

KAB

Crop circles have been perplexing scientists for years.
Norman Inness meets a man who's in search of a cause

Unearthing a mystery

WHATEVER happened to Pat Delgado as he stood in the centre of a crop circle near Avebury won't be explained by putting it down to hedgehogs.

Wearing a radio microphone, Delgado was being filmed by a crew from Pebble Mill, talking to camera about the phenomenon of the flattened, swirled circles that mysteriously appear in fields in the south of England.

The recording was proceeding smoothly until Delgado approached the centre of the circle. Suddenly the sound recordist found things had gone haywire.

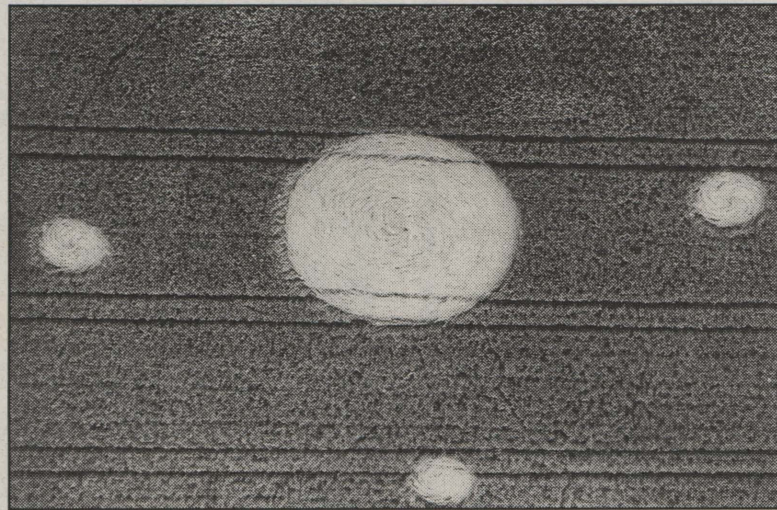
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Producer David Morgenstern described the sound being produced as 'birdie noises'. 'The sound man reported it was like sparrows chattering followed by bursts of static.'

There was nothing wrong with the mike - as Delgado moved away from the centre of the circle his words were heard clearly. And to establish on film what was happening, Delgado moved in and out of the centre, predicting when and where the sound would be distorted.

Delgado believes there can be a column of energy in the centre of crop circles that can be felt through dowsing. Both he and fellow researcher Colin Andrews have felt it in their eight-year investigation into the phenomenon.

The results of their research were published in the book *Circular Evidence* earlier this year and its climb to number five in the general bestsellers chart proves that a good



Centres of attraction: a crop of circles in a field in southern England

many people share their intense curiosity about the subject. Their work does not claim to find an explanation - rather, it dismisses some of the risible theories and some of the more plausible.

Both Delgado and Andrews have impeccable scientific credentials. Delgado worked on satellite tracking in Australia and was seconded to NASA for the Mariner mission to Mars, the Lunar Orbiter project and other notable programmes. He possesses the scientist's drive to establish causes and contempt for explanations that don't hold water.

'For a very long time the theory that the circles were caused by freak whirlwinds was held on to. Meteorologists fell about laughing at this . . . whirlwinds draw things

up, they don't produce contra-rotation. People have talked about animal activity, groups of hedgehogs or deer, but that idea is absolutely out,' says Delgado. 'The hoax theory is rubbish too; farmers have been exceptionally helpful to us in trying to re-create circles and it simply can't be done.'

What about the possibility, far-fetched though it may be, that an extra-terrestrial force is involved?

'We can't eliminate this entirely,' he says, 'but whenever you mention UFOs people envisage some kind of nuts-and-bolts spaceship. It might not be that, it might be some light in the sky, or some energy force we don't understand. We have to keep an open mind.'

There is only one certainty about

the phenomenon - an explanation has yet to be found. And that is why Morgenstern finds the subject exciting. 'What makes the circles so intriguing is that other mysteries such as the Abominable Snowman or the Loch Ness monster depend on eyewitness reports for substantiation. In this case the circles are there, and we know something must be causing them. When the discovery is made it is going to be something pretty extraordinary.'

Meanwhile official sources appear - publicly at least - not to care about the mystery. Delgado wrote to the Ministry of Defence about the circles and received a reply that he describes as 'quite pitiful' in its attempt to address the issue.

'That's the Government for you. Things are going on all the time all round the world but there's this ridiculous attitude that nobody must know.'

In the 60s at Woomera, Delgado was one of a team who tracked objects travelling at exceptionally high speeds and that appeared to be emanating from a larger object miles further up. No explanation was ever found for this phenomenon that is logged in official Australian records.

Perhaps this experience led to his obsession with the circles and his belief, like Hamlet, that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy.

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