

Exercise 1

Read the article about an island called Surtsey, near Iceland, and then answer the questions.

Surtsey Island*A fascinating place for scientists*

On November 14, 1963, a series of huge underwater explosions was heard by fishermen 32 km from the southern coast of Iceland. They used their radios to let people know, and within a day, dozens of military and research planes and boats were in the area. A volcano had come to life: the result was the new island of Surtsey.

Surtsey's appearance raised interesting questions. What forms of life would appear on the island? When? How would they get there? In order for scientists to find out, Surtsey is closed to tourists. Researchers wanting to study there need to obtain written permission stating when and for how much time they can go. The next step is to do a special training course. This includes learning how to check clothing and other gear for what's known as hitchhikers – things such as seeds which could grow on Surtsey but which didn't arrive naturally.

Once researchers reach the island, there are certain things they must do. They can't just travel anywhere, but instead have to use established footpaths. No vehicles are allowed, and people can only work in certain areas. Once an expedition has finished, literally everything that came to the island must also leave it.

All these rules have been worth it – Surtsey remains unspoilt, which allows scientists to learn about how life establishes itself on a new island. Some of the first signs were observed in 1965, when a plant called sea rocket was found growing on Surtsey and a mosquito was also spotted. Other early arrivals included spiders and various types of insects which were either blown there or floated on pieces of wood or plastic. Perhaps unsurprisingly however, sea birds were observed on Surtsey from the very beginning, and species now visit from as far away as southern Europe. Research trips to Surtsey are not allowed during the egg-laying season. This finishes in July. There is then a short period for visits, which ends with the arrival of grey seals. Over 100 babies, or pups, are now born there each year.

Although warm ocean currents around Surtsey mean temperatures there are never especially cold, research work becomes almost impossible due to frequent severe storms in the winter. The constant action of the ocean has already reduced Surtsey's size by about 50 per cent. Indeed, in the long term, it's only expected to remain above water for another 100 years or so. Before then, though, an ongoing challenge faced by Surtsey is its popularity. Because people cannot land there, they have to look at it from the sea or the air. As activity around the island increases, it is likely to result in oil pollution, which could have devastating effects on the island's species.



Question 5

What is the most serious potential threat to wildlife on Surtsey?

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