39.1 Stability and change

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 26 marks**

KEY WORDS keystone species • tipping point • eutrophication • biomagnification • sustainable • succession

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **stability and change** in ecosystems: tipping points, keystone species, sustainable use, eutrophication, biomagnification, plastics and restoration.

You must be able to:

- explain what makes an ecosystem stable, and how deforestation can pass a tipping point
- explain sustainable harvesting and sustainable agriculture
- explain eutrophication and biomagnification, and the harm caused by plastics
- describe how mesocosms are set up and how rewilding restores ecosystems
- explain primary and secondary succession, climax communities and arrested succession

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

Stability and change

A **stable ecosystem** keeps its structure over long periods. It needs a supply of energy, recycling of nutrients, high **biodiversity** and climate within suitable limits. A **keystone species** has a large effect for its numbers (sea otters keep sea urchins in check, so kelp forests survive).

Tipping point: a small further change causes a large, lasting shift. If enough of the **Amazon rainforest** is cleared, less water is recycled by transpiration, rainfall falls, and the forest may turn to savanna.

Mesocosms are small, closed or open model ecosystems (a sealed jar or a fenced plot) used to test how factors affect stability.

Sustainable harvesting takes no more than the population can replace (fishing quotas, minimum net mesh size). **Agriculture** can cause soil erosion, leaching of fertilizer, and a large carbon footprint.

Eutrophication: fertilizer runs into water → **algal bloom** → algae die → **bacteria** **decompose** them and use up **oxygen** → fish die. **Biomagnification:** a persistent pollutant (DDT, mercury) is not broken down or excreted, so its concentration **increases at each trophic level**. **Plastics:** macroplastics trap or choke animals; microplastics are eaten and pass along food chains.

Restoration: rewilding brings back species, such as wolves in Yellowstone, and lets natural processes recover.

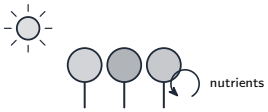
HL: succession is the gradual change of a community over time. **Primary succession** starts on bare rock with no soil (pioneer lichens and mosses make soil); **secondary succession** starts where soil remains (after fire or farming). Biomass, soil depth, diversity and food-web complexity increase until a **climax community** forms. **Arrested succession** happens when a factor such as grazing or fire stops it (grassland kept by sheep).

Worked example. DDT in water 0.00005 ppm, in fish-eating birds 25 ppm: $\frac{25}{0.00005} = \mathbf{500\,000}$ times higher.

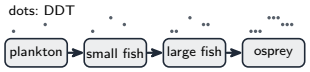
Answer shapes: cause → change in one factor → effect on organisms → effect on the whole ecosystem.

2 Practice

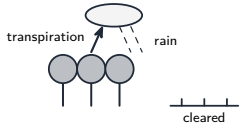
2.1 State two conditions needed for an ecosystem to be stable. [2]



2.2 Explain why the concentration of DDT is highest in top predators. [3]



2.3 Explain why deforestation of part of the Amazon could cause the rest of the forest to change to savanna. [3]

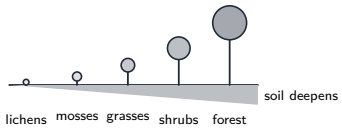


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2.4 Distinguish between primary and secondary succession. [3]



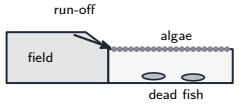
2.5 Outline the changes that happen during primary succession. [3]



3 Exam-style questions

3.1 The diagram shows a lake next to a field where fertilizer is used.

(a) Explain how fertilizer run-off causes the death of fish. [4]



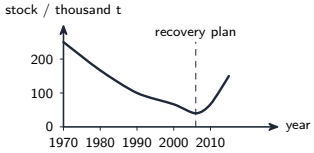
(b) Suggest two ways a farmer could reduce run-off into the lake. [2]

3.2 The graph shows the spawning stock (adult fish that breed) of North Sea cod. The data are simplified.

(a) State the spawning stock in 2006. [1]

(b) Explain why the stock fell between 1970 and 2006. [2]

(c) Suggest how quotas and larger net mesh sizes helped the stock recover. [3]



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