

Creatures Caught on Film?

An Exploration of the Photographic Evidence for a Number of Organisms, the Origin of which Defies Biological Classification

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The world of cryptozoology or parazoology is beset with as many problems and controversies as that of its related family of psychical research and parapsychology. The believers claim the existence of animals that were previously believed to be extinct, or to have never been accepted by mainstream science, whereas the sceptics maintain that a variety of human failings have accounted for the claims of the believers. Even when evidential photographs have provided anomalistic images, these have been condemned as misguided at best and fraudulent at worst.

It is impossible in an article of this length to explore in depth the vast range of photographs and their provenance that is available, but an attempt to whet the appetite for such marvels can at least be suggested here. The variety of creatures might include hairy hominids, furry predators, flying anomalies, water-based beasts and other anomalies.[1]

Hairy Hominids

Is a desire to find further missing links between humans and ape-like animals the reason for the many examples of such creatures continuing to attract interest in the general public, or is it films like *King Kong* that have maintained our interest? There have been sightings of bi-pedal creatures from many remote regions around the world notably including Russia and the Himalayas, the latter noted for its claims concerning the 'Abominable Snowman' or 'Yeti'. In the USA, the 'Bigfoot' was allegedly filmed at Bluff Creek, California, in 1967; and the 'Sasquatch' has made appearances in Texas, with a relation known as the 'Skunk Ape' turning up in Florida.[2] The so-called 'De Loys' Ape' caused considerable controversy in the 1920s when a photograph was put on display by the Swiss geologist Francois de Loys, who claimed he had discovered an unknown species, and the showman Frank Hansen also

claimed missing-link fame for his 'Minnesota Iceman' exhibited in 1967.[3]

Furry Survivors

There are many sightings each year of cats and dogs that are either abnormally large or behave in ways that defy normal explanations despite claims that discarded pets or escaped zoo or circus animals are the causes of such appearances. Folklore has also related tales of devilish black dogs, although these tend to come from bygone ages. One strange investigation was made by the psychical investigator Harry Price into the case of 'Gef' the talking mongoose in 1935.[4] The so-called 'Surrey Puma' made headlines in the 1960s and there have been strange photographs of cats and dogs in abundance.[5] The Woolly Mammoth may have survived as a dwarf variety into more modern times despite its generally prehistoric classification, but the *Solenodon* certainly resurfaced in 2003 when a living specimen was discovered in Cuba – it previously having been classed as extinct.

Flying Anomalies

The Bords devote a significant chapter in their book *Alien Animals* to giant birds and birdmen, as well as a section devoted to the various 'mothman' sightings. There are amazing feats undertaken by eagle-like birds and the appearances of pseudo-dragons, the latter of which would deserve a whole book to themselves. Another bizarre creature, known as the 'Jersey Devil', was encountered in 1909: '[it was] about three feet and a half high, with a head like a collie dog and a face like a horse. It had a long neck, wings about two feet long, and its back legs were like those of a crane, and it had horses' hooves...'[6] There have also been photographs taken of pterosaurs – notably the so-called 'Civil War' Pterodactyl from the late nineteenth

century, which was almost certainly a promotional stunt.

Water-Based Beasts

With the large amount of water that covers our planet via its oceans, seas, rivers and lakes, it is not surprising that a large number of creatures have been encountered there with varying degrees of veracity as to their actual existence. Cryptozoologists, zoologists and other scientists still argue about the classification and evidence for many of the sea's beasts. The crew of a Japanese fishing boat the *Zuiyo Maru* discovered what some scientists believed to be the carcass of a dead plesiosaur in 1977, which was hotly disputed, and another alleged plesiosaur was examined in 1925 by scientists from the California Academy of Sciences. The 'Loch Ness Monster' and its lesser-known cousins the 'Morgawr' from Cornwall, the 'Champ' from the USA and the 'Manipogo' and 'Ogopogo' from the USA and Canada, respectively, have all been claimed to have originated from the plesiosaur. Sometimes, however, sea 'monsters' are found to be readily identifiable creatures that have either been elusive or have grown to an unusual size. The 'Kraken' of sea-faring mythology might well be identified as the giant squid, which can grow to a length of 90 feet, including tentacles. The oarfish (*Regalecus glesne*) lives at depths approaching 3,000 feet, but can surface at times and has been measured at 50 feet in length. The giant sturgeon (*Acipenseridae*) also rarely surfaces, but can grow to a length of 18 feet and could easily be misidentified as a mythological sea-dragon. However, the coelacanth, a Devonian-period fish believed extinct for millions of years, was discovered in 1938 near Cape Town, South Africa, and since 1952 living examples have been discovered in the Indian Ocean.[7]

Other Anomalous Creatures

Sensational press reports of monsters usually lurking in the night might well be taken with a large degree of scepticism; however, the 'Chupacabra', or 'goat-sucker', from Puerto Rico has merited many reports of livestock being attacked by it in particularly gruesome ways. The cryptozoologist Loren Coleman discovered images of what became known as the 'Montauk Monster' in 2008/9. It was variously claimed to be an alien creature, a decomposed racoon, an animal experimentation, or a hoax. Conclusive evidence was not forthcoming.

Claims for the existence of dinosaurs into the period beyond the Cretaceous, when most of them became extinct, have included the 'Kasai Rex' – a tyrannosaurus that attacked a rhinoceros in the African Congo in 1932 – and the 'Mokele-mbembe' – a creature bearing similarities to a brontosaurus from the same region – and the 'Emelantouka' from Central Africa that resembled the beaked ceratopsians (styracosaurus, triceratops etc.).

Finally, one might enter the realm of the mythological and folklore wherein there dwell many more creatures of interest. It is beyond the remit of this article to include such marvellous beasts as the unicorn, the hydra and the chimaera; and one must also omit (with regret) mermaids/men, werewolves and the Lambton Worm. However, some of these might have existed in less enlightened times which modern investigation can now identify as known species. For instance, fossil bones of prehistoric mammoths and giant bears may have inspired some dragon legends, and the authentic 12-foot-long Komodo dragon was only discovered in 1912.

This brief introduction to the vast subject of cryptozoology has been presented with many omissions and too few examples. One is left with decisions to make as to the provenance of the various creatures encountered and their photographic evidence. As with any photograph, the camera can certainly lie and modern technology has made that considerably easier, but for the sake of argument, if one discounts deliberate fraud on the part of the photographer, what does the image and the witness to the organism tell one about it? One may have encountered a new species that was hitherto undiscovered, or that was previously believed to be extinct. One may have come upon an abnormality in terms of the size of the



A savane "88" trace (longueur 31 cm),
à droite calle de ma samelle (pointure 41).
Roiwaling (Himalaya du Népal) sur
le glacier de Tholembau à 5300 mètres
d'altitude en haut de la moraine
frontale; ce lieu est situé à 45
kilomètres au sud-ouest de
l'Everest. Mars 1976.

René de Milleville

animal, its behaviour or its location. There is also the possibility of hallucination brought about by fear, conditioning, alcohol/drugs, or group coercion – less tangible if photographic evidence is forthcoming.

To finish on a personal note, which I believe is relevant, I live surrounded by woods and farmland on a single-track road with no other properties nearby. My property can only be seen through trees, hedges and other foliage, but standing in my garden are two life-like models of triceratopses – one full size and the other half size. The reactions from passer-by include seeing nothing; disbelief that they actually saw the dinosaurs; belief that they are real (yes, really!); shock followed by

amusement and occasionally, if it is night time and they have not seen them before, fear. Perhaps these same emotions can be understood in people who witness other parazoological phenomena. Taking a photograph precludes some of the queries, but not all of them. ♡

NOTES

- [1] For further examples and more details see Melvyn Willin, *Monsters Caught on Film* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 2010).
- [2] Willin, *Monsters*.
- [3] Loren Coleman & Jerome Clark, *Cryptozoology A-Z* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999).
- [4] Harry Price and Richard Lambert, *The Haunting of Cashen's Gap: A Modern 'Miracle' Investigated* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1936).
- [5] For many examples, see Janet & Colin Bord, *Alien Animals* (London: BCA, 1981).
- [6] Bord, *Alien Animals*, p. 118.
- [7] For more details see Willin, *Monsters*.