

Infested Lake (solution)

by Ong Kah Kien

Solvers need to first note down the sequence of fishes caught in the fishing game in each video clip. There is a changeover of the fishing rod from red to blue in-between, so there are actually a pair of sequences in each clip. After noting down the 16 sequences, it could be observed that 2 of the sequences end with the same 3 fishes, while another 3 sequences end with the same 4 fishes. This hints that the fishes are used as some sort of cryptogram, with some of the sequences ending with the same letters/word. Given that this is a fishing game, a thematic deduction is that the repeated ending 4-letters/word could be “FISH”, and that these sequences all spell names of different “fishes”. Note that the term fish will be used very loosely here and could include other animals that live in the water. This insight provides an entry point to solve the cryptogram, based on potential names of fishes and the common letters between names.

The mapping of the letters to fishes is shown in the image below:



What makes the cryptogram tricky to solve is that each fish in the game can only be caught/used once in each video clip for a pair of fish names. Hence repeated letters in each pair of fish names are represented using different fishes, ie. there could be multiple fishes that encrypt a single letter. So a frequency analysis of individual fishes is less useful in this case. Nonetheless, there are certain rules to help make the solver's task easier:

- The same fishes are always used to form the repeated words “FISH” and “EEL”, to help solvers notice these common ending words as an entry point.

- In the given video clip order, the first letter of the first fish in each of the 8 clips are represented by a fish in clockwise order along the bottom half arc of the outermost ring (letters in blue in image above). This hints that the top half arc of the outermost ring hides a clue phrase.
- The fishes in the top half of the outermost ring (letters in black in image above) are always used first, except when this conflicts with any of the rules above. This helps solvers to figure out the clue phrase here as the fishes are used more often.
- The fishes representing each letter are always used in the same order, except when this conflicts with any of the rules above. This helps solvers to figure out the mapping for more fishes as they are used more often.
- Each letter is only represented by fish/es in one color, and if they appear in the same ring, their positions will have rotational symmetry to each other.

The fishes in the top half of the outermost ring (letters in black in image above) spell the clue phrase “ACNH PRICES”. This references the fish prices in the video game “Animal Crossings: New Horizons”, and all the 16 named fishes are from the game. Note that the prices used are the standard ones from Nook’s Cranny, and not the 50% higher ones sometimes offered by the character C.J. The flavor text also hinted at this game with the word “crossings”, and if solvers picked up on this, it would be easier to identify the names of the fishes too.

The table below summarizes the pair of fish names in each video clip (linked to their fish sequences), with their prices and the extracted letter from the total price:

Video	Fish 1	Fish 2	Price 1	Price 2	Total	Letter
1	GUPPY	ANCHOVY	1,300	200	1,500	O
2	RIBBON EEL	CATFISH	600	800	1,400	N
3	TADPOLE	POND SMELT	100	400	500	E
4	YELLOW PERCH	CARP	300	300	600	F
5	NEON TETRA	FRESHWATER GOBY	500	400	900	I
6	SEA BASS	CRAWFISH	400	200	600	F
7	GOLDFISH	SALMON	1,300	700	2,000	T
8	MORAY EEL	SQUID	2,000	500	2,500	Y

The letters in the alphabet position corresponding to the total prices for each video (div 100) in the above order spell the clue phrase ONE FIFTY. This references the fish in Animal Crossings: New Horizons which is priced at 150, which is the **HORSE MACKEREL** and thematic answer for this puzzle.

Constructor's notes:

One common type of hunt puzzles is creating thematic puzzles using familiar pop culture references. In this case, the childhood fishing game is transformed into the basis for a cryptogram to spell out different fish names. The overhead fishing videos turned out to be very challenging to record in a continuous take though, and it took many hours to get them right for this puzzle. And even then some video clips were not really ideal as there were delays caused by searching for the next fish to catch or failing to hook up a fish at the first attempt.