

*Promoting conservation can be fun through video games like Animal Crossing*  
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Scientists are always looking for new ways to help stop wildlife going extinct. An important aspect of this is finding new ways to communicate pro-conservation messages to the public, particularly those who are otherwise disconnected from natural environments.

Yet, video games can host a virtual alternative to experience nature. There are an estimated 2.7 billion people gaming worldwide, a large population that could be targeted for pro-conservation messaging. We argue that video games can be used as a force for good, to teach players about different animals and plants, to raise awareness for conservation issues (such as the illegal trade of certain pet species), as well as promote positive behaviours (such as recycling).

In our paper, we explore how features of the popular Nintendo game Animal Crossing: New Horizons do just that. Released during the COVID-19 pandemic, the game quickly became the second-best selling video game ever in Japan and has been praised for its positivity, escapism, and measurable wellbeing benefits to players. But what about its benefits for conservation?

The game is centred around players creating their own island on which they can learn about different seasonal plants and animals, collect fossils, and socialise online with fellow players. Players are incentivised to clean litter and maintain a diversity of flower and tree species. We celebrate the game's focus on traditionally less-popular species, including insects and fish, which do not get the same international publicity as charismatic mammals or birds. The social nature of the game encourages interconnectivity, furthering ACNH as a platform for education. We also highlight where current features of the game may harm conservation messages. We acknowledge these within the context that game designers need to balance educational materials against the primary aim of

entertainment, to ensure the game's success and enjoyment.

We praise Nintendo for considering this balance and creating a game that promotes nature conservation in a fun and interactive way. Finally, we offer several simple recommendations to further promote pro-conservation messages and behaviours should Nintendo and game developers alike continue to expand on this capacity in the future.



*Video-games can be used for pro-environmental messaging. In Animal Crossing: New Horizons, players learn about species through activities such as fishing, bug catching, and planting. Illustration by Danielle Rundle, digitisation by Natalie Yoh*

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