

The Results of Our Survey

As of this posting, 115 subscribers have responded to our questionnaire, 71 men and 44 women. (A list of their names and locations is at the end of this report.)

Their ages

They range in age from 28 to 80 (median, 54; average, 62).

Where they live

Canada	5	Colorado	3
Australia	3	Connecticut	3
India	1	District of Columbia	2
UK	1	Oregon	2
US	105 (as follows)	Rhode Island	2 (2 Providence)
		Tennessee	2
New York	15 (3 New York City)	Arizona	1
Massachusetts	15 (2 Cambridge)	Arkansas	1
Pennsylvania	8	Georgia	1
California	7 (2 San Francisco)	Indiana	1
Maryland	6 (2 Baltimore)	Kansas	1
Michigan	6	Kentucky	1
Virginia	6	Minnesota	1
North Carolina	5	Missouri	1
Illinois	4 (2 Chicago)	New Mexico	1
New Jersey	4	Washington	1
Texas	4	West Virginia	1

Their education

They are well educated, reporting anywhere from 12 to 25 years of school (average 18), and several of them have advanced degrees, including 4 PhDs.

What they do

They list their occupations, either current or before retirement, as follows:

computer-related	17	novelist	2
education (teacher / professor)	15	psychologist	2
business	10	accountant	1
writer / editor	9	actor	1
banking / finance	8	agriculture	1
law	8	antique dealer	1
art / music	5	bookkeeper	1
medicine	5	economist	1
chemistry	4	geologist	1
engineering	4	magician	1
housewife / mom	4	physicist	1
administration	3	policeman	1
health care	3	postal clerk	1
librarian	3	psychiatrist	1
mathematician	3	secretary	1
technician	3	Torah reader	1
contractor	2		

(The total comes to 124 because some people listed more than one occupation.)

How they found us

- 48 from the web¹;
- 20 from an announcement in *Harvard Magazine*;
- 13 from a friend, relative, or spouse;
- 10 from the National Puzzlers League;
- 6 from an ad in *Harper's*;
- 5 from the *New York Times* forum
- 13 either couldn't remember or wouldn't say.

¹ Of these, 2 mention Will Johnston's puzzle site: <http://www.fleetingimage.com/wij/xyzyzy/nyt-links.html>

Puzzlecrypt habits

- 98 visit puzzlecrypt at least once every month;
- 12 visit irregularly but fairly often;
- 5 do so occasionally or rarely.

- 91 attempt John's puzzle every month;
- 16 do so occasionally;
- 8 ignore it altogether.

- 66 attempt Accipiter's acrostic whenever it appears;
- 18 do so occasionally;
- 30 ignore it altogether;
- 1 respondent test-solves Accipiter's acrostics before she sends them to us.

Puzzle difficulty

- John's puzzles are rated from 2 to 5 (average 4.2) by 105 respondents;
- Accipiter's puzzles are rated from 1 to 5 (average 2.8) by 81 respondents.

Previous puzzles

- 61 respondents have solved one or more John's previous puzzles;
- 21 respondents have solved one or more of Accipiter's.

Hints for John's puzzles

- 75 respondents say they don't use the hints;
- 28 say they do;
- 12 don't say;

48 respondents claim to have solved *all* of John's puzzle without hints. Indeed, the question about using hints elicited emphatic negatives, such as "No!" "Never!" and "Didn't know there were any." Of the 28 solvers who say they use hints, 15 add "occasionally," "rarely," or a like qualification, and 7 say they couldn't complete John's puzzles without them.

What they think about the site itself

- Respondents rate it as follows:
 - ease of getting around: 2 – 5, average 4.6;
 - ease of use: 1 – 5, average 4.6;
 - speed of pages: 3 – 5, average 4.7;
 - reliability: 3 – 5, average 4.7.
- Few respondents visit the forums page:
 - 78 just don't go there (18 didn't even know it existed);
 - 20 visit it occasionally;

1 does so regularly;
16 left the question blank.

(The two most frequent comments were "don't have time" and "don't go in for chat," or words to that effect.)

- Only 42 respondents answered questions about visiting other sections of the site:
 - 20 regularly look at the solution to the previous month's puzzle and the list of solvers (which one respondent found "fascinating");
 - 14 look at other sections without specifying which ones, although one respondent mentions the guide to solving cryptic clues and another mentions "archives" (presumably meaning previous puzzles and solutions);
 - 8 look only at current puzzles.
- Respondents express their puzzle format preferences as follows:
 - 49 adobe;
 - 31 regular (html);
 - 25 both;
 - 10 no preference.
- A large majority of respondents (94) said they would not be interested in an on-screen version of John's puzzles, because they are too difficult and require pencil and paper and a lot of erasing. A few thought Accipiter's acrostics might be amenable to on-screen solving, but a recurring theme was that puzzles are seldom done in one sitting and are best worked on paper in comfortable surroundings away from the computer.

Comments

Taking advantage of the space at the end of the questionnaire, 74 respondents offered comments ranging in length from a few words to a couple of paragraphs. Most of them expressed approval of the puzzles and welcomed the challenge they presented, but many lamented that there weren't more ("How about two a month?"; "There can never be enough!"). A few subscribers wished we would vary the format of the puzzles, and two suggested we make the solving more competitive ("How about adding times for the top ten solvers?"; "To make the 'contest' fairer, you could announce a time of posting a day in advance").

I reply as follows:

First, thanks to all of you who responded, with or without adding comments. We try to maintain a high level of quality in both our puzzles and our web site, and it's gratifying to get the kind of response you've given us.

Second, I appreciate that some of you would like more puzzles, but constructing cryptic puzzles is a time-consuming business. I happen to love it, but I can spend only so much time at it without burning out, and one puzzle a month is about my limit. On a few occasions I've managed to produce an extra or "special" puzzle, but most of the time I struggle just to maintain a comfortable backlog, ie, having a back-up puzzle ready by the time the current one gets posted. I gather from Accipiter that she's in the same boat and finds it impossible to offer an acrostic more often than once every other month. Acrostics, I would add, are more tedious to construct than the puzzles I offer.

Third, I too would like to vary the puzzle format, but I choose to stick to the current one for two reasons. The first is that it doesn't require special software, which would be expensive. As we don't charge for our puzzles and incur moderate expenses in maintaining the site, we try to keep

our costs low. The second reason is that, because the current format uses a grid with no blank squares or numbers and also features what I call "word wrap," solvers have the extra challenge of figuring out how words fit in the grid, which many of them seem to like. I'm sorry if staying with the status quo disappoints some of you, but I hope you'll understand why I do it. I was delighted when Accipiter began contributing her acrostics, as they provided welcome variety.

Fourth, soon after we launched Puzzlecrypt, I offered a "contest" puzzle that drew 24 contestants. Most of them said afterwards they really weren't interested in competing, they just liked solving puzzles. So I abandoned the idea of more contests (without reluctance, I might add, because administering the contest had been quite a hassle; for example, it was practically impossible to get the puzzle to contestants in a way they could all start at the same time). Instead, I began listing solvers in the order in which I received their solutions. Even that has drawn adverse comments from those who dislike any form of competition.

I can't please everyone, so I'll stick to current practice, which seems to be okay with most of you. But I'll add a feature for those who'd like a competitive challenge. I'll post test-solver Kevin Wald's solving time for the regular puzzle at the same time that I post its solution. That way, those who wish to may compare their time with his, although I must warn you, he's fast. His shortest solving time is about 30 minutes, his longest 3 hours, and his average about an hour.

Please continue to let us know your views on the site whenever you're inclined to communicate them, especially if there's something you think we could improve with minimal effort or outlay. We value your feedback and delight in providing puzzles that so many of you say you can't get enough of.

JdeC

Respondents

1. Judy Adamski – Jenison, MI
2. Douglas Ashleigh – Havertown, PA
3. Judith Bagai – Portland, OR
4. Geoff Bailey – Sydney, Australia
5. Peggy Bedell – Northampton, MA
6. Jonathan Belsky – Saint Louis, MO
7. Paul Bickart – Washington, DC
8. Bob Bowen – Jackson, MI
9. Robert Brown – Albuquerque, NM
10. Lori Burns – Highland Park, IL
11. Joe Cabrera – Boston, MA
12. Debbie Carter – Auburn, NY
13. Marilyn Castle – Virginia Beach, VA
14. Mark Chalom – Ogdensburg, NY
15. Susan Christie – Corvallis, OR
16. Nancy Clemente – Waltham, MA
17. Charlene Coates – Coatesville, PA
18. Bob Colonna – Providence, RI
19. Norman Crawford – Ocean Pines, MD
20. Elaine Cullinan – Valencia, PA
21. Norman W. Davis – Englewood, NJ
22. David A. Durfee – Petersburg, NY
23. Edna (no last name) – Milton, WV
24. Michael Engber – New York, NY
25. Ed Enstrom – Pearl River, NY
26. Matthew Field – Nassau, NY
27. Herb Fish – Napa, CA
28. Carolyn Fox – Midland, MI
29. Stan Francuz – Forster, NSW, Australia
30. Carol Freeman – Winston-Salem, NC
31. Dwight Freund – Sacramento, CA
32. Joyce Friedman – Cambridge, MA
33. Fred Geldon – Rockville, MD
34. Michael N. Geselowitz – Cedarhurst, NY
35. Max Goodman – Chicago, IL
36. Yohma Gray – Evanston, IL
37. Tony Greanias – Saginaw, MI
38. Kris Green – Toronto, Ontario, Canada
39. Douglas Hamilton – Carmel Valley, CA
40. Dave Hanson – Minneapolis, MN
41. Vicki Homer – Philadelphia, TN
42. Valerie Horst – New York, NY
43. Carol Houton – Springfield, PA
44. Doug Hoylman – Chevy Chase, MD
45. Gerald Hurtubise – Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
46. Charles Jacobsen – Walnut Creek, CA
47. William I. Johnston – Watertown, MA
48. Rebecca Jordan – Arlington, MA
49. Dorothy Juhlin – Hillsborough, NC
50. Al Kahn – Houston, TX

51. Rick Kasten – Alexandria, VA
52. Eliot Kieval – New York, NY
53. Michael Kleber – Newton, MA
54. Stan Kurzban – Chappaqua, NY
55. Kathy Lacey – Baltimore, MD
56. William Lane – East Falmouth, MA
57. Richard Lang – Stamford, CT
58. Robert Leavitt – Fredericton, NB, Canada
59. Ruth L. Leder – Fenton, MI
60. Mike Lessie – Douglassville, PA
61. Gary Levin – Bedminster, NJ
62. Elaine Mach – Haddam, CT
63. Mark Manasse – San Francisco, CA
64. Tom Marks – Houston, TX
65. Carol Marsh – Greensboro, NC
66. Caryl McColly – Santa Cruz, CA
67. Roy McLeese – Washington, DC
68. Jim McNally – Shortsville, NY
69. John McNeill – Austin, TX
70. Ed Mehling – Phoenix, AZ
71. Daniel Miller – Worcester, MA
72. Patricia Miller – Chicago, IL
73. Daniel J. Milton – Vienna, VA
74. Kiki Neely – Waban, MA
75. Stephen Ness – San Francisco, CA
76. Paul Noack – West Bloomfield, MI
77. Emvee Nolin – Lexington, KY
78. Mary Lyndal Nyberg – Manhattan, KS
79. Priscilla Olson – Framingham, MA
80. Thomas O'Neill – Staunton, VA
81. Mary Ann Parmelee – Highlands, NJ
82. Jim Perkins – Brookline, MA
83. Patrick D. Phillips – Bainbridge Island, WA
84. Roger Phillips – London, UK
85. Dick Plotz – Providence, RI
86. Arnold Reich – Bronxville, NY
87. Jim Robins – Richmond, VA
88. Joe Rogers – Old Greenwich, CT
89. Carolyn Roosevelt – Cambridge, MA
90. Phyllis Rosen – Mount Vernon, NY
91. Renate G. Rosenblatt – Philadelphia, PA
92. Al Sanders – Fort Collins, CO
93. Arthur Schless – Unionville, PA
94. Joe Schrader – Melba, ACT, Australia
95. Donald W. Scott – Heeney, CO
96. Wayne H. Scott – Jamaica Plain, MA
97. Andrew Silikowitz – West Orange, NJ
98. Ernest F. Silversmith – Baltimore, MD
99. Caleb Smarr – Atlanta, GA
100. Carolyn G. Smith – Massena, NY
101. Robert M. Smith – Massena, NY

102. Andy Spooner – Memphis, TN
103. Anita L. Stejskal – Raleigh, NC
104. Edward Stejskal – Raleigh, NC
105. Joan B. Strassman – Belmont, MA
106. Becky Swann – Dallas/Fort Worth, TX
107. Steve Tice – Great Falls, VA
108. Claire Trazenfeld – Crownsville, MD
109. S. Venkatraghavan – Mumbai, India
110. Elaine Waddington – Montreal, Canada
111. Thomas Wilson – South Williamsport, PA
112. Ann Woodyard – Westminster, CO
113. Elaine Woontner – Marion, IN
114. Jane Wright – Vancouver, BC, Canada
115. Carol Young – Huntsville, AR