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NewsMaker

Q & A

EDITOR'S NOTE: Whether it's an unidentified flying object, ice falling from the sky, cougars or Big Foot, the Pennsylvania Association for the Study of the Unexplained is interested in reports of the strange, the bizarre and the seldom seen. *Tribune-Review* staff writer Dave Lester spoke with PASU director Stan Gordon of Greensburg, who has been investigating strange phenomena for the past 28 years. An internationally recognized authority on the subject of UFOs and Bigfoot, Gordon gained prominence from his first-hand investigation into the 1973 Big Foot/UFO wave in Pennsylvania.

Q: What type of people belong to PASU?

A: PASU is an all-volunteer, non-profit, scientific research group that has been set up as the statewide clearinghouse for reports of alleged sightings of UFOs and other phenomena. Most of the people who belong to PASU are professionals. We have a lot of research specialists including scientists, technicians, medical doctors and many types of engineers who donate their own time and equipment to look into these reports.



Stan Gordon

Q: Do most of your investigations consist of interviewing witnesses to an occurrence or do you spend a lot of time in the field gathering first-hand evidence?

A: Our main purpose — if the case warrants it — is to try to have trained investigators get to the site of an incident while there is fresh, physical evidence. We've reorganized another specialized unit called the Phenomena Response Team. If something big happens, we will try to get the team to the scene to collect evidence. We also work with researchers throughout the world, including the Mutual UFO Network, the largest international group doing serious study. MUFON is based in Seguin, Texas.

Q: What kinds of reports do you get from the public, police departments and other agencies?

A: We get reports of all kinds of things, from objects falling out of the sky to unusual archeological finds, strange animal sightings and sounds, anything off the beaten track. We basically specialize in UFOs, Big Foot and other strange animal sightings.

Q: How can people report an occurrence?

A: They can call our research center at 412-838-7768. The mailing address is 6 Oakhill Ave., Greensburg, Pa. 15601.

Q: What percentage of your cases are classified as UFOs?

A: When you say UFO a lot of people think right away of visitors from outer space — little green men — and that's definitely the wrong connotation. To the person calling in, it just means that they are observing something in the sky other than conventional aircraft. A lot of the reports of UFOs are naturally explainable objects that under certain conditions look unusual to the observer such as lights on planes, bright meteors, weather balloons and reflections of light off clouds. Some of the ones we've had around here have turned out to be NASA high-altitude research projects.

Q: But you have noticed an increase in reports of UFOs?

A: Around the country in the last 10 years there actually has been quite a decrease in reports compared to 1973, when we had the last major wave of reported sightings. However, we have never seen a real decrease here, probably because we have been very active in research and have established a very good grapevine. What I've tried to do is educate the law enforcement agencies, the news media and the public to the fact that we take these sightings seriously.

Q: Have any theories been propounded to explain some of these sightings?

A: Approximately 90 percent of the reports are naturally explainable. For a high percentage of reports there is a logical explanation.

Q: Are most of the reports UFO sightings or do you get other weird things?

A: We deal a lot with unusual animal sightings. People claim they see Big Foot and black panthers. But the highest percentage of reports refers to UFO sightings. Last year, for example, there was more than one case of ice falling from the sky. The incident in Hempfield Township, Westmoreland County, was on a clear, beautiful afternoon. There was no definite indication that it fell from an aircraft. Theoretically, it could have been pieces of an ice comet. A laboratory test indicated that it had zinc, iron and aluminum content much higher in concentration than what would normally be found in rainwater. We really can't be sure what it came from.

Q: What about reported sightings of mountain lions, which are supposedly extinct in Pennsylvania?

A: There have been reports of yearly sightings in Pennsylvania even though they have been classified as extinct in the eastern part of the United States since the late 1800s. There is mounting evidence that the cougar does survive in Pennsylvania and bordering states. The plaster cast we made in 1984 from Armstrong County is the first strong evidence. It drew nationwide attention. People saw it close; they heard animal sounds. We had reports of cubs and adults being seen in that area. There's no reason they couldn't be around.