

Check your understanding



1 Why do we think that early breeders choose better sites for nesting than the later breeding pairs?

Answer [Early breeders are usually older and more experienced birds. Plus they get to choose first – so they can pick the best spot.]

2 In our study, were the early breeding woodpeckers more reproductively successful than the later breeding pairs?

Answer [Yes, early breeders fledged more chicks than the later ones.]

3 What is a use-availability study?

Answer [Comparing the characteristics of the plants on which birds choose to nest to the characteristics of the other plants (the ones available but not picked).]

4 What is the drawback of a use-availability study?

Answer [It doesn't account for the choices of the earlier breeding pairs, who are more experienced and fledged more chicks (thus contributing more to population growth)]

5 Why are birds an important part of the ecosystems?

Answer [There are many pollinators among birds. Others keep insects in line. Some birds help disperse seeds. Seabirds add nutrients to soil and water with their production of guano (poop). Some birds like woodpeckers are considered to be keystone species because they make habitat for other species.]

6 For the curious: Why don't woodpeckers get headaches?

Answer [Unlike our brain, muscles and a compressible bone surround the woodpecker's brain. This keeps the brain safe, since it works like an absorber.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-15458633>]