

# Mating fish take the blame for night-time hum

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Vibrating water pipes have been considered and a cement factory investigated, but so far no answer has been forthcoming regarding the origin of the night-time “Hampshire hum”.

Marine biology, however, has a new theory — that the mysterious drone heard across Southampton may be the sound of fish in search of love.

Midshipman fish, which croak to attract mates, have been blamed for a similar hum in Seattle, and Sarah Neenan, a PhD student at the University of Southampton, argues that their English cousins may be doing the same.

“Many fish have been observed to produce vocalisations during reproduction,” said Ms Neenan, who specialises in fish acoustics. “These courtship events tend to occur through the night or at dawn. It is definitely in the realms of possibility that fish are causing the mysterious hum.”

She suggested sand gobies as a potential culprit. “If the noisy species are abundant enough they could keep people awake. Fish sounds are limited by the size of their vocal apparatus and swim bladders, but with enough fish present it could be possible to annoy local residents.”

Dr Paul Kemp from the university has not heard the hum but has done a lot of work in fish vocalisations. “If you live in the turbid waters of an estuary it makes sense to be vocal,” he said.

