

Directions: *There are 2 passages in this section. Each passage is followed by some questions or unfinished statements. For each of them there are four choices marked A), B), C) and D). You should decide on the best choice and mark the corresponding letter on **Answer Sheet 2** with a single line through the centre.*

Passage One

Questions 46 to 50 are based on the following passage.

New research suggests that pandas may be at risk of dying out because they are too comfortable. Experts say too much happiness can stop the bears from searching for new mates.

Environmentalists have long believed that building roads or homes near the bears may threaten their survival by "reducing or fragmenting their natural habitats", The Times reported. But the new research suggests that a "modest degree of discomfort and fragmentation" may actually help preserve panda populations.

The research was conducted by scientists from Michigan State University. It concluded that pandas fail to wander off in search of new mates if they find their habitat too comfortable, resulting in a lack of vital genetic diversity.

For their study—outlined in a paper in the journal *Conservation Biology*—the team looked at genetic diversity and spread among a Chinese panda population. The ideal level of perfectly livable habitat was found to be only 80% of an area, with the remainder either too harsh or too affected by human activity.

The experts concluded that pandas should ideally "be happy enough to thrive, but not so content that they don't want to move around and find new mates".

Their conclusions about what The Guardian described as this "sweet spot" are in line with the so-called Goldilocks principle: that there can be just the right amount of something. The concept has been applied to a wide range of disciplines, from developmental psychology to economics and engineering.

Claudio Sillero, a professor of conservation biology at Oxford University, told the newspaper that the new findings could have implications beyond panda conservation.

"Most large animals that eat meat live in increasingly fragmented landscapes," said Sillero, who was not involved in the research. "It may well be that the messy nature of their relationship with human efforts induces more animals to scatter or travel further, and might result in greater genetic connectivity and enhanced population persistence."

The most recent count of pandas found that there were more than 1,800 left in the wild, putting them on the list of vulnerable, but not endangered, species.

46. What do we learn from new research about pandas?

- A) They are losing habitat due to the building of roads and houses.
- B) They have stopped seeking new mates for reproduction.
- C) They may not adapt to the fragmentation of their habitat.
- D) They may cease to exist as a result of enjoying too good a life.

47. What can we conclude from the new research by scientists at Michigan State University?
- A) Environmentalists' long-time belief regarding panda conservation may be misleading.
 - B) Housing development near pandas' homes may threaten their survival.
 - C) Pandas' natural habitats are becoming less suitable for reproduction.
 - D) The increased panda population is attributed to the fragmentation of their habitat.
48. What is the experts' conclusion regarding pandas?
- A) It is urgent to provide an ideal habitat for them to thrive.
 - B) It is very important to preserve their genetic diversity.
 - C) Their chances of finding new mates have a lot to do with their habitat.
 - D) Their environment for survival has been continuously worsening.
49. What can we infer from the passage about the Goldilocks principle?
- A) It needs to be confirmed by more studies on pandas.
 - B) It applies to the preservation of pandas too.
 - C) It has implications for future panda research.
 - D) It can be used to locate the right spot for pandas.
50. What can the new findings do according to Professor Sillero?
- A) Help discover new ways for the conservation of pandas.
 - B) Help remove pandas from the list of endangered species.
 - C) Shed light on the conservation of most large meat-eating animals.
 - D) Show the complexity of interactions between humans and animals.