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John's hot on trail of the UFO...



John Hurley with his record of sightings. Over the past four months he has registered 124.

Whitley is showing the way in USA

More than half the adult population of the United States — and 39 per cent of Britons — believe in beings from outer space.

The startling statistic, revealed in a recent Gallup survey and indicating that flying saucers are far more likely to be the average American's cup of tea than in the case in Britain, is largely due to Whitley Strieber.

He is the 42-year-old Texan lawyer who claims to have met extra-terrestrial visitors who looked like very large grasshoppers.

The *Evening Mail* interviewed him in May last year and evoked tremendous interest among readers.

At the time, *Communion*, the book in which he tells his story, was newly published in Britain and was selling at a staggering 100,000 copies a week in hardback in the United States. This week, it has been published in Britain in paperback.

Strieber says he was frightened by his experience, which happened in an isolated cabin in upstate New York, and that he wrote the book for all the other people who have been just as frightened.

There's something in the air — but what?

The latest reports of an unidentified flying object over the West Midlands — with flashing lights and bigger than any aircraft, spotted independently this week by two pairs of patrolling police officers in Willenhall and Walsall — come at a time when sightings are showing a dramatic increase.

Cigar-shaped

Mr John Hurley, 48-year-old chairman of the West Midlands-based UFO Studies Investigations, said: "Since October last year, I have received 124 reports.

In the same period from October 1985, there were 21; and there were 18 from October 1984 to February 1986."

Objects reported generally range from 3ft in diameter to the size of a small caravan. But three weeks ago, on January 28, he received calls about something described as being the size of a football pitch, hovering with lights all around it.

RAF Shawbury, in Shropshire, told him that there was an image on its radar screens for four seconds but would not give any other details.

Three weeks before that, a sister, two staff nurses and a doctor at Good Hope Hospital, Sutton Coldfield, saw a cigar-shaped object 400ft by 50ft, hovering with lights all round it. Birmingham Airport said there been a brief showing on radar — but again, there were no further details.

Reports

John Hurley, a computer analyst who lives in Kingalton Road, Kingstanding, Birmingham, said: "I have interviewed all of them and they are all genuine people. But I cannot understand why, even though admittedly it was at 2.15 am, we did not have any other calls at all."

It was last October that sightings hit a peak. He received 51 in the course of two days, charting the course of a huge orange object with a green band around it as first sighted by a



UFO alert by police

A recent sighting — from Wednesday's Mail

woman in Bromsgrove and the drivers of two other cars as it remained stationary and silent at 2,500 feet, for four minutes before shooting off towards Birmingham.

Soon afterwards, there were reports from Birmingham, Streetly, Four Oaks and Aldridge, where it was seen hovering for a minute. Then a retired police officer watched it for 90 seconds in Staffordshire. Other reports came an hour later of its being seen over Huddersfield, Leeds and the Lake District.

John Hurley said: "All the descriptions were the same and it cannot be explained as being an aircraft. I would not stick my neck out and say it was a flying

saucer, but I haven't a clue what it may have been. There is certainly something very strange going on."

Strange, he thinks, in more ways than one.

Last November, he applied to the Ministry of Defence at Cheltenham under the 30-year time limit of the Freedom of Information Act to see documents relating to sightings up to 1957 and was told they had been inadvertently destroyed with files on the second World War.

He has a theory that despite the Freedom of Information Act, members of the public will continue to be free to know only what the Government wants them to know.

Arcing

UFOs have fascinated him since he began collecting information 18 years ago, and although he tries to keep an open mind on the subject, he admits there are things that he cannot reasonably account for.

But he points out that nine out of ten UFO sightings can be explained without involving objects from outer space.

It is probably because John Hurley knows this that he is able to say so confidently that he has never seen a thing.

The nearest he came to it was in 1961 and 1962, when he saw a meteorite light up the sky. He knew what it was — but there were reports next day of UFO sightings.

At the moment, he is working on a report from Acocks Green, Birmingham, about a light in the sky, arcing from the North to the East.

He suspects it may have been a man-made satellite.

John always likes to hear the false alarms — because it is possible that they could have been something important.

Flash

Unfortunately, many people hesitate to make their sightings known — and he understands why.

"I am sure that everyone at some time has seen something flash across the sky and wondered what it was. But they think, 'if I report this, people will think I'm barmy...'"

John Hurley promises he will think nothing of the sort. His telephone number is 021 260 4390.

JOHN SLIM