

When wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park in 1995, biologists expected the predators to reduce the elk population. What they did not anticipate was how deeply the entire ecosystem would change.

For nearly seventy years, wolves had been absent from the park. Without natural predators, elk herds grew rapidly and began grazing freely along riverbanks. Young willow and aspen trees were eaten before they could mature, and the banks slowly eroded. Beavers, which depend on those trees for food and dam-building, disappeared from many areas.

After the wolves returned, the elk were forced to move more often and avoid open valleys. Trees began to grow again along the rivers. Beavers came back, and their dams created ponds that became habitats for fish, birds and insects. Even the rivers themselves changed course, becoming narrower and more stable.

Scientists call this a "trophic cascade" - a chain of effects that begins with a single predator and spreads through the whole food web. Not all researchers agree on how much of the change was caused by wolves alone; drought, hunting and climate also played a role. Nevertheless, Yellowstone has become the most famous example of how one species can reshape an entire landscape.

Questions 1–5

Complete the summary below.

Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the text for each answer.

In 1995 wolves were brought back to Yellowstone. The scientists did not (1) __ how greatly the ecosystem would change. For about seventy years the wolves had been (2) __, so the number of elk rose quickly. Beavers, which (3) __ on young trees, vanished from many areas. When the wolves returned, trees grew again and the rivers even changed (4) __, becoming narrower. Scientists call this process a "trophic cascade", although other factors also played a (5) _