

Section A: Reading

You should spend about 40 minutes on this section.

Read the following passage carefully and then answer questions 1 to 3 which follow.

The Trials of Life

In this passage David Attenborough describes the extraordinary journey that land crabs make every year in order to spawn (release their eggs).

It is midnight on the coast of Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean, two hundred miles south of Java. The November moon is in its third quarter and the tide is coming in. Behind the narrow sandy beaches stands a sheer cliff of coral rock, seventy feet high. On its vertical face, clinging beneath overhangs, jammed three or four deep into cracks, are a million scarlet crabs. In places, they are so crowded that their bodies touch and the cliff seems to have been painted crimson. These crabs are found nowhere else in the world. They are large animals with glossy rounded shells five inches across. All are females, each with a huge mass of brown eggs bulging beneath the semi-circular flap on her underside. They are about to spawn.

A month ago they, together with the males, left the burrows on the floor of the forest inland where they had spent most of the year and began a long march to the coast. Then the vast size of their population became dramatically apparent. There were about one hundred and twenty million of them. They moved mostly in the early morning or the evening, for they dry out easily and cannot withstand the full tropical sun. But when the sun went behind the clouds, and particularly after a rain shower when the undergrowth was moist, they travelled during much of the day. Nothing deterred them. In places their traditional routes cross roads that were made by the people who now live on Christmas Island. Thousands of the marchers were inevitably crushed beneath the wheels of the traffic but still, day after day for two weeks or so, they kept coming. When they reached the coast, the males then excavated burrows and there mated with the females. The males then returned inland, but the females had to wait in the burrows for a further two weeks while their fertilised eggs matured.

And now the moment to release the eggs has arrived. The crabs have climbed down the cliffs, for their eggs must be deposited directly into the sea if they are to hatch. But this is not without hazard. Although the crabs' distant ancestors came from the sea, these are land crabs. They breathe air and they cannot swim. If they lose their

hold on the rock or are swept away by the waves, they will certainly drown.

As the tide reaches its height, the width of the beach is reduced to a few yards. The females move down from the cliffs, across the shingle to the breakers, scrambling over one another in their anxiety to get to the water. Soon the sea is fringed with a moving scarlet carpet of glinting shells, grappling legs and craning stick-like eyes. When at last the waves sluice over them, each shakes her body convulsively so
40 that the brown eggs swirl away in the water and, with a touching gesture of apparent exultation, lifts her claws above her head as if waving a salute.

At either end of the beach, where the sea beats directly on the face of the cliffs, the crabs have a harder time of it. So great is the traffic between those striving to clamber down to the sea and those who, having spawned, are attempting to get back again, that many cannot reach the water. They are thus compelled to release their eggs
50 while they are still high on the rock and a brown rain of spawn falls sporadically from as high as twenty feet. In the confusion, many crabs lose their foothold, tumble into the water and are swept away.

Each one of these females sheds about a hundred thousand eggs. The waves and the water beyond have become a thick brown soup. As the sky lightens in the east, the crabs leave the water's edge and are on their way back to the forest. Only a few stragglers remain on the shore. Here and there, limp bodies float in the shallows and great expanses of the beach are covered with a layer of brown grains that are not sand but eggs. The extraordinary laying is over for another
60 year and the crabs' offspring, abandoned, must now look after themselves.

Turn over

Now answer the following questions.

1. Give **four** phrases which the writer uses to emphasise the huge numbers of crabs that take part in this journey. (4)

2. Look again at lines 12 to 29 of *The Trials of Life*. Describe, **in your own words**, the journey the crabs make. (4)

3. How does the writer involve the reader in the events he describes?

In your answer you should write about

- how the writer makes the reader feel sympathy for the crabs
- how the writer builds a sense of wonder and excitement.

You may include **brief** quotations from the passage to support your answer.

(12)

Total for Section A: 20 Marks