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Denver UFO Society awaits saucers' return

DENVER (AP) — UFO sightings in the United States reached an all-time high 12 years ago, when more than a thousand were reported and the topic was a favorite subject of debate.

Today, even the most sensational tabloids are ignoring stories about flying saucers.

Reports of odd-shaped, fast-moving, flashing objects in the sky are down 50 to 75 percent since the last rash of sightings in 1973, said Mark Rodeghier, a researcher at the Center for UFO Studies in Illinois.

Amateur groups interested in UFOs also have dwindled. The Air Force closed its formal investigation of unidentified flying objects in 1969.

This has not deterred a small but faithful group of UFO believers. About 30 members of the 27-year-old Denver UFO Society still meet once a month at the Glendale Fire Station.

Lorita Green, president of the society, joined the group in 1963 after she saw her first UFO that summer while working in her garden in Commerce City.

"Everybody saw UFOs that summer. I tell you they was thick," she said in the kitchen of her Adams County home, where a sticker on her refrigerator reads: "Flying saucers are real. The Air Force don't exist."

Mrs. Green and her husband, Juan, are so convinced that UFOs are real that they moved to a rural area at the suggestion of "contactees" — people who have met with UFO occupants.

They both believe more UFOs will soon start to appear.

"Of course," she said with a laugh, "I've thought that for 10 or 15 years."

Some UFO researchers suggest the sightings have declined because the spacecraft are exploring Soviet-bloc countries. Others say the visits are cyclical and will resume. Some also maintain that the aliens are too smart to let humans see them.

In the past, those who saw UFOs were thought to have mental problems. But the increased number of sightings has helped make UFOs more acceptable. Believers include people like the Greens, as well as authors, professors and scientists.

J. Allen Hynek, an astronomer who once was the chief UFO debunker for the Air Force and is now considered the top authority in the field, estimates there have been 80,000 reports.

Most are "just nonsense," but 1,000 sightings from 140 countries merit investigation, he said.

Hynek, 73, helped found the Center for UFO Studies in Illinois and has opened a branch office in Phoenix, Ariz. Practically no research money is available so he operates with donations.

He's never seen a UFO, but he hopes that someday, there will be a "mini-NASA" devoted to research.

David M. Jacobs, a history professor at Temple University, wrote a book called "The UFO Controversy in America."

He said, "This has been going on for so long and there have been so many reliable people who have claimed this, it's just plain crazy to say everybody is wrong."

But others disagree, like Philip J. Klass, senior electronics editor for Aviation Week & Space Technology magazine and the country's best-known UFO debunker.

He said UFO reports have declined because they have become so outlandish, with frequent stories about abductions by aliens. The more believable stories are no longer considered interesting.

Klass said all UFOs have earthly explanations and the myth has survived for so long because it has a timeless appeal.

"This is a great hope," he said. "It's the universal dream that we are not alone."