

Practice Comprehension- 9: COCK-OF-THE-ROCK

1. Our guide unlocked the wooden door. 'Here' he announced to his still sleepy but excited audience 'are the keys to paradise. José Antonio has probably used this line before, but none of us was complaining. For as dawn broke over the Manu cloud forest, in the heart of Peru, we were assembling on a wooden platform perched on the edge of the mountainside. We had come to see one of the greatest bird spectacles in the world: the courtship display of the Andean cock-of-the-rock (*Rupicola peruvianus*).
 2. Cocks-of-the-rock (note the pedantic plural) are very striking birds indeed. About the size of a collared dove, though much plumper, they sport a prominent crest, which they use to intimidate their fellow males, and attract females, in the avian equivalent of the red deer rut. But their most obvious feature is their incredible colour: luminous orange on the head and body, with black wings and a pearl-grey back, making them look like a tricoloured rugby ball.
 3. I was in Peru with the Crees Foundation, which carries out scientific research and runs wildlife tours in Manu. Having driven across the Andes from Cuzco just the day before, this was our first experience of this incredible place.
 4. We were just in time: even as our eyes became accustomed to the darkness we could hear a series of harsh squeals and grunts echoing from the foliage. Moments later, the first cock (these were all male birds) melted out of the gloom onto the forest floor, as if someone had switched on a very bright light.
 5. Within seconds, a second and a third appeared; then more, until by the time the display was over, some twenty minutes later, at least half-a-dozen birds were gathered in their arena snorting, squeaking and showing off their wares to the females, somewhere out of sight.
 6. Unseen they may be, but the females are far from bit-players in this extraordinary event. For as usually happens in nature, they will do the choosing, picking out the lucky male as their partner in this winner-takes-all contest. For now, though, the males were alone: sidling up and down the branches like tiny orange monkeys, emitting those strange, gurgling calls.
 7. As the light improved, I got a better view of a splendid male perched against a dark backdrop of leaves, making jerky, almost mechanical movements. The small, beady eye was odd enough for a bird that lives in this forest darkness, but even more peculiar was the tiny bill: so wrapped in feathers it appeared virtually non-existent.
 8. Cocks-of-the-rock (there are two species, the other living further north) are members of an avian family known as the cotingas. The name means 'bright forest bird' and they certainly got that right. José Antonio told us that the cock-of-the-rock is Peru's national bird; not just thanks to that amazing display, but also because its deep orange-red plumage matches the nation's flag.
 9. Just before light finally filled the forest, we watched two males having a standoff: flicking their wings, and turning up the volume and intensity of their calls. Then, in unison, they paused and turned, as if admiring each other's performance.
 10. With the morning sunlight filtering down through the canopy, the show was over. And, as with all great theatrical events, we were left wanting just a little bit more.
-

Question 1:

- (a) What does the writer mean by his use of the words, "the keys to paradise" (line 2) [2]
- (b) From Paragraph 2, in your own words identify two features of the cock of the rock? [2]
- (c) The writer says in paragraph 1 that this event took place at dawn. But in paragraph 4 he emphasises that it was still dark. Explain what this tells you about the time of the day? [2]
- (d) What does paragraph 6 tell you about the different behaviour of the male and female. [2]
- (e) In paragraph 7, why does the writer think that the bird's 'beady eye' and beak are odd? [2]
- (f) What more information do you learn about the cock-of-the-rock from paragraph 8? [2]
- (g) Why does the writer describe this experience as a theatrical event (paragraph 10)? [1]
- (h) Explain using your own words, the writer's different feelings about the experience before, during and after witnessing the bird. Use details from the text to support your answer. [3]

Question 2:

- (a) -i- At the end of paragraph 2, the phrase, 'like a tricoloured rugby ball' is which literary device? [1]
-ii- How does it help you understand the appearance of the bird? [1]
- (b) In Paragraph 4, what does the writer want to suggest to the reader at this point in the story, "We were just in time." [1]
- (c) Read this sentence from the text:
'at least half-a-dozen birds were gathered in their arena snorting, squeaking and showing off their wares to the females' (Paragraph 5)
What effect does the writer want to suggest about the birds by using the words 'snorting, squeaking and showing off'? [2]
- (d) In paragraph 9, why has the writer used the word, 'stand-off', instead of the word, 'fight' in the sentence: "we watched two males having a standoff: flicking their wings and turning up the volume and intensity of their calls." [1]
- (e) Identify one example of how the writer uses language effectively to convey his feelings about the bird in this extract from the text:
'For as dawn broke over the Manu cloud forest.....with black wings and a pearl-grey back, making them look like a tricoloured rugby ball.' (Paragraphs 2 and 3)
Explain the impression the writer creates in the example you have identified. [3]

Marks Obtained: [/25]