

**CRYPTOZOOLOGY: THE SEARCH FOR MYTHICAL
CREATURES**

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From millennia past to our present day, strange and unusual creatures have been depicted in art, on walls of caves, pyramids, temples, in sacred writings, mythology, and literature of our own day. Our ancient ancestors recorded their experience of the mysterious worlds in which they lived. They expressed themselves in ways that stir our imaginations even today as we explore the extreme depths of oceans and look to the stars that unveil themselves within reach of our eyes and beyond our imaginations.

The history of scientific inquiry follows a long labyrinthine path through time, beginning when strange and unusual creatures were a normative part of mythological and religious thought. Primitive scientific discovery was not concerned with these beings. Instead, they were worshiped, feared and adored. Systematic scientific inquiry has a beginning with the Egyptian medical text book, the Edwin Smith papyrus. To treatment of disease, it applies examination, diagnosis, and prognosis, paralleling the basic empirical method of science. As we traverse through the centuries, we pass by Aristotle, who started documenting deductive reasoning in the 4th century BC, and then on to the Middle Ages, when the inductive experimental method emerged to prominence with the work of Islamic scientists, who developed advanced instruments that significantly increased their powers of observation. As scientific inquiry continued to evolve across Europe, mythological and unusual creatures would begin to fade from their culture of self-understanding.

Among Islamic scientists, Ahmad Al-Biruni is recognized as the most exact experimental scientist of the 11th century. He would make a radical statement in his study of India with the declaration that, “to execute our project, it has not been possible to follow a geometric method”.¹

His study of India expanded his method of scientific inquiry making him a pioneer in comparative sociology by insisting on field experience and information thus opening the door to enter the vestibule of further inquiry that would eventually introduce folklore and the unusual into the equation.

As we continue through the centuries we meet up with Francis Bacon who said, "If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties".² Inductive reasoning is given the ultimate role in his utopian novel, *The New Atlantis*, in which he says, "Lastly, we have three that raise the former discoveries by experiments into greater observations, axioms, and aphorisms. These we call interpreters of nature".³ From here we journey past Descartes, Galileo, and Newton to land at the feet of two such interpreters, Georges Cuvier and Charles Darwin.

Cuvier, recognized as the "Father of Paleontology", proclaimed in 1813 that there is little to no hope that any large animals remain unknown. This is often referred to as his "radical dictum". Since his declaration, the largest species of bear, mountain gorilla, and white rhinoceros have been discovered along with a plentitude of previously unknown animals including among them the pygmy elephant, pygmy hippopotamus, pygmy chimpanzee, and the Celebesean ape, or black ape, to name just a few.

Cuvier stood in opposition to the newly emerging evolutionist theories and refused to admit anything that would contradict the letter of Scripture. In response, he invented the theory of the Revolutions of the Globe. The theory supposed periodical disasters followed by a new creation.

One of his pupils concluded that twenty-seven successive creations were needed to accommodate Cuvier's theory when taking all known fossils into consideration.

Darwin would publish "On the Origins of the Species" nearly a half century later in 1859. His theory was a stark contrast to Cuvier's. "While many members of the scientific community accepted Darwin's theory in his lifetime, it was not until the 1930's – 1950's that a broad consensus developed that accepted natural selection as the fundamental mechanism of evolution."⁴ During the throes of the rumbling debate, epitomized in the famous Scopes trial, a young Bernard Heuvelmans was growing into adulthood. He would claim he had developed an interest in zoological oddities at an early age, saying he was inspired by Jules Vern and Arthur Conan Doyle's book *The Lost World* (1912). Heuvelmans was awarded his doctorate in zoology from the University Libre of Brussels in 1939. His dissertation was concerned with the previously unclassified teeth of the aardvark, *Orycteropus afer*, a unique African mammal.

The word Cryptozoology would make its debut in print to a wide audience in 1959 when Lucien Blancou, Inspector of the French Overseas Territories, dedicated his new book *The Cynergetic Geography of the World* (Géographie cynégétique du monde) to Bernard Heuvelmans, naming him "master of cryptozoology". By this time Darwin's theory had gained its place of permanence in the life sciences and Heuvelmans had published his sensational hit, "On the Track of Unknown Animals", first in French in 1955, an English translation in 1958, and an abridged English edition in 1962. Heuvelmans never publicly associated the term cryptozoology with his work until after it appeared in Blancou's dedication in 1959. He would later name

cryptozoology as his life-long passion. Having gained wide recognition as the “father of cryptozoology”, he naturally and ably became the standard bearer of the discipline.

As with Darwin, Heuvelmans’ book represented a radical departure from Cuvier’s theory, pioneering an additional perspective in the life sciences and cryptozoology took its place as a unique perspective in the ongoing discussion of origins. The underlying theme in Heuvelmans’ book is that folklore and legends concerning unusual and sometimes implausible creatures often contain a substratum of truth that can lead to the discovery of creatures previously unknown to science. This calls to mind shades of Al-Biruni’s 11th century work that introduced the application of field experience and information in his study of India, thus integrating consideration of cultural and environmental observations.

There is an interesting twist to Heuvelmans’ story. Upon his death in August 2001, Cryptozoologist, Loren Coleman, was invited to write Heuvelmans’ obituary wherein he credited his friend with inventing the term cryptozoology. Mark Rollins, an American environmental manager and artist, read the obituary and later emailed Coleman informing him that he remembered from another book by Heuvelmans, titled *In the Wake of the Sea Serpents*, that Heuvelmans credited someone else with being responsible for inventing the term. Coleman was stunned.

Heuvelmans’ *In the Wake of Sea Serpents* was first published in French in 1965 and followed by the American edition in 1968. Speaking of two articles on Sea Serpents written by Ivan T. Sanderson in 1947 and 1948, Heuvelmans added the following sentence to the 1968 American

edition of his book which reads: “When he [Sanderson] was still a student he invented the word ‘cryptozoology’, or the science of hidden animals, which I was to coin later, quite unaware that he had already done so.”⁵ The first French edition of Heuvelmans’ book on Sea Serpents does not contain this paragraph.⁶ Coleman concludes by asking, “So, who invented the term ‘cryptozoology’? Apparently, it was Sanderson first, and then Heuvelmans, much later.”⁷

Cryptozoology is the study of unknown animals as the title of Heuvelmans’ first book suggests. In the swell of the response from critics he later insisted that it is not an arcane or occult zoology saying, “It fuses three Greek words: *krypto*, *zoon*, and *logos*: hidden, animal, and discourse. Thus, cryptozoology is the study of hidden animals”.⁸ Heuvelmans’ definition remains as the foundation of all subsequent definitions, some “more restrictive” than others according to Dr. Karl P.N. Shuker, Editor of the Journal of Cryptozoology.

Shuker’s editorial in the Journal’s inaugural publication emphasizes that the Journal’s purpose is to provide a credible venue for publishing papers with a cryptozoological theme that would not otherwise easily gain acceptance from the wider scientific community. The Journal’s editorial board recognized that those engaged in exploring the hidden animal kingdom find themselves facing ridicule from those in the life sciences. Their remedy to the problem was to adhere to the same high standards for publication as do mainstream zoological periodicals.⁹

The Journal’s editors would define, a cryptid as “a creature that is known to the local people sharing its domain (ethnoknown) but unrecognized by scientists”.¹⁰ A cryptid may be a creature large or small. However, large cryptids were of greater interest to the Journal’s editorial staff.

For example, one such little creature that could have been of interest for the publication is the Kitti's hog-nosed bat (*Craseonycteris thonglongyai*). It was so remarkably different from any other bat that it required the creation of an entirely new taxonomic family to accommodate it. The Kitti hog-nosed bat is no bigger than a bumblebee.¹¹ Although the Journal's editorial staff prefers article submissions on large cryptids, guarded consideration to articles on small ones such as this tiny bat are acceptable if, first, they had not been scientifically identified and, second, they are known to the local population, ethnoknown.

Other cryptids given careful consideration by the Journal are fabulous mythological beasts. For example: if a paper's subject has a direct relevance to cryptids such as "reviewing the similarity between a given lake monster from folklore and cryptids reported in that same lake in modern times".¹²

Since cryptozoology is not formally recognized as a discipline in academia, it is not credentialed. How then does one become a cryptozoologist? Heuvelmans friend, Loren Coleman, advises inquirers to pick the subject they are most passionate about (primates, felids, giant squids, fossil men, etc.). He further advises them to match their subject of interest with complementary studies. For example, appropriate coursework such as anthropology, biology, linguistics or any other discipline relevant to the field of interest is apropos. Coleman's undergraduate education included studies in both anthropology and zoology and his graduate studies were in the area of psychology to understand the human factor.¹³

Exploration of new species in the mainstream of scientific discovery is remarkably successful. The International Institute for Species Exploration (IISE) represents one such organized effort. Their work is widely recognized among biologists and zoologists. The Institute unveils a list of the top ten discoveries of approximately 18,000 new species discovered each year including plants, animals, and insects. The list is announced annually on or around May 23rd to honor the birthday of Carl Linnaeus, 18th Century botanist and physician who developed our modern binomial classification system for naming organisms.¹⁴ The IISE's work to identify and classify discoveries does not fall within the realm of cryptozoology mostly because these discoveries are not so fantastic, they are not a frightening regional presence and, they have little to no effect upon the folklore or mythology of the local culture.

It is no surprise that there is a free mobile app that can be used for new species discovery: iNaturalist. Creators of the app, iNaturalist, LLC, claim their program to be "one of the world's most actively used apps". It helps with identifying plants and animals by connecting with a community of over 400,000 scientists and naturalists. By using a mobile phone to photograph and share data, one can help scientists better understand and protect nature. In fact, the application can be used to connect with an interactive community that offers help with the discovery of new species of plants and animals. The app also makes it possible to follow projects made up of smaller communities concerned with a particular geographic location or species.

There is a clear distinction between Cryptozoology and the work of IISE and iNaturalist's. For the purposes of cryptozoological exploration, Heuvelmans would write, "for an animal (or alleged animal) to be of cryptozoological interest, it must have at least one trait. It must be truly

singular, unexpected, paradoxical, striking, emotionally upsetting, and thus capable of mystification”.¹⁵

In 1988 Heuvelmans would publish the following in the now defunct “magazine”,

Cryptozoology (Vol 7):

To gain more credence, (hidden animals) have to be documented as carefully and exhaustively as possible, by search through the most diverse fields of knowledge. Cryptozoological research thus requires not only a thorough grasp of the zoological sciences, including, of course, anthropology, but also a certain training in such extraneous knowledge of mythology, linguistics, archaeology and history. It will consequently be conducted more extensively in libraries, newspaper morgues, regional archives, museums, art galleries, laboratories, and zoological parks...¹⁶

Cryptozoologist Ben Roesch, in a 1999 article titled *A Critical Approach to Cryptozoology*, states, “In many cases, cryptozoologists simply do not use sufficient critical thought in their investigations, putting too much weight on anecdotal evidence and pushing forward scientifically unacceptable theories as an explanation.”¹⁷ Roesch cites the “coelacanth analogy” as an example. The coelacanth is a bottom dwelling fish often referred to as a living fossil and discovered on a fishing boat by Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer, curator and taxidermist at the East London Museum, northeast of Cape Town. Its discovery gave rise to much debate about how this strange fish would fit into the evolution of land animals. Fourteen years later, relocated British fisherman, Captain Eric Hunt, set out to find another coelacanth. On the Comoros island of Anjouan, he was approached by Ahamadi Abdallah who presented him with what the locals call *gombessa*, a fish that occasionally hits the locals’ fishing lines. Bingo, a second coelacanth found! As it turns out, “years later, ichthyologists were shocked to learn that the local islanders had been catching and eating these ‘living fossils’ for generations. Since then, more

than 200 coelacanths from the Comoros islands have been caught and studied. Most natural-history museums now have a mounted specimen on exhibit”.¹⁸

Some say that the Coelacanth survived long without leaving a fossil record. In his article, Ben Roesch states that a more thorough research on this would show that the Coelacanth

survived in an area of poor fossilization (the deep-sea), and has a very fragile, inconspicuous skeleton compared to those of dinosaurs. (and thus wouldn't fossilize as well or be readily noticed). . . . Basically, it is ridiculous to compare the geological record of a fish to that of a dinosaur, because they are such different creatures. Yet many cryptozoologists make this error---among others---time and time again.¹⁹

Roesch concludes by saying, “Critical thought and good research are key in cryptozoology, and until this practice becomes commonplace among cryptozoologists, cryptozoology will remain disrespected by traditional zoology---and rightly so”.²⁰

Cryptozoological studies have endured ongoing criticism from the life and social sciences for more than a half century. However, there are many within those disciplines who are very supportive and open to it. When the International Society of Cryptozoology was active, its board included members from top universities and museums from around the world: the Smithsonian, American Museum of Natural History, Beijing Natural History Museum, Royal Museum of Scotland, Transvaal Museum, University of Paris, Australian National University, University of Calgary, Villanova University, Illinois State University, University of Chicago, and Ohio State University.²¹

“In an anonymous survey of professional biologists, King and Greenwell (1983) noted that more than half of all respondents agreed that scientists *certainly* or *probably* should undertake research of Nessie or Bigfoot.”²² A quieter academic landscape exists today among those who have an

interest in cryptozoology including subscribers with master's and doctoral degrees in biology and other life and social sciences. It can be said there are many closet supporters who remain silent so as not to jeopardize their credibility in their chosen fields.

Examples of some of the more believable work in the discovery of previously unknown creatures is found in Karl Shuker's *Encyclopedia of New and Rediscovered Animals* where he says, "In the year 2000, the annual rate of species discovery globally was estimated at 60 for reptiles, 80 for amphibians and 200 for fishes, with at least two new species of bird having been discovered annually since 1980".²³ In October 2010 the World Wildlife Fund reported new species discoveries from 1999 to 2009 of 39 new species of mammal, 16 birds, 55 reptiles, 216 amphibians, and 257 fishes in the Amazon ecosystem, not taking into account insects and plants as does the IISE.²⁴

The build-up to the August 21 total eclipse captured the attention of our nation and the world. On that historic day, I followed the eclipse for reasons other than watching the moon cover the face of the sun. Warnings were being issued by the South Carolina Emergency Management Division (SCEMD) alerting citizens to be vigilant of paranormal activity associated with the eclipse. Since it was a major event in our solar system, one might have thought it was an alert to keep an eye out for UFO activity. Actually, the warning issued by the emergency division was for citizens to keep an eye out for Lizard Men!

Fox News online reported that the South Carolina Emergency Management Division's warning was completely legitimate since South Carolina has a history of Lizard Man sightings.²⁵

Suspicious of so called "fake news" I checked the agency's Twitter feed. Sure enough, the agency's tweet was made on August 9th.²⁶ The tweet includes a map of where Lizard Man

sightings have been reported in the past with an overlay of the path of the eclipse, advising residents of Lee and Sumter counties to be vigilant and to report any sightings.²⁷ There have been numerous sightings of this cryptid over the years, the first on June 18, 1988 by 17-year-old Mike Davis. Davis did not report the incident until after a report of a car mauling appeared in a local paper the following month. These incidents were followed by several others. The story of this mysterious creature has become part of the folklore of South Carolina. Sadly, there were no reported sightings of Lizard Man at the time of the August eclipse.

We now look to the west coast to take a brief look at reported lake monster, Tahoe Tessie, sighted in California's 1,600-foot deep Lake Tahoe. Tessie has been seen on several occasions including one by two local police out for a day of fishing. Tessie, of course, takes her name from the famed Loch Ness Monster, Nessie. Native American legends have long told of monsters in the lake. Organized searches for the leviathan are inconclusive.

According to ever-evolving folklore, the closest anyone came to figuring out Tahoe's mysteries was in the mid-70's. Local legend has it that famed oceanographer Jacques Cousteau brought a mini-submarine to the lake, making several dives to search the lake's bottom. Upon finishing his exploration of Lake Tahoe, he allegedly said, "The world is not ready for what is down there". Local legend also has it that to his death Cousteau refused to release pictures and data from his exploration. This legend is countered by those who say that it was not Jacques Cousteau who explored the lake but his grandson who visited the lake in 2002.

A discovery a bit easier for our imaginations to embrace than Lizard Man or Tessie is that of the Beast of 'Busco, a giant turtle spotted by Oscar Fulk in 1898 in a lake on his Churubusco

(Indiana) farm. He eventually dropped his fantastic story after telling a few of his friends. I suspect he dropped it because the story he recounted may have sounded a bit far-fetched to them. However, the story picks up again fifty years later when a large turtle was sighted in 1948 by Ora Blue and Charlie Wilson when fishing in the same lake. Blue and Wilson reported that the turtle had a shell the size of a dining room table and a head the size of a child's.

In early 1949 a Fort Wayne UPI reporter picked up on the tale and investigated the sighting. He would send it out on the wire and in so doing the reporter brought Churubusco's turtle to national fame. Curiosity seekers and news agencies descended on the town.

A number of reputable townsfolk swore they'd spied the behemoth in Gale Harris's small lake on Madden Road, serving to escalate the investigation—and the media flurry. In March 1949, a future town councilman surveyed the lake from a plane. Reporters from the Indianapolis Star and the Fort Wayne gazette—along with a representative from the Cincinnati Zoo—confirmed having seen the creature, alternately dubbed “Oscar” after the property's original owner.²⁸

State Troopers were called in to help with traffic control following the report's appearance in publications around the country. Curiosity seekers streamed through the Churubusco farmstead at 400 cars each hour. Life Magazine reporter Mike Shea took 299 photos that were later deemed unusable. All attempts to capture the turtle failed. Fulk's Lake was subsequently drained, and the farm sold. A local resident reported to me that, “the lake was not completely drained because of an equipment failure.” There is no hard evidence of the Beast's existence but, in the spirit of the story, the turtle will live on in the folklore and imaginations of the people of Churubusco. The town of Churubusco began celebrating Turtle Days in 1949, and at that time adopted the nickname *Turtle Town U.S.A.*²⁹ Turtle days have been celebrated ever since.

What about other cryptid sightings in our parts? In addition to the Beast of Busco, lake and river monsters have been reported, mystery kangaroos, one kangaroo report coming from Rick Rainbow, News Director of WWKI Kokomo, and others from Carmel and Sheridan. In Boone County in 1949 Charles Jones and George Coffman were chased by a brown gorilla while fishing from the banks of Sugar Creek. These brown gorillas sighted around the country would later be named Bigfoot.

A pair of large cats were tracked for several weeks beginning on August 5, 1948 beginning at Elkhorn Falls. Their path led to Richmond on August 7th, where two teenage boys, Arthur and Howard Turner, spotted them, the maned cat glancing over its shoulder at them before he and his partner disappeared. The cats headed northwest to Abington, Indiana, then turning to the east and north into Ohio. One cat was described as a maned lion, the other as a black panther, male and female respectively. The two seemed to follow the path of the Whitewater River, eventually returning them to the Ohio River. Loren Coleman offers more detail on this pair and on other very similar sightings from Maine to California. Of mystery cats he says, “If you dig, you will find. But most people looking for sea serpent and hairy wildman accounts in old papers have overlooked the mystery cat reports as merely more mundane mountain lion accounts”.³⁰

Coleman notes that among prehistoric cats there lurks one in the background larger by a third, the *Panthera atrox*. He adds fossils of this cat have been found in forty sites, from Alaska to Peru, from California to northern Florida, and lived more than 10,000 years ago. He suggests that they may live today in isolated pockets saying, “an unbroken range of lions fringed the top of the world during the Pleistocene, with a distinct subspecies in each hemisphere that persist.

“The Pleistocene Epoch is typically defined as the time period that began about 2.6 million years ago and lasted until about 11,700 years ago. The most recent Ice Age occurred then, as glaciers covered huge parts of the planet Earth.”³¹

“Pleistocene mammalia investigators such as W. Boyd Dawkins and W. A. Sanford see no difference between the (prehistoric) cave lion and the modern lion.”³² Prehistoric cave drawings of these large Ice Age cats are found in two types, one with a mane and one with a tufted tail and, there are clear differences between the males and females. The male’s maned head is turned toward the viewer with a stare. The color of the one without a mane is unclear. Coleman asks, “Could this scene be a prehistoric reflection of what the Turner boys saw in Indiana in 1948?”³³ He adds, “Only lions are social. Only lions show wide physical differences between sexes”.³⁴ Coleman states that, “the American lion has been reported ... as black panther, maned cat, or African lioness”.³⁵ Do you know that, Decatur means “dweller at the sign of the cat”? Strangely enough, the only report from Decatur, Indiana is of frogs falling from the sky, not cats. However, these large cats have been sighted in Decatur, Illinois.

Of course, this would be no fun without at least making mention of the 78 Indiana Bigfoot reports since 1998.³⁶ Neighboring states Ohio, Michigan and Illinois come in with much higher numbers: Ohio at 271, Michigan, 212, and Illinois with 284 reported within the same timeframe. The highest number of recorded accounts come from Washington, State not D.C., with a whopping 635 Bigfoot reports since 1998. The combined forests of the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia make up approximately 70,000 square miles. Bigfooters, as they are called, enjoy a great privilege when they are granted permission by Native American tribes to search

their vast forests for these mystical creatures. Bigfoot reports generally include wood knocks, howls, whistles, and whoops in addition to actual sightings.

Hominid reports are plentiful and issue from around the country and throughout the world.

Native American myth is replete with tales of such creatures with depictions of them found in cave wall paintings on their lands dating back as far as 1,000 years. Sadly today, some reports are hoaxes and others have little credibility but there are many that have issued from very credible sources, including university professors, anthropologists, law enforcement officers, park rangers, and museum curators along with reports from other public servants and respected citizens.

I once heard that if you were to spend an hour in New York City's Times Square you would see someone you know. Years ago, our son Christopher and I travelled from Nebraska to upstate New York to visit family and friends. We made a day-trip to the city and visited several sights ending up in Times Square. When shopping in a cramped souvenir shop we ran into an old high school friend I hadn't seen in over thirty years. No, we didn't spot a cryptid in the Big Apple. We had an experience that I didn't believe possible.

An artist called John Newling went to insurers Lloyd's of London in 2006 and asked them to underwrite him against 'loss of mystery' — in other words, to offer to pay out if all mystery was lost from his life. He felt life had become too controlled, constantly surveyed and audited, with every meeting minuted and every risk assessed. 'Mystery,' he says, 'is a predisposition to search, enjoy, play and wonder. That becomes lost when we're controlling it all.'³⁷

Albert Einstein said, "Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions".³⁸

Einstein would change the world with his imagination as he applied it to his thought experiments.

Cryptozoology; if it contributes anything at all to our understanding of the world it enlivens our imaginations. As it explores the mysteries that thrive within cultures around the globe, wonder and inspiration spring forth when those mysteries take on flesh; discoveries that give life to the human imagination. With Halloween just a few days away, keep an inquiring eye open. It just might be possible that you will end up passing a treat to a mythical creature out of costume.

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⁷ Ibid.

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¹¹ Ibid., p.4

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