Name_____

A Forest Secret

Until recently, saolas remained one of Earth's best-kept secrets. Upon discovering this animal in the wild, scientists just as quickly recognized this unique species as endangered. Immediate steps are being taken, in the form of establishing national parks, to ensure the survival of the species.

Villagers in Vietnam and Laos have spotted saolas only on rare occasion. Although saolas physically resemble miniature antelopes, DNA testing confirmed they are a separate species, previously unknown to mankind. Biologically, saolas are related to cows and bison. Their name means "spinning wheel posts," referring to the animals' long horns that sweep back over the neck. Their most distinguishing feature, aside from the horns, are massive scent glands in their cheeks. Saolas mark their territory with musk from these glands. Scientists are uncertain exactly how many of the animals exist today.

Nearly twenty years ago, an adult female was captured and sent to a zoo in Laos. The saola stood about waist-high with 18-inch horns. This interesting mammal appears to have little fear of humans and was observed to be approachable in zoo settings. Their reaction to dogs, however, gives a clue as to possible predators. Unfortunately, observations of saolas have been limited, as those captured have died shortly thereafter. Causes of each death have not been fully determined, although at least two have succumbed to infection.

Scientists disagree as to the best course of action for saving saolas. Some believe that leaving the saola alone to roam the few remaining patches of their native habitat—wet evergreen forests—will ensure their survival. Others argue for a more direct approach, such as captive breeding. Either way, if saolas become extinct, it will represent another failure in protecting Earth's fragile ecosystems.

Text Questions

1. What is the main idea of the last paragraph?
   a. It provides examples of keeping a saola in captivity.
   b. It offers ways to save saolas.
   c. It describes how saolas are unique.
   d. It gives a description of the saola's appearance.

2. What does the word *distinguishing* mean as it is used in the second paragraph?
   a. different
   b. separated
   c. infamous
   d. unknown

3. Why is this passage titled "A Forest Secret"?
   a. Saolas were not known about until recently.
   b. Saolas are a unique species.
   c. Saolas are afraid of dogs, but scientists do not know why.
   d. Saolas are endangered.

4. Which information about saolas is <u>not</u> included in the passage?
   a. their habitat
   b. their appearance
   c. their diet
   d. their possible predators

5. What are some reasons scientists might want to keep saolas from becoming extinct?

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LIVEWORKSHEETS