

15. LONDON -- MYSTERIOUS CIRCLES DOT SOUTH ENGLAND WHEAT FIELDS :::

Mysterious saucer-shaped areas of flattened wheat are dotting southern English fields, reviving an annual wave of speculation that "extra-terrestrial intelligence" is at work.

Aerial pictures in the British press show golden fields indented with neat rings like cut-out pastry.

Newspapers and television have suggested tongue-in-cheek that the circles could have been landing pads for flying saucers.

Amateur scientists Colin Andrews and Pat Delgado have investigated the phenomenon for eight years and recently completed a book documenting dozens of cases in which wheat stalks were flattened in circles up to 150 feet (50 metres) across.

They say the circles often appear near scenes of unexplained happenings such as single-vehicle road accidents.

Some were discovered in a field where a pilot's body was found after he ejected from a military jet which flew on for 90 miles before crashing into the sea.

"There must be some force field manipulated by some unexplained intelligence", Delgado, a retired radar expert, told reporters.

An agriculture ministry spokesman said the circles could be caused by swirling winds or dry soil above ancient earthworks.

The mystery deepened after Andrews and Delgado reported finding a white jelly in one circle. Those who handled it were hit by colds, they said. The substance remains unidentified.

Both men dismiss sceptics who say the circles are the work of pranksters. They reported in the book that they had tried to reproduce the phenomenon but found it impossible to exert enough force to flatten huge areas of wheat into an exact pattern.

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