

## IELTS General Reading Practice Test 30

**Q1. You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 28-40, which are based on Reading Passages below.**

**Write answers to questions in boxes 28-40 on your answer sheet.**

### THE ROLE OF THE SWISS POSTBUS

Switzerland's postbuses are much more than just a means of public transportation.

The Swiss PostBus Limited is the largest of the country's 78 coach companies. Administered by the Motor Services Department of the Post Office, it carries over 120 million passengers each year and is carefully integrated with other public transport services: trains, boats and mountain cableways. The Swiss transportation system resembles a tree, with the larger branches representing federal and private railways, the smaller branches being the coaches, and the twigs being the urban transit operators running trams, city buses, boats, chairlifts and so on. But the trunk that holds the tree together is the vast postbus network, without which the whole network would not function.

There isn't an inhabited place in Switzerland that cannot be reached by some sort of public transport. Federal law and the Swiss Constitution stipulate that every village with a population greater than 40 is entitled to regular bus services. The frequency of these services is directly related to population density. Timetables are put together four years in advance, and seldom change. If a new route is to be introduced, the population of the area affected is invited to vote in a referendum.

At times, postbuses are the main — sometimes the only — links between settlements. These coaches, often with a trailer in tow to increase their capacity, are a common sight in high-altitude regions, and their signature sound — part of Rossini's *William Tell* Overture, played by the drivers on three-tone post horns with electrical compressors at every road turn — is one of the most familiar Swiss sounds.

The three-tone horns can still be used to 'talk' to post offices (and each other) from a distance. By altering the combination of the tones, a driver can announce 'departure of post', 'arrival of post', 'arrival of special post', and so on — so much more romantic and often more reliable than radio or mobile phones. This musical 'language' started in the mid-nineteenth century, when the coach drivers could also blow their horns a certain number of times on approaching the station to indicate the number of horses needing to be fed, giving the stationmaster time to prepare the fodder.

The postbus history goes back to 1849, when the Swiss postal service was made a monopoly. The role of today's modern yellow buses was, back then, played by horse-drawn carriages (or in winter by sleighs, in order to travel on snow), which were the same colour. By 1914, eight years after the first motor coaches were introduced, there were still 2,500 horses, 2,231 coaches (or carriages) and 1,059 sleighs in service.

After the First World War, Swiss Post bought a fleet of decommissioned military trucks which were converted into postbuses, but it was not until 1961 that the last horse-drawn coach was replaced with a motorised version.

Today, the Swiss Post Office boasts one of the world's most advanced coach fleets, including fuel-cell models and the world's first driverless bus. This was launched in 2015 in the town of

Sion, the capital of the canton of Valais, one of the 26 cantons, or administrative regions, that make up the country.

Postbuses often go to places that other means of transport cannot reach. Most of the drivers therefore see themselves as educators and tour guides. Although it's not in their job description, they're likely to point out the sights — waterfalls, gorges, and so on — and are always ready to pull over for a photo opportunity.

Switzerland's longest postbus journey, and one of the highest, crosses four mountain passes — an eight-hour trip undertaken by a single postbus. The route goes through several cantons; two languages (German and Italian); all four seasons — from burning sunshine to showers and heavy snowfalls; and countless places of interest. One of the passes, the Gotthard, is often described as 'the People's Road', probably because it connects the German-speaking canton of Uri with Italian-speaking Ticino. Like Switzerland itself, postbuses 'speak' all four state languages: German, French, Italian and Romansh — and by law, their automated intercom announcements are given in the language of whichever canton the bus is currently passing through.

Irrespective of their previous driving experience, drivers undergo lots of training. During the first year, they have, to drive postbuses under the supervision of a more experienced driver. Only after two years of safe driving in the valleys can they be pronounced ready for a mountain bus. Some routes are not at all busy, with the bus often carrying just two or three passengers at a time. But for most people living in small mountain villages, the postbus is of the utmost importance. It not only carries the villagers to town and back, it takes village children to and from school, delivers mail, transports milk from the village farms down to the valley, collects rubbish from the village (Swiss laws do not allow dumping anywhere in the mountains), and brings building materials to households. It takes elderly villagers to shops and carries their shopping up the hill to their homes. More a friend than just a means of transportation, for the dwellers of mountain villages the postbus is an essential part of life.

### Questions 28-32

Choose the correct letter, A, B, C or D.

Write the correct letter in boxes 28-32 on your answer sheet.

28. When comparing the Swiss transportation system to a tree, the writer emphasises

- A. the size of the postbus system.
- B. how competitive the postbus system is.
- C. how important the postbus system is.
- D. the threat to the postbus system.

29. What is said about bus services in the second paragraph?

- A. Villages have the chance to request more buses every four years.
- B. New routes are often introduced to reflect an increase in population.
- C. Bus timetables tend to change every four years.
- D. The number of buses that call at a village depends on how many people live there.

30. According to the fourth paragraph, what were three-tone horns first used to indicate?

- A. how many coach horses required food
- B. how long the bus would stay at the station
- C. how many passengers wanted a meal

- D. how soon the bus would arrive at the station
31. What point does the writer make about the postbus drivers?
- A. Many choose to give passengers information about the surroundings.
  - B. Most are proud of driving buses to places without other forms of transport.
  - C. They are required to inform passengers about the sights seen from the bus.
  - D. They are not allowed to stop for passengers to take photographs.
32. What is said about the buses' automated announcements?
- A. They are given in the language of the bus's starting point.
  - B. The language they are given in depends on where the bus is at the time.
  - C. They are always given in all the four languages of Switzerland.
  - D. The language they are given in depends on the bus's destination.

### Questions 33-40

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the text above?

In boxes 33-40 on your answer sheet, write

TRUE if the statement agrees with the information

FALSE if the statement contradicts the information

NOT GIVEN if there is no information on this

- 33. Some postbuses after the First World War were originally army vehicles.
- 34. The number of driverless buses has increased steadily since 2015.
- 35. On the longest postbus route in Switzerland, passengers have to change buses.
- 36. The weather on the longest postbus route is likely to include extreme weather conditions.
- 37. There is a widely used nickname for part of the longest route used by postbuses.
- 38. Bus drivers' training can be shortened if they have driven buses before joining PostBus.
- 39. In some villages most passengers are school children.
- 40. Buses carry only rubbish that can be recycled.

**Q2. You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 28-40, which are based on Reading Passages below.**

**Write answers to questions in boxes 28-40 on your answer sheet.**

## Mass appeal of the manta rays

A. I am underwater, face to face with a large flat fish which I recognise immediately as being a manta ray. For an instant I look straight into its gaping mouth and see the row of small, flattened teeth in its lower jaw. Close on its tail comes another manta ray, and another and another. The manta rays are unaffected by my being there, cruising past in a leisurely fashion without seeming to expend any great effort.

B. From above, the manta rays are great black silhouettes that fishermen called 'devil fish', because of the curious horn-like fins hanging down near their mouths. But looking into their eyes you get a sense of their peaceful nature. Unlike stingrays, mantas don't have venomous spines in their tails, and unlike many fish species they seem to enjoy human company. Once, over-enthusiastically, I swim towards a manta. I am just a few inches away when it senses me. To my surprise, the whole fish twitches in alarm and shoots off, perhaps fearing that I will touch it. I feel ashamed to have given it a fright.

C. I have come to Hanifaru, a small lagoon next to an uninhabited island in the Maldives, especially to see manta rays. These great harmless creatures congregate here during the south-west monsoons between May and November and, if the tides and winds are right, enter a shallow cul-de-sac in the reef to hunt for plankton, their main source of nutrition. On certain days the bay can attract more than 100 mantas. I have seen many manta rays on dives around the world, though not in these numbers.

D. Guy Stevens is my guide, a British marine biologist who has been studying the mantas for the past five years. Based at the nearby Four Seasons resort, he has identified more than 2,000 individual manta rays, photographing and cataloguing them according to their distinctive skin patterns. Each day we make the 40-minute boat journey from the resort to Hanifaru. Feeding events, as Guy calls them, are never guaranteed, but, during the season, hotel guests can sign up for 'manta alerts'. If Guy and his research assistants spot significant manta activity, the guests will be brought by fast speedboat to the lagoon to snorkel. When feeding, the mantas of Hanifaru tend to stay near the surface, making them accessible to snorkellers just as much as divers. They seem not to mind the human competition in this quite small space, and indeed they are often joined by other rays and even giant whale sharks, which feed on the same plankton.

E. Word among the diving community about the possibility of finding a mass of manta rays at Hanifaru has slowly been spreading over the past year. Outside the shallow lagoon I can see five large safari boats- live-aboard cruisers that take divers around the best underwater sites in the Maldives. It is something that Guy has been monitoring closely. 'Word is out that Hanifaru is a top manta spot,' he explains, 'and although the government has declared the bay a "protected area", we still don't have any regulations in force to limit the number of people in the water at any one time.'

F. During my stay, the resort received a visit from the then-president of the Maldives, Mohamed Nasheed. Since coming to power in 2008, he had made his interest in the marine environment and concerns about climate change well known. In 2009 he held an underwater cabinet meeting, urging other world leaders to act decisively to combat climate change. The protection of wildlife areas such as Hanifaru was clearly one of his objectives, and I asked him why he took such an interest. 'Maldivians have lived with the reefs and their fish life since long before there were tourists,' he said. 'And while tourist dollars are good for our country, the sea and its produce are even more vital to my people. I have to balance what tourists want to see with preserving the marine environment- and in some cases, like Hanifaru, those objectives coincide.'

G. On several dives I am lucky enough to get close to the mantas, sometimes at underwater 'cleaning stations'. Here, the mantas come in small numbers, or individually, to pause above a coral outcrop and wait while small fish pick at their skin, removing parasites. Adapted for fast swimming with their flattened bodies, they can accelerate rapidly with a twitch of their wings. They gaze at human swimmers with a kind of knowing calm, something people often remark on when they try to capture the emotion they experience after seeing them. 'The manta rays have the biggest brain of any fish,' Guy explains, 'and some manta researchers are convinced that mantas can recognise individual people underwater.'

H. I return to the lagoon over the course of several days and learn more from Guy about his hopes for the future. 'People can visit this place, but I want to be sure that they don't harass the mantas by touching them or crowding them out while they're feeding. We're working to get a

full-time ranger station and some kind of permit system to limit the number of boats that can enter the lagoon each day.'

**Questions 28-30**

The reading passage has 8 paragraphs, A-H.

Which paragraph mentions the following?

Write the correct letter, A-H, in boxes 28-30 on your answer sheet.

- 28. a record that is being kept of manta rays in the area
- 29. something that the writer regrets
- 30. the reason for the writer's visit

**Questions 31-36**

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the reading passage?

In boxes 31-36 on your answer sheet, write

TRUE – if the statement agrees with the information

FALSE – if the statement contradicts the information

NOT GIVEN – if there is no information on this

- 31. It is difficult to distinguish one manta ray from another.
- 32. For hotel guests, viewing manta rays feeding has to be arranged at short notice.
- 33. The manta rays appear to object to the presence of people in the water while they are feeding.
- 34. Guy Stevens is concerned about the increasing interest in Hanifaru.
- 35. Mohamed Nasheed succeeded in persuading certain other countries to take steps to protect the environment.
- 36. A procedure has now been established to control the number of visitors.

**Questions 37-40**

Complete the summary below.

Choose ONE WORD ONLY from the text for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 37-40 on your answer sheet.

## The manta ray

During certain times of year, depending on the weather conditions and the tides, manta rays collect to look for 37 ..... to feed on. They eat the same food as other species, such as giant whale sharks. As for keeping clean, they are kept free from 38 ..... by smaller fish.

Manta rays have certain characteristics which make them good swimmers; they use their 39 ..... to get up speed and they have flattened bodies, which help them to move quickly through the water. The nature of the manta's 40 ..... is of particular interest to scientists.

**Q3. You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 28-40, which are based on Reading Passages below.**

**Write answers to questions in boxes 28-40 on your answer sheet.**

# Marine Ecosystem

A

For some time now, the world's oceans and the people who fish them have been a constant source of bad environmental news: cod is effectively an endangered species of fish in some places now; every year thousands of dolphins are injured by fishing vessels; huge tuna farms are ruining the Mediterranean Sea.

What is more, marine biologists recently warned that our seafood is in terminal decline.

According to research published in Science last November, stocks of all the fish and shellfish that we currently eat will collapse before 2050. Or at least that's how the media reported it.

B

However, the scientist who led the study has said that the main conclusion of his research has been buried beneath the headlines. While the danger to our seafood supply is real enough, says Boris Worm, assistant professor of marine conservation biology at Dalhousie University, Canada, there is a more serious point: that the way in which we manage the oceans is not only threatening the survival of individual species, it's upsetting the delicate balance of marine communities and thus causing the collapse of entire ecosystems. Research has shown that the number of ecosystems where all higher forms of life are extinct, so-called dead zones, is increasing.

The point that many reports failed to highlight, says Worm, is that we have to revolutionise the way our marine resources are run, changing the focus from stocks and quotas to biodiversity and ecosystem protection. And to do that, we must change the way the debate about our marine resources is conducted in the public domain.

C

Around 7,500 years ago, shrinking glaciers and the resulting higher water levels led to the development of what's called the Wadden Sea, a 13,500-square-kilometre area of the North Sea. During the first 5,000 years or so, the sea pulsed with life. There was a high level of biodiversity on the seabed too, and the salt marshes and mud flats on the coast supported millions of birds. This continued until around 2,000 years ago, when human pressure began to affect it. Research has shown that some of the larger creatures disappeared more than 500 years ago. And by the late 19th century, populations of most of the other mammals and fish were severely reduced, leading to the collapse of several traditional fisheries.

D

What's interesting is that overfishing isn't the main agent of the decline, as we might assume. It's due to an ongoing combination of exploitation, habitat destruction and pollution. Coastal development, for example, destroys large areas of wetlands that support a range of species. Pollution fuels a process known as eutrophication, which kills certain seagrasses. Nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus contained in human and industrial waste promote the growth of tiny phytoplankton. This over-enrichment of the sea can ultimately lead to the collapse of the entire system through oxygen starvation.

Most marine ecosystems have an in-built capacity to deal with a certain amount of pollution because shellfish can absorb phytoplankton. But in many cases, these have been largely removed by fishing, so the effect of any nutrient-rich pollutants entering the system is increased.

In a healthy system, coastal wetlands also act as filters, so their destruction causes even more pollution. These processes have been fairly well understood for a number of years.

E

What the Science paper has demonstrated, however, is that the decline in the health of ecosystems is greater where the number of different species is low. The population of marbled rock cod around the South Atlantic island of South Georgia, for example, still hasn't recovered after the fishing industry caused its collapse during the 1970s. By contrast, North Sea cod has withstood very heavy fishing for hundreds of years, says Worm, and although it has declined substantially, it hasn't yet collapsed completely. Worm believes that, 'to have a greater number of species makes an ecosystem more robust'. His theory is backed up by evidence from experiments into how ecosystems react to change.

F

And some positive news came from the study. Worm and his colleagues were able to show that it's possible to reverse such damage as long as there are enough species. A survey of 44 protected areas revealed increases in biodiversity and fish catches close to the reserves. Worm says, 'We should be focusing our attention on protecting all of our marine resources at the ecosystem level, and managing levels of fishing, pollution and habitat disturbance to ensure that crucial services that maintain the health of the ecosystem continue to function.' To anyone who knows anything about ecology, it would appear that Worm is just stating the obvious. And many protected areas on land are now managed in this way.

G

However, there has long been a tendency to view our oceans as a limitless resource, combined with a widespread failure to make an emotional connection with most marine wildlife. True, we have created a small number of marine protected areas. 'We seem to have understood the value of protecting ecosystems in areas such as the Australian Great Barrier Reef that we consider to be particularly beautiful' says John Shepherd, Professor of Marine Sciences at Southampton University in the UK. 'Human nature will always draw us towards those species or habitats that are more aesthetically pleasing. That's why there will always be support for protecting pandas and very little for worms, even though nematodes play a vital role in maintaining the health of an ecosystem.'

#### Questions 28-34

The text below has seven sections, A-G.

Choose the correct heading for each section from the list of headings below.

Write the correct number, i-viii, in boxes 28-34 on your answer sheet.

#### List of Headings

- i. Plans for more marine protected areas
- ii. A historical overview of one specific area
- iii. Why more has not been done to save marine creatures
- iv. What the press has missed
- v. Where biodiversity has been shown to help
- vi. Who is currently being blamed
- vii. A reason for some optimism
- viii. Various factors other than fishing

- 28. Section A
- 29. Section B
- 30. Section C
- 31. Section D
- 32. Section E
- 33. Section F
- 34. Section G

Questions 35-37

Choose the correct letter, A, B, C or D.

Write the correct letter in boxes 35-37 on your answer sheet.

- 35. Boris Worm's main concern is that
  - A. marine ecosystems will completely break down.
  - B. insufficient attention is being paid to fish numbers.
  - C. there will no longer be enough seafood for people to eat.
  - D. politicians will be unwilling to discuss marine resources.
- 36. What point does John Shepherd make?
  - A. Marine conservation areas are not high on the list of visitor attractions.
  - B. People know very little about how different species actually live.
  - C. The public are much less likely to help unattractive creatures
  - D. The marine environment was better understood in the past.
- 37. Which of the following best summarises the text as a whole?
  - A. Scientists disagree about the state of the world's oceans.
  - B. A radical review of marine resource management is needed.
  - C. The fishing industry is mainly responsible for today's problems.
  - D. The natural systems of our seas will not be able to repair themselves.

Questions 38-40

Complete the summary below.

Choose ONE WORD ONLY from the text for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 38-40 on your answer sheet.

## The Wadden Sea

The Wadden Sea was created when the sea rose as a consequence of 38 ..... slowly contracting. The waters were full of different species of marine creatures, and there were large numbers of 39 ..... living on the wetlands along the shore. This continued until species began to decline 2,000 years ago. Overfishing was partly responsible for the changing circumstances, and so was pollution. At the same time, there has been an increase in some nutrients in the Wadden Sea which can also destroy marine creatures and vegetation by depriving them of 40 ..... which is essential for their survival.