 years before raccoons started to spread out from their major habitat, the wooded river bottomlands. They have also expanded into many areas lacking any agriculture other than grazing and into places without forests or permanent streams. Prior to Europeans settling and farming the Great Plains region—a vast grassland region in North America extending from central Canada south through the west central United States into Texas, raccoons probably were just found along its rivers and streams and in the wooded areas of its southeastern section. With the possible exception of the southern part of the province of Manitoba, their absence was notable throughout Canada. They first became more widely distributed in the southern part of Manitoba, and by the 1940s were abundant throughout its southeastern portion. In the 1950s their population swelled in Canada. The control of coyotes in the prairie region in the 1950s may have been a factor in raccoon expansion. If their numbers are sufficient, coyotes might be able to suppress raccoon populations (though little direct evidence supports this notion). By the 1960s the raccoon had become a major predator of the canvasback ducks nesting in southwestern Manitoba. The extermination of the wolf from most of the contiguous United

States may have been a critical factor in the raccoon's expansion and numerical increase. In the eighteenth century, when the wolf's range included almost all of North America, raccoons apparently were abundant only in the deciduous forests of the East, Gulf Coast, and Great Lakes regions, though they also extended into the wooded bottomlands of the Midwest's major rivers. In such areas, their arboreal habits and the presence of hollow den trees should have offered some protection from wolves and other large predators. Even though raccoons may not have been a significant part of their diet, wolves surely would have tried to prey on those exposed in relatively treeless areas.

question 1

According to paragraph 2, what happened to raccoons in the 1930s?

- A They had a series of unusually good breeding seasons.
- B They expanded into the Rocky Mountain West.
- C Their population levels fell.
- D They were harvested in significant numbers for the first time.

question 2

Which of the sentences below best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence in the passage? Incorrect choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.

- A Raccoons are growing more numerous even though they must continue to find new habitats.
- B Raccoons are now undoubtedly present in areas where they were once rare or absent.
- C Raccoons have found prairies, deserts, coastal marshes, and mountains to be excellent habitats to expand into.
- D The numbers of raccoons must be even greater today because raccoons have continued to expand into new habitats.

question 3

According to paragraph 3, what is true about raccoons in Utah's Great Salt Lake valley?

- A They were not easily transplanted there from Indiana.
- B They were not found there prior to 40 years ago.
- C They were often restocked because of illegal hunting.
- D They expanded into that area from nearby suburban and urban settings.

question 4

According to paragraph 3, the introduction of raccoons into Utah's Great Salt Lake Valley appears to have been an example of an introduction that was

- A motivated by a desire to have raccoons among the local wildlife
- B illegal
- C carried out by hunters who wanted more raccoons to hunt
- D unsuccessful

question 5

All of the following are mentioned in paragraph 3 as helping to explain the raccoon's dramatic increase in abundance and distribution EXCEPT:

- A Raccoons thrive in suburban areas.
- B Hunting raccoons has become illegal in most areas.
- C People enjoy having raccoons as part of their environment.
- D A transplanted raccoon will generally be able to succeed in its new environment.

question 6

According to paragraph 4, how has the spread of agriculture affected raccoon populations?

- A The spread of agriculture destroyed some of the raccoons' natural habitats

and reduced their

populations in Kansas and eastern Colorado.

B Because of the availability of corn and other cereal grains as a result of the spread of agriculture, significant raccoon populations are no longer found in areas lacking agriculture.

C The spread of agriculture may have contributed to some raccoon expansion but has not always caused raccoon populations to expand.

D The spread of agriculture to Kansas and eastern Colorado brought increased raccoon populations in the 1870s and 1880s.

question 7

According to paragraph 5, what was true about raccoons before the arrival of European settlers?

A They were widely distributed throughout the region.

B They were found mostly in areas of open prairie.

C They were not found in most of Canada.

D They had not yet reached the wooded areas of the southeastern portion of the region.

question 8

What can be concluded from the discussion in paragraph 5 about coyotes and raccoons in Manitoba?

A In the 1950s both coyotes and raccoons increased their populations.

B Coyotes are more difficult to control than raccoons are.

C Coyotes and raccoons both tend to prefer regions that have rivers, streams, and wooded areas.

D More evidence is needed to determine if controlling coyotes contributed to raccoon expansion in the 1950s.

question 9

According to paragraph 6, during the eighteenth century, raccoons were abundant only in forests and wooded bottomlands of major rivers mainly because those were the only places where raccoons

A were relatively safe from conflict with humans

B had little trouble finding sufficient food

C had some protection from wolves

D could find a varied diet of prey

question 10

Look at the four squares [] that indicate where the following sentence could be added to the passage.

Raccoons have a vast transcontinental distribution, occurring throughout most of North America and Central America. [] They are found from southern Canada all the way to Panama, as well as on islands near coastal areas. [] They occur in each of the 49 states of the continental United States. [] Although raccoons are native only to the Western Hemisphere, they have been successfully transplanted to other parts of the globe. [] Following a decline to a relatively low population level in the 1930s, raccoons began to prosper following their 1943 breeding season. A rapid population surge continued throughout the 1940s, and high numbers have been sustained ever since. By the late 1980s, the number of raccoons in North America was estimated to be at least 15 to 20 times the number that existed during the 1930s. By now, their numbers have undoubtedly grown even more, as they have continued to expand into new habitats where they were once either rare or absent, such as sandy prairies, deserts, coastal marshes, and mountains. Their spread throughout the Rocky Mountain West is indicative of the fast pace at which they can exploit new environments. Despite significant numbers being harvested and having suffered occasional declines, typically because of disease, the raccoon has consistently maintained high population levels. Several factors explain the raccoon's dramatic increase in abundance and distribution. First, their success has been partially attributed to the growth of cities, as they often thrive in suburban and even urban settings. Furthermore, they have been deliberately introduced throughout the continent. Within the United States, they are commonly taken from one area to another, both legally and illegally, to restock hunting areas and, presumably, because people simply want them to be part of their local fauna. Their appearance and subsequent flourishing in Utah's Great Salt Lake valley within the last 40 years appears to be from such an introduction. As an example of the ease with which transplanted individuals can succeed,

raccoons from Indiana (midwestern United States) have reportedly been able to flourish on islands off the coast of Alaska. The raccoon's expansion in various areas may also be due to the spread of agriculture. Raccoons have been able to exploit crops, especially corn but also cereal grains, which have become dependable food sources for them. The expansion of agriculture, however, does not necessarily lead to rapid increases in their abundance. Farming in Kansas and eastern Colorado (central and western United States) proceeded rapidly in the 1870s and 1880s, but this was about 50 years before raccoons started to spread out from their major habitat, the wooded river bottomlands. They have also expanded into many areas lacking any agriculture other than grazing and into places without forests or permanent streams. Prior to Europeans settling and farming the Great Plains regionA vast grassland region in North America extending from central Canada south through the west central United States into Texas, raccoons probably were just found along its rivers and streams and in the wooded areas of its southeastern section. With the possible exception of the southern part of the province of Manitoba, their absence was notable throughout Canada. They first became more widely distributed in the southern part of Manitoba, and by the 1940s were abundant throughout its southeastern portion. In the 1950s their population swelled in Canada. The control of coyotes in the prairie region in the 1950s may have been a factor in raccoon expansion. If their numbers are sufficient, coyotes might be able to suppress raccoon populations (though little direct evidence supports this notion). By the 1960s the raccoon had become a major predator of the canvasback ducks nesting in southwestern Manitoba. The extermination of the wolf from most of the contiguous United States may have been a critical factor in the raccoon's expansion and numerical increase. In the eighteenth century, when the wolf's range included almost all of North America, raccoons apparently were abundant only in the deciduous forests of the East, Gulf Coast, and Great Lakes regions, though they also extended into the wooded bottomlands of the Midwest's major rivers. In such areas, their arboreal habits and the presence of hollow den trees should have offered some protection from wolves and other large predators. Even though raccoons may not have been a significant part of their diet, wolves surely would have tried to prey on those exposed in relatively treeless areas.