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A Mystery Dragonfly

Chad Arment

One question that regularly comes up within cryptozoology is, are there any insect cryptids? Sometimes this is brought up to suggest that small creatures are of little interest to cryptozoology, or because a critic is trying to imply that cryptozoology only concerns itself with ‘monsters.’ As I’ve noted before (time and again), the only criteria for a mystery animal that regards size, is its salience. If an animal can be recognized as distinctive and unique in appearance, differing from other creatures, so entering the folkloric pathway that asks, ‘What the heck was that?’, then it can qualify as a cryptid. There aren’t as many smaller mystery animals recognized, but that has more to do with investigator interest than in lack of candidates. A few have entered the cryptozoological literature, like the bioluminescent spider of Myanmar or the Australian bioluminescent moth. There are also cases of new species that were chased for years before their discovery, like the giant walkingstick from South China. In 1998, a Chinese entomologist was told by locals in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region about a ‘half-meter-long’ giant, but it wasn’t until 2014 that he located a specimen (Xinhua 2016).

It is currently recognized that there are millions of insects that remain undescribed. Estimates vary on how many millions (could be between two and thirty million, according to the Smithsonian). Most are in the tropics where biodiversity among most organisms is highest. In the U.S., we have about 91,000 described species and an estimated 73,000 yet to be named (Smithsonian n.d.). Most of these will likely be beetles, flies, moths, and Hymenoptera (ants, bees, wasps), where there are lots of minute species that require specialist determination. Even among the better-known (and larger) insects, though, like the Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies, with about 450 species in the U.S.), new species are sometimes named. Often these are distinguished

by tiny morphological characters that aren't readily observable without a specimen in hand. (Some traits like color or pattern are highly variable or can overlap between species. Meadowhawks, for example, can be tricky to distinguish in some parts of the country without examining the male's secondary genitalia, or hamules, underneath the body; even then, the legitimacy of some species is under debate (Pilgrim and von Dohlen 2007).)

As with most creatures, most undescribed Odonates in North America can be expected to be smaller (e.g. damselflies), related to similarly-colored or patterned species, and may live in remote or specialized habitats where people (especially wandering entomologists) are less likely to visit. There's one interesting case where a new dragonfly made a splash, with notices published in the national news.

THE ST. CROIX SNAKETAIL

In the summer of 1989, William Smith, a zoologist with the Wisconsin DNR's Natural Heritage Inventory Program, was surveying dragonfly exuviae (the shed skin that dragonflies cast off as they transform from larvae to adult) in the St. Croix River of northwestern Wisconsin (Brody 1997). Sixteen exuviae looked different from any other that he had seen, though they keyed out to snaketails. A fellow entomologist, Timothy Vogt, was able to rule out snaketail species from outside North America (as dragonflies sometimes are accidentally transplanted). To determine whether these were from a new species, the biologists knew that an adult would be needed. By this time, mid-fall, it was too late in the season to look for active, flying adults, so they decided to search for dormant nymphs in the frigid river. Going back to the same location, they found several specimens "in water of at least 1 m depth and only where the current was so swift that collectors had extreme difficulty remaining in place" (Vogt and Smith 1993). These nymphs were maintained until the adults emerged, allowing the biologists to determine for certain that they were in fact a new species, which they named *Ophiogomphus susbehcha* (*susbehcha* being Lakota Sioux for dragonfly). This discovery received wide public notice in 1991-1992, particularly as further investigation located the species along the Chippewa and Flambeau Rivers, prompting discussion that it might derail plans for a planned copper mine (AP 1991; Knight 1991; AP 1992).

One fascinating side development with the St. Croix snaketail is that the species has more recently been discovered in a few rivers in Maryland and Virginia, with a historical record from eastern Pennsylvania (Orr 2018). It is as yet undetermined whether this population should be considered a new subspecies; they do appear to be a bit smaller than those from the Wisconsin population.

Several new North American gomphids were discovered in the 1980s and 1990s (for example, the southern snaketail, *Ophiogomphus australis*, and the Sioux snaketail, *Ophiogomphus smithi*, which was named for co-discoverer William Smith). These types of dragonflies often have small, localized populations, and because they aren't as flashy or distinctive as the well-known pond skimmers or darners, may require examination of key anatomy to identify. It's certainly possible that additional species await discovery, but that will likely require entomological surveys of adults or nymphs to capture specimens for closer inspection. Chances are slim that any of these will be cryptozoological (which requires some form of ethnozoological attachment prior to discovery that would allow for a targeted search).

But that doesn't mean there can't be a cryptozoological dragonfly.

THE MYSTERY PETALTAIL

While attending the Ohio Odonata Conference in 2017, I was a little surprised to hear the keynote speaker mention in passing that there appeared to be an undescribed species of petaltail here in the eastern United States. Petaltails (Family Petaluridae) are considered an 'ancient' group of dragonflies, with fossils known from Jurassic rocks. Two species are known from North America: the black petaltail (*Tanypteryx hageni*) of the Pacific Northwest, and the gray petaltail (*Tachopteryx thoreyi*) of the eastern United States. Gray petaltails are fairly well known, though are usually found in woodlands with permanent seeps or boggy areas, where the semiaquatic larvae burrow into the mud or under wet leaves. The adults are known for perching directly on a dragonfly enthusiast's clothes, hat, or face.

Gathering details on the mystery petaltail was a bit tricky, as there are ongoing 'expeditions' in search of the species and professional entomologists don't always care to have amateurs mucking about in their business, especially when a new species is on the line. (This isn't new; for a fascinating discussion of the tension between a professional

entomologist and an ‘amateur regional expert’ as they corresponded about a new dragonfly species in the early 1900s, see White and O’Brien (2017).) Of course, there’s more at stake here than just a new species. One of the most frustrating aspects of cryptozoology is that we know that ethnozoological targeted searches occur in ‘normal’ zoology, but it is rarely if ever documented. Zoologists simply publish the description and name, perhaps some habitat details, but rarely how they came to discover the species if it didn’t occur in a random survey. This is at odds with the history of discoveries in physics, astronomy, chemistry, etc., where the methodology of discovery is often given due credit. So, if nothing else, the cryptozoological literature offers opportunity to correct this imbalance.

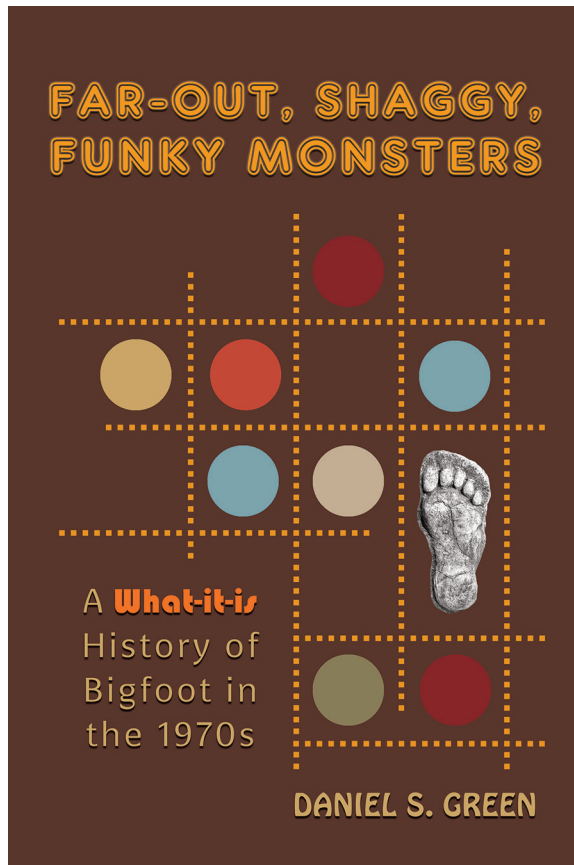
The petaltail in question was first spotted 5 or 6 years ago at a central Tennessee rest stop. It has been seen multiple times since by several different dragonfly enthusiasts (including professional entomologists, one of whom has jokingly referred to it as the ‘Sasquatch’ dragonfly). It is recognizable by a larger size than the typical gray petaltail (which at 3 inches long is already one of the larger dragonflies in the eastern U.S.). I was told it may in fact be larger than a dragonhunter (*Hagenius brevistylus*), which can be almost 4 inches long. Some giant petaltails in Australia (genus *Petalura*) are known to reach almost 5 inches in length, so it would be fascinating to discover a giant species here in the U.S.

With a concerted effort being made to collect a specimen, I suspect this is one mystery that won’t remain so for long. And, perhaps its discovery will inspire other nature enthusiasts to learn more about their regional Odonata, and get involved in state surveys to find out what is where, and if there are other species yet undiscovered.

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Far-Out, Shaggy, Funky Monsters:
A What-it-is History of Bigfoot in the 1970s
Daniel S. Green

Now available from your favorite online booksellers, an engaging, detailed look at the 1970s, when Bigfoot moved from being an oddity from the Pacific Northwest to entrenchment in the North American cultural landscape. Author Dan Green objectively reviews the researchers, the sightings, and the theories that dominated the media and thrilled the public.

Profiles in Cryptozoology: Commander Attilio Gatti

Chad Arment

Attilio Gatti (1896-1969) was an Italian explorer who led numerous safari expeditions in Africa. Gatti graduated from the Italian Military Academy and during WWI became a Squadron Commander in the Royal Italian Air Force. He began exploring Africa in 1920, collecting specimens for natural history museums. (Gatti later recounted (1962) that in the early years, “with scientists attached to one or another of my expeditions, I had discovered, collected and classified close to three score of new insects, reptiles and small mammals.”) He wrote at least 19 books recounting his African adventures, and his American wife, Ellen, wrote one herself. Gatti also photographed and filmed the people and animals he encountered (producing one early film, *Siliva the Zulu* (1927)). He was the first person to photograph a live okapi in its natural habitat. He is perhaps best known for, during his later Congo expeditions, using luxuriously-outfitted ‘jungle yachts’ (called ‘deluxe apartments on wheels’) produced by International Harvester. Among his zoological endeavors were attempts to transport live okapis and bongos to European zoos.

It should be no surprise that an experienced African explorer would occasionally discuss alleged undescribed or even mythical species. Gatti had a strong interest in discovering new species, but it doesn’t appear that he had any actual training in zoology, so his observations were often tinged with subjectivity. Still, his anthropological notes are fascinating and may certainly suggest future directions for cryptozoological investigations.

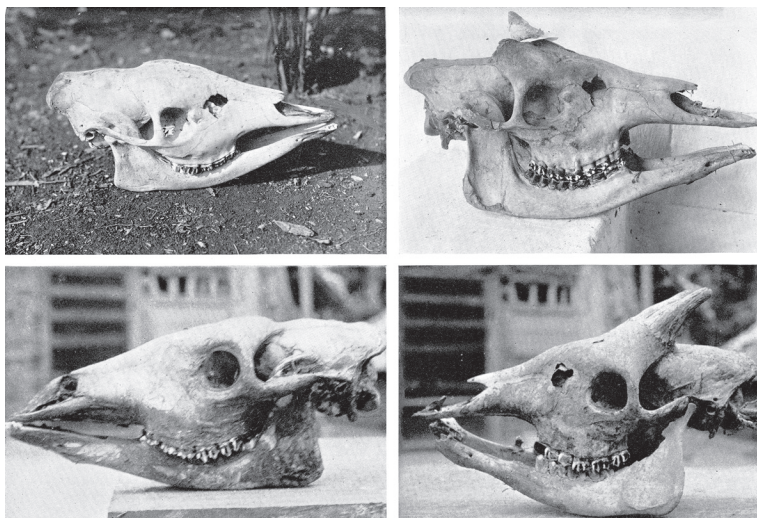
THE OKAPI

One interesting point regarding the okapi is that Gatti discovered it was a taboo animal to the Kibali-Ituri natives, and they believed it had fantastical traits (what we might refer to today as paranormal

beliefs). Within scientific publications, there is a tendency to gloss over or ignore folkloric attachments to rare or undescribed animals, but recognizing this type of folklore allows us to consider modern paranormalist claims regarding mystery animals more objectively. “For months the commander had talked okwapi [okapi] to deaf pygmies. They didn’t relish the topic. For them the okwapi is a beast almost tabu. Only the greatest chiefs and medicine men may wear its fur. It is a dangerous animal, they say, a changeling that turns into a poisonous fish when it goes down to the water. It also eats poison weeds” (Canning 1937).

Gatti believed he had discovered a new race of okapi which was separated from the known species by the Epulu River. He examined okapi skulls from both sides of the river, as well as several live specimens, and believed those of the unknown okapi were consistent with each other, yet consistently different from the known okapi. He proposed the name Kibali okapi (*Ocuapia kibalensis*) for the new race, though noted that his description was tentative and needed authoritative corroboration.

“The most striking difference between the two races is found in the head. The *ocuapia kibalensis*, thinner and lighter head than the *ocapia johnstoni*. In the former the front line descends straight from



Gatti’s (1937) okapi skull comparison. The Kibali okapi makes up the top row, the known okapi is at bottom. Females are left, males are right.

the horns to the nose; while in the latter, this line forms a well-defined convex angle at about one-third of the distance between horns and nose.

“Viewed from above, the head of the Kibali Okwapi forms a regular triangle from the temporal bones to the nose, while that of the *ocapia johnstoni* forms a massive square from the temporal bones to the beginning of a denture, narrowing sharply thereafter and continuing in a very thin strip to the nose. This is what gives to the head of the Okwapi of the first-known race that strange, uncanny appearance, further emphasized by the convexity of the lateral oral walls, so extreme in proportion to the lower jaw that often the upper teeth do not coincide with the lower, and hence the grinding surface is greatly reduced. This naturally influences mastication, and therefore digestion and general condition of the animal, which usually is less developed and almost always of poorer appearance of nourishment and coat than the *ocapia kibalensis*.

“The skull of the *ocapia johnstoni*, massive and heavy, has a comparatively smaller ocular cavity, and in the male presents a pair of horns which were astonishing for us, accustomed as we were to the Okwapi of the Kibali. The horns of the former make one body with the skull and are strong, long, pointed and inclined toward the back. Never have I happened to see a specimen, dead or alive, with broken horns. One which I examined had horns five inches long; many had horns of four inches or four and a half inches.

“The *ocapia kibalensis*, on the contrary, has very short, blunt horns never exceeding two inches in length. They are usually so worn on the inner and rear sides as to show a flat, smooth surface. And, most interesting of all, the horns are not a part of the skull, but rest on it, on a broad, irregular base, and are held only by the skin which covers them to their inclined, flat tops. Which explains how often one finds an adult male with one horn, or no horns at all, their previous place being marked by scars left on the skin, but by no sign whatever on the skull. . . .

“The *ocapia johnstoni*, smaller than his Kibali brother, less well-nourished and healthy, is certainly also less strong, pugnacious and aggressive. The two adult Okwapi I saw at the Buta Mission were enclosed in a low palisade of light bamboo that would not have lasted a second under the butts and kicks of one of the Okwapi we captured. Seeing those two quiet, subdued animals that went mournfully wherever they were pushed by the point of a long stick handled through

the wide gaps of that weak corral, my wife and I could not believe our own eyes. Especially remembering the violence, determination and strength of our first Okwapi when, a living expression of power and might in spite of the exhaustion of forty hours passed without food in the bottom of a muddy pit, he charged and easily broke that huge palisade of enormous green trunks bound solidly together.

“The impression we received at Buta found a complete confirmation in the attitude shown toward the Okwapi by pygmies and natives. While in the Aruwimi, in the Itimbiri, in the Uele, they have no fear at all of the animal, in our forest even the best hunters, both Mambuti and Bandande, consider the Okwapi to be a very dangerous animal; as they did not mind showing by skinning instantaneously up the nearest tree every time I tried to keep them in the neighbourhood of an adult male, or even more an adult female, which is usually appreciably larger and more aggressive than a male of the same age.

“This fear of the Kibali Okwapi is so ingrained in the natives [that] when Toto, our baby Okwapi, was loose in the camp only *Kapita Kaluèse*, and only when I was present, had the courage of approaching him. All the other men, even the pygmies who had helped in the capture, were not ashamed to run away at full speed the moment Toto lowered his head and galloped in their direction” (Gatti 1937).

Gatti was unable to send a live specimen back to Europe, but managed to obtain physical specimens of both male and female Kibali okapis for a museum. A few additional okapi “species” were described in the early 1900s (e.g., *Okapia liebrechtsi*, *Okapia eriksoni*), based on striping differences among other characters, but these, along with Gatti’s discovery, were quickly synonymized with the first-described *Okapia johnstoni* as simple variation among one species. Recent research suggests that okapis exhibit a remarkable amount of genetic variation (on par with that found in all giraffe subspecies combined, as well as other genetically diverse ungulates). The lack of speciation may be due to okapis finding a way to cross the Congo River in a way that other animals in the region did not (which, for example, led to the divergence between chimpanzees and bonobos) (Stanton et al 2014). But this genetic variation might certainly indicate behavioral diversity in the species, as well. The Congo forests might just hide a few particularly feisty okapis.

THE PYGMY ELEPHANT(S)

Gatti discovered that there were four different ethnozoologically distinct elephants in the Kibali-Ituri forest. (For those unfamiliar with cryptozoology, ethnozoological classification is the manner in which people define and distinguish different animals in their region. They may conceptually separate types of animals based on morphology or behavior which are scientifically considered one species. In some cases this may indicate areas where future scientific discoveries might be made, or they may simply be recognizing local variations, ontogenetic differences, etc.)

The “normal” elephant (what we know today as the forest elephant, *Loxodonta cyclotis*) was called a *Somà*. It shows some adaptations to forest life (shorter tusks, no more than 9 feet in height, excellent hearing, darker coloration) that would differentiate it from the better-known African bush elephant (*Loxodonta africana*).

A pygmy elephant was referred to as *M’zei* or *M’gei* (females were called *Malekwe*). Gatti claimed to have seen these on multiple occasions. In showing examples of tusks from both *Somà* and *M’zei*, he discovered that natives were consistently able to distinguish from which elephant form the ivory came. The pygmy elephant averaged 5 feet in height, though Gatti saw one male that appeared to be 6 feet high. The ears are proportionally larger, “almost square in form, with corners rounded.” Gatti noted, “Usually the *M’zei* are so small and their ears so big, that the latter give the impression of reaching the ground.” Their hearing was acute, and sight was poor. “In this abnormally acute sense of hearing there probably is to be found the best reason for the general disbelief in the pygmy elephant, and also the conviction of its extreme rarity entertained by the few people admitting its existence. For the *M’zei*, intercepting the slightest noise at an incredible distance, normally has plenty of time to elude the hunter’s pursuit by silently disappearing from his path, helped in this by its small bulk and great agility and surprising swiftness of movement” (Gatti 1937). The pygmy elephant has short, extremely sharp tusks, “at least a third heavier . . . than [young forest elephant] tusks of the same length.” These tusks are usually reddish; “in an old male can take the most beautiful tones, dark purple, blood-red, rich brown with golden streaks, as of precious marble, often with the points so smoothly and deeply flattened on the sides as to appear like rough scimitars” (Gatti 1937). While forest

elephant herds averaged 10-12 individuals, the pygmy elephants traveled in very large herds, often over 100 individuals. Pygmy elephants were generally believed to be more aggressive, more cunning, and more vindictive than the forest elephant.

A second form of pygmy elephant, a “pygmy among pygmies,” was one Gatti heard about, but never saw himself. They were “said to be no higher than four feet. Their colour is supposed to be decidedly whitish; their ferocity extraordinary; their habitat the ‘zone of mystery,’ . . . described to me the thousand odd square miles north of the Stanleyville-Irumu road included between the Epulu, Mava, M’bure and Akaba rivers” (Gatti 1937). A Mr. Hackars, Commissaire of the Kibali-Ituri District, was said to have entered this area, “only to find himself abandoned by his pygmies and shortly thereafter attacked by a small herd of the white dwarf elephants, which kept him in dire distress on the branches of a tree for a good many hours until a strong rescue party came to deliver him.”

Gatti noted also stories of large elephants, seen by many old hunters, described with two pairs of tusks each. One large four-tusked skull was presented to an official in Lubero, and supposedly sent on to a European museum (possibly what is now the AfricaMuseum in Belgium).



Gatti's (1937) photo of a *M'zei*

There is at least one four-tusked elephant skull in an African museum (Luptak et al 2009), so as Gatti pointed out, these stories may be based on “freak” elephants rather than a distinct race.

THE NDEGI

Bird, bat, hairy pterosaur? There aren’t enough details for classification with this mystery flyer, though the ethnozoological scheme of the pygmies apparently placed it with the birds: “. . . a bird so enormous and powerful that in one instant it can reduce to a pulp the strongest man; and it is absolutely invulnerable because of a cuirass of thick, heavy hair, covering the whole body except for the feathered wings” (Gatti 1937).

As Gatti noted: “This word [Ndegi] means simply ‘bird,’ in general. The particular name that the natives give to this bird I have not been able to learn, if there is a name, for if one calls by name this creature, ‘one calls death on himself,’ they say.

“They affirm that it is taller than a man, possessed of great strength, covered with hair instead of feathers, and has a head similar to a monkey’s. This description may sound grotesque, and perhaps it is in part.

“But—one day I heard a beating of wings so loud and so heavy that it startled me. The pygmies said in an offhand way that it was only a bird, but I noticed that each of them raised his right arm in the air and snapped his fingers, as they do to exorcise the evil spirits of the lightning in the great forest storms” (Gatti 1935).

Gatti believed he encountered the Ndegi on another occasion:

“At last, one morning as I was walking through the forest, the sounds of leaves pushed aside by some heavy body brought me to a stop, my rifle at my shoulder.

“An okwapi, or a buffalo, I thought; but I was puzzled at the conduct of the pygmies, who had all thrown themselves face downward on the ground. I had the sensation that the big body hidden from me by the foliage, for visibility in the forest does not extend beyond five or ten yards, was moving away from me and upward, and I ran forward to try to get at least a glimpse of it.

“Then I heard once more that strange sound coming from above the green dome of interlaced branches covering me; and, looking up, I saw through an interstice in the leaves something black and immense passing over me.

“Those few seconds of hesitation had lost for me a clear sight of the ndegi. For ndegi it was, although it was not until several weeks later, so great was their fear of this ill-omened bird, that the pygmies confirmed the fact to me” (Gatti 1935).

THE CONGO UNICORN

The unicorn legend cropped up in native folklore: “. . . an antelope somewhat resembling the Okapi, but having one long spiral horn in the middle of the forehead, and this animal is more ferocious than an infuriated rhino” (Gatti 1937).

A GREAT RED APE

“I believe today, even at the risk of appearing ridiculous, that there exists a great ape, larger than the gorilla, red of hair and differing from the gorilla in the fact that it walks always on its hind legs and stands erect like a man.

“A white man whom I esteem very much, assured me that about 20 years ago one of these monsters was killed by the poisonous arrows of some pygmies whom he had attacked.

“The territorial administrateur of that time himself saw it, but when he returned to the spot a few hours later to take the skin, he found that it had been burned by a missionary who feared that it might be considered a proof of the Darwin theory.” (Gatti 1935)

This may or may not be related with the following:

“... fantastic men having the coarse hair, the long arms, the super-human strength of the gorilla, who beat to death with their huge stone knives anybody daring to enter their domain.” (Gatti 1937)

Of course, these may simply have been variant tales for the Mulahu (below), but they appear to be ethnozoologically distinct. Certainly, they were published after Gatti’s primary expedition for the Mulahu in 1933, so he likely wouldn’t have indiscriminately separated accounts related to the Mulahu.

THE MULAHU

The Mulahu was of particular interest to Gatti, and was the focus of several expeditions, as he believed it could possibly be the “fifth great anthropoid ape.” Gatti kept his cards close to his chest throughout most of expedition years, and only a few details about the alleged creature and his hunt for it appeared in news articles or his books. There

are a few account details that suggest Gatti may have been confusing more than one type of mystery animal. The first accounts that appear of his interest in the Mulahu show up in 1935, but this is two years after his most intriguing expedition in search of it.

“The hours of march this creature has cost me, both before and after I became convinced of its existence, only I can know. Ten times it happened to me to be walking on the tracks of an okwapi, or in search of a bongo, or to be following a river just discovered, when suddenly without any plausible reason whatever my natives, even the best ones, refused to advance an inch further. Excuses of every kind, palpably excuses, greeted my insistence.

“It took four months before, word by word, I succeeded in dragging out of Sultani Kalume the real reasons for the deceptions. All the fault of the mulahu!

“The physical description of this animal is not particularly terrifying. He is about four feet in height at the shoulder, and seven or eight feet long from the head to the end of the tail. He is covered with long hair that falls over his face, and has a coat which is black on the top and white underneath.

“But the natives say that he lives in the hollow trunks of trees which his mere presence has been enough to kill and dry. And they swear that if a mulahu sees a human being he immediately tears out a handful of his hair and blows it in the face of the man, who dies on the spot with much suffering” (Gatti 1935).

This is the only place I’ve found where there is a suggestion that the Mulahu had a tail. I think it is possibly an editing error: that likely what was intended is that the Mulahu, when on all fours, is about four feet in height, but standing erect is seven or eight feet high.

In 1938, Gatti again was planning to search for the Mulahu. He noted that natives described it as larger than the known anthropoids, “walking erect, covered with long dark hair except for the face, which is shielded by a white mane.”

“The Italian adventurer said he was not fortunate enough to see the ‘mulahu’ during his work in the forest last year [1936], but that investigation convinced him there was a sound and fearful foundation for the tales of the pigmies. Advancing into an unexplored section of the forest, he related, his party made two significant discoveries.

“‘First, we found footprints which were not those of a gorilla,’ he said. ‘They were double the size of those of an ordinary man.

“Secondly, we found a dead mahogany tree, in which had been clawed a cavern. Five pigmies climbed into the hole and were not crowded. On the sides of the hole we found two white hairs, each 10 3-8 inches long.

“The natives immediately cried that they were from the veil of the “mulahu”” (Anon 1937b).

A 1938 report notes that Gatti had actually seen a Mulahu. “I saw one of them—a terrible looking monster bigger than the biggest giant gorilla. . . . This fellow was just unbelievable. He was about 8 feet high, and his feet, absolutely human, were two and a quarter times larger than a human foot” (Greene 1938). It turns out this refers to his 1933 expedition (more on that below).

A retrospective on the 1938 expedition noted that during a previous expedition, a Mulahu was believed to have killed seven natives (again referring to the 1933 expedition). Unfortunately, the onset of World War II ended his 1938 expedition’s attempt to track down the creature. At this point, Gatti had no further intention to explore Africa, as he had nearly died from a bout of blackwater fever (Reil 1939; Gatti 1948).

Gatti couldn’t stay away, however, announcing plans in 1947 for an expedition the following year, with intent to seek out the Mulahu. The news brief noted that “No white man . . . has ever seen it,” however, though as we’ll see, this wasn’t exactly what Gatti believed. Gatti stated, “I have seen hair, footprints and other evidence supporting the view that such a creature exists,” but doesn’t mention his own sighting (Anon 1947; Gatti 1948).

Ellen Gatti briefly mentioned the Mulahu in her 1944 book, *Exploring We Would Go*, noting that Tillo (Attilio) managed to coerce a frightened man who had just seen the creature to show him the location. (This appears to have been the 1936 expedition.) He found “enormous footprints, and several stiff black hairs in the hollow of a tree where the evidence showed the brute had been sitting. Neither hairs nor print corresponded to any other known ape.” Ivan T. Sanderson noted this discussion in *Abominable Snowmen* (1961), but he appears to have obtained a copy of a later UK edition of the book (which he misnames *Hunting We Will Go*) which has differing text from the book I’ve seen. In that, Ellen clearly differentiates between the Mulahu (“exceptionally large, walks erect habitually, and is covered with very dark,

possibly black, fur, except for the face, where the hairs are white”) and another unnamed creature, “a big animal with a coat of long hair, black on the back, white on the other parts of the body. And it is enough to be seen by this monster, for one to die in the most atrocious agony.” Are there two cryptids commingling in these reports, or are folkloric traits varied enough to create the appearance of two mystery animals?

It wasn’t until 1962, in *Sangoma*, that Gatti wrote directly about his 1933 expedition for the Mulahu. “I first became convinced that the Mulahu was not a myth, but an actually existing great ape, in 1928. . . . Livingstone and Stanley had written about this creature [*the Soko?*] as of a fantastic monster. Practically every African explorer since them had been impressed by hints and stories they had picked up here and there concerning the Mulahu, and tried to find its tracks, dreamed of becoming its discoverer. Now it was my turn. And I was determined to do something about it.”

Gatti discovered that most tribesmen (pygmies or not) were extremely reticent to talk about the Mulahu. Over the years, he gathered bits and pieces of information (essentially folklore) about the creature. He realized that not everyone spoke about it the same way: “Nor did they call it by the same word; in fact, I have collected nine different names for it. The nearer to the Ituri, I observed, the more these names sounded like Mulahu. Far away . . . the animals was described hazily, with contradictory details, and was talked about with a relative indifference. Whereas, all around the Ituri, the descriptions increased in sharpness and similarity; and a deep, superstitious fear invariably lowered the voices, widened the eyes, embarrassed the expressions of any native with whom I broached the matter.” Within the Ituri, Gatti discovered the native people wouldn’t even speak about it, pretending to have never heard the word, and immediately trying to change the subject.

The rumored appearance of the creature was something like a great ape, seven or eight feet tall, perhaps 800 pounds. The face was uncertain (some said it had the face of a cow, goat, man, or gorilla), but it had a curtain of long white hair falling over its face from the forehead. In order to properly see anything, the creature had to get down on all fours and look backwards, underneath itself. It supposedly took only a glance to kill a man, which Gatti ascribed to a superstitious mentality, where awe and shock would lead to a subconscious certainty precipitating death.

Gatti spoke with Dr. Morais, who lived in Beni (New Beni at the time), who told him about an Australian photographer and big-game hunter named Bob Kindreick who was supposedly killed by a Mulahu during Word War I. Encountering fresh tracks in the jungle led to the flight of Kindreick's Mayaka guide, but he continued forward. Kindreick was believed to have been ambushed by the creature, getting his head crushed in the process. A few coarse, long, white hairs had been found between his teeth and under his fingernails. His camera was found nearby, smashed flat, and his Mauser rifle was found broken in two. The hairs were retained by the Mayaka guide as a talisman.

This information spurred Gatti to action, but while gathering men and supplies for an expedition into the dark reaches of the forest, he collapsed from malarial fever and had to be sent back to a Cairo hospital. His recovery took over a year—then he took a quick trip to America, where he met Ellen (they decided on the same day to marry and travel back to Africa). It wasn't until 1933 that Gatti was able to return.

The original Mayaka guide who had kept the Mulahu hairs had died, but the talisman had been passed to his son, Amisi. After some persuasion, he agreed to show Gatti the hairs, which he described: "In texture they matched those of a gorilla. In colour they were similar to the white hairs of the colobus monkey. In stiffness they resembled the moustache of a leopard. But they were many times longer, larger, coarser, stronger than any of these, or of the hair of any other wild animal I had ever seen in my African life."

Amisi agreed to accompany Gatti in search of the Mulahu, but pointed out that no one else would, unless the local sorcerer could be persuaded to offer a charm to protect them in the Mulahu's territory. This was finally accomplished, through a complicated ritual.

Because there was potion enough for only fourteen people to go through the ritual, it was a smaller expedition, split into three parts and spread out, that headed into the woods. After advancing about an hour's march into the creature's territory, a storm came up on Gatti's section. It was during this that Gatti states he had an encounter with the Mulahu, as it emerged from the brush and smacked him down, hard enough that he drifted into unconsciousness. His guide had cried out, "Mulahu!" and fled when he saw it. "The gigantic brute stood there for only a brief instant, towering high over me. It growled. It went down on all fours again. Its form faded into the mist, vanished away. All this

happened quicker than I can describe it. But I can still see the red-dish-black, wavy fur of its immense uplifted arms, the colossal girth of its stomach, and above all, that disconcertingly huge head, which was made eyeless, even faceless by the long white curtain of hair falling from the protruding line of the brow.”

Awakening, and pulling himself together, he found a print of the creature, noting “a foot which was absolutely human in appearance except for its size. It had a big toe which was as divaricated as that of a pygmy, but in all, it was three or four times larger and longer than a pygmy’s foot.” Without supplies (his guide having disappeared), Gatti spent three days wandering before relocating another section of his expedition. A power struggle between the sorcerer and the headman had led to the deaths (likely through fear and shock) of seven men in the party, which the tribesmen superstitiously blamed on the Mulahu.

Dr. Bernard Heuvelmans, in *Les Bêtes Humaines d’Afrique* (1980), was not impressed with Gatti’s account from *Sangoma*, suggesting that Gatti probably exaggerated his stories and decrying his inability to provide evidence (e.g., hair samples; or even a sketch of the Mulahu’s footprint) for scientists to examine. He also noted Gatti’s eagerness to suggest new types of gorillas and okapis, which may have been more useful in raising funds for expeditions than in advancing science.

This was the end of the 1933 expedition, as recounted in *Sangoma*. It fueled Gatti’s interest in the creature for years to come. The last trip where the Mulahu was specifically mentioned was the 1948 expedition. It was sponsored by the Hallicrafters Company, an electronics firm from Chicago. The Mulahu was but one of several planned investigations during the trip, which would focus mostly on “The Mountains of the Moon” (Rwenzori Mountains). They were outfitted with mobile radio stations, underwater photographic equipment, and additional scientific equipment. They don’t appear to have had any success with the Mulahu, however, and no further mention of it appears in public media.

By the 1950s, the Gattis were living in Vermont, but Attilio still managed to participate in the occasional African expedition. On his 12th expedition, he produced a movie, *Bitter Spears*. On the 13th, he traveled from Kenya to South Africa via Tanganyika, Uganda, the Belgian Congo, French Equatorial Africa, and Rhodesia, all the while testing and publicizing products for twenty American business sponsors

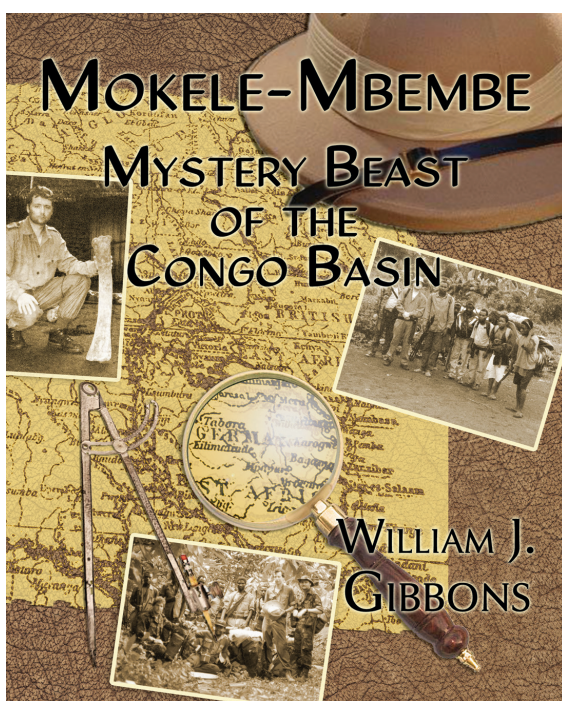
(Anon. 1956). The Gattis eventually moved to Switzerland, where Ellen died in 1962 and Attilio died in 1969.

Attilio Gatti may have been publicity-minded, and we may have to take some of his tales with a grain of salt, but he was sincere in his search for an unknown anthropoid ape, and as such earned a place among the few true explorers into cryptozoological mysteries.

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Mokele-Mbembe: Mystery Beast of the Congo Basin
William J. Gibbons

Explorer Bill Gibbons has traveled many times to the Congo Basin in search of *Mokele-mbembe*, a creature that has allegedly escaped scientific discovery. This is the story of his adventures and why he believes it is worth continuing that search.

The Lumpy, Skinny-Necked Dino-Bird

J. Ericson-Flatland

[*Editor's Note:* In the first issue of *BioFortean Notes* (2011), I presented the eyewitness sighting of a small, bipedal, reptile-like animal near Gerlach, Nevada. I considered this a valid account that fit within a range of unusual 'dinosaur-like' mystery animals that have been reported in various parts of western North America (many sightings of which were not nearly as compelling). Of particular interest was the 'hair' or 'feathers' covering the animal, given the ongoing research into 'dinosaur feathers' in paleontology. Last fall, the eyewitness contacted me again; she had seen, in the same area, another unusual animal. While there were some basic similarities (some sort of bird-like bipedal reptile), there were differences also. It was a bit larger, and there were some differences in certain morphological traits. One might suggest it looked like what we could expect from ontogenetic changes, if it were an adult form of the animal previously seen. What follows is the account the eyewitness wrote up, with additional notes I took from speaking with her.]

WHERE I WAS AND WHAT I WAS DOING AT THE TIME:

[*This was on November 10, 2017. The weather was decent, a little cool at night, about 34° F.*]

I was in the area to do some rockhounding with an old fellow teacher friend. We have done this same trip for 28 years now. Usually several or more times a year, just she and I. I come up with my daughter and husband many more times a year. We own 159 acres about 15 miles down

Hwy. 447. (That is why I am in the area so often and why I know it quite well.)

I was on HWY 34, near the Granite Ranch, nearest the town of Gerlach, NV. The sun had set, but it was not dark or dusk. I had my headlights on.

I was driving slowly (25 mph), “head-hunting” for my friend who I was to meet there that day. I was coming up to a tight turn in the road. I always slow down here, at this turn, as small cars may not be as visible due to view obstruction by brush, etc., and bad drivers who think they can navigate the turn going too fast.

I had my Catahoula dog with me. I was enjoying my loud music. I was focused on the road, due to the turn. (And, since the sun had set, animals can be on the move at this time more than during daylight hours.)

[This same evening, she had a coyote, a kit fox, and six mule deer cross in front of her on this same road.]

I was slowing down even further, shifting my eyes from the road to the right side of the road looking for my friend.

My friend could only be on the right side of this road if she was there, since this area is *not* fenced and not privately owned. The left side is private property.

This is when I saw it coming towards me.

MY FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THIS DINO-BIRD:

I saw a “something” moving toward my vehicle from the right-hand side of the road. It came out of the brush, and onto the shoulder of the road still moving toward me.

My very first thought was that it was a *huge praying mantis!*

That really got my attention. I don’t mind bugs too much, *but not that size.*

Why did I think it a praying mantis? It was green, or greenish, with arms folded in front of its chest, and I didn’t notice the head for a few seconds. I could tell by the height of the rabbit brush and other plants (growing/dead around) that it was about 2.5 ft tall at that point. I estimated this height due to the brush in this location being over 2 ft to maybe 6 ft at the most.

I then became *concerned* at this point still thinking it could be a praying mantis . . . (I know this sounds strange, but that’s what I first

thought). It wasn't a slow mover nor a fast mover . . . and it was still coming toward me for about another yard.

It must have then noticed the vehicle as it veered to the left, still on the sandy shoulder, and began to cross the blacktop road in front of me. That's when I noticed its head (and realized it was not a praying mantis! a small "lol" sigh of relief!) At this point the creature looked tall enough to pick the back of a person's rear pants pockets! So, I now estimated it at around 3 ft tall, head to feet.

I must have made a verbal noise, as my dog, even with music playing, shot his head up between the front seats to look into the road.

It was now facing the left of the road and I had a clear view of it from the side, and in my vehicle headlights.

[It was about 40 feet in front of her.]

RABBITS AND KANGAROO RATS:

I like to point things out to our dogs when driving. All you have to do is say "Rabbits" and they go crazy to look out onto the road. Out here in this part of Nevada, there are years where the jack rabbit and the kangaroo rat populations explode. Trying to drive at night is like gaming at an arcade . . . rabbits come out of nowhere to "run to the light" . . . it's an exhausting experience!

The kangaroo rats do a similar act like the rabbits . . . only they get to the center of the road and start to spin faster than the tea cup ride at Disneyland. (I wonder if these Dino-birds eat snakes and rodents. With such a long neck and small head and mouth, I would think they would need prey they could catch, gulp, and swallow quickly. And with those long claws they could pick snakes from their skinny burrows. Even scratch like a chicken and uncover some burrowing animal or plant roots. Who knows.)

THE CREATURE'S HEAD:

There was a one-time flash of eyeshine. But I did *not* notice eyeshine while it was turning and then turned sideways to me. (I'm guessing that may be because it was not looking directly at me when turning.) The eyeshine was light yellow but not white, and not very bright. I would compare the eyeshine to that of a deer or a horse.

The eyes were proportionate to the head. They were not as large or bulbous like an ostrich but more like a chicken's eye-to-head ratio.

The head size if compared to the entire body as a whole was small, and kind of reptilian in appearance. (It looked a bit like the Loch Ness Monster's head or like a plesiosaur's head looks on a long skinny neck.)

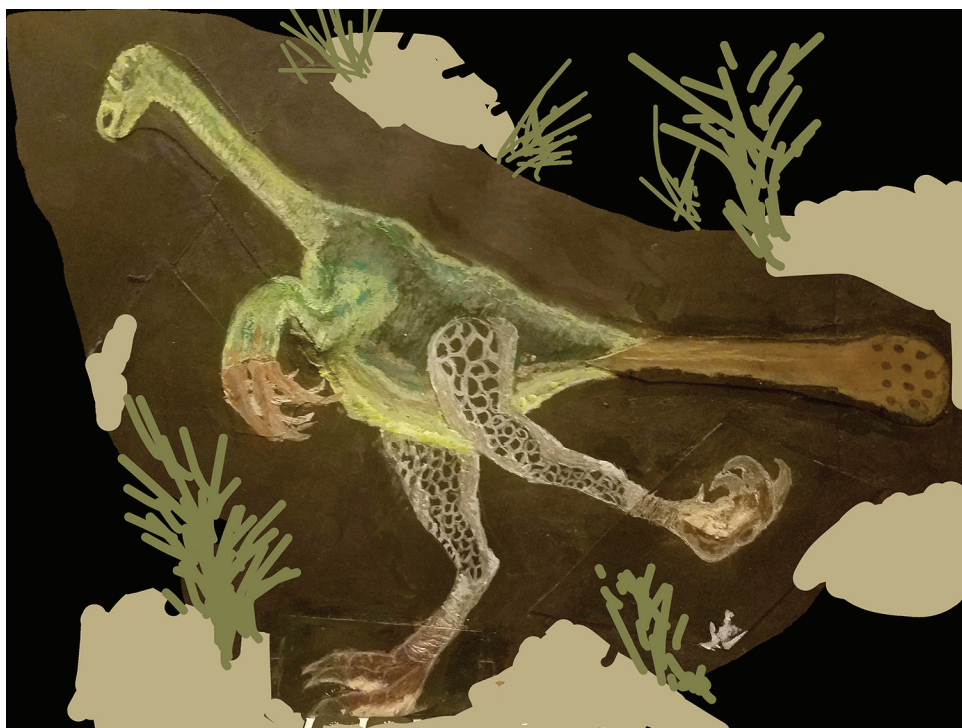
[It had a flat 'lizard' head, with a flat, rounded snout.]

CONTINUING ON DOWN THE BODY:

Head was followed down by a very upright, stiff-looking, skinny neck. The neck looked as if it had been planted directly onto the chest area. There was no real gradual slope into the chest area. The shoulder and hip area made the animal look lumpy. They were obvious "hills" in the outline of the animals' profile.

The legs were large, long, and solid looking, and I could see muscle flex and retract when it was moving. They were thickest at the thigh and graduated down to the ankle area. Very similar to ostrich legs. They looked to be covered in a pretty white and dark grey scale pattern.

The feet were large and wide looking with very thick pads on the bottoms. (I drew them a slight bit too large in my drawing!) The feet were a darker brownish black on top with yellowish /orange pads on the bottom. Much like chicken feet are.



It had claws on the feet that looked thick and strong in a more triangular shape. (Like “regular chicken style claws,” meaning they weren’t overly large or too small for the foot size.) The claws didn’t look weird or evil.

THE CLAWED FRONT LIMBS!!

The front claws on the front arms did look evil. . . . I have never seen claws like that on any animal! Just the brownish-colored claws themselves must have been at least as long as a popsicle stick each. That’s not counting the long fingers they were attached to, either. There were more than four claws and I’m pretty sure no more than six claws up front altogether. The claws and fingers were slightly different in overall length. Some seemed to “dangle” lower than others etc.

It did not seem to use its arms when moving or when it turned sharply onto the road to my left. It carried the arms folded tightly onto the front of its chest area with the claws and fingers pointed down at a minor angle to the ground.

It looked as if the fingers were attached to a wrist, then to a forearm and shoulder area. I did not see flight or similar feathers on the arm or hand area.

BODY OVERALL COVERING:

I am not positive, but pretty sure that the rest of the animal was covered in small size, close-fitting feathers.

Why? Because the legs were the only area I noticed muscle movement and scale pattern. The rest of the body looked “soft and slightly puffy” in overall appearance. With color changing from almost yellow to then variegated greens, until dark green near its body center then back out to greens and brownish yellow on the underside. I did not notice a scale pattern anyplace else on the animal.

It had a medium length, brown, long feathered tail (it looked a little like a peacock tail when carried closed) with black spots at the terminal ends. The tail appeared very “buoyant” and seemed to float out behind the animal as it moved.

THE WEIRD WAY IT MOVED:

The moving stride of this animal was like nothing I have ever seen before. As I said before, it was neither fast nor slow. But, its movement

appeared awkward and with excess motion! The hips seemed to roll in the sockets in such a way as to turn out and fling the legs away from the body, swing in a forward arc, then rotate forward and downward until then swinging back in and under the body.

It wasn't a shuffling stride like a reptile. It wasn't a chicken or ostrich stride either. But, the animal's back did not seem to rise up and down with the bizarre stride it was moving with. (I kept replaying that picture over and over later on.) But, its back stayed a fairly level and without much movement.

OTHER ODDITIES OBSERVED:

It did open its mouth as it was making its turn to my left and off onto the left side sandy shoulder of the road. I didn't notice any teeth. The inside of the open mouth was round-looking, almost flat, jaws

The head rotated atop the neck and the neck didn't seem to move or bend in any direction. Just looked stiff.

Only movement seemed from the legs and the head, as it turned, and the tail as it floated out behind the body in a "levitating" kind of style. (I don't know if levitating is the exact descriptive term.)

The eyes were placed forward in the skull enough so that it didn't really look "bird-ish". (I mean that its eyes weren't just on the sides of its head, but more toward the front of its face.)

The "eye size on its head ratio", looked more like a chicken than a hawk's eye or duck's eye, to use as a comparison. (A hawk's eyeballs being a bit too large and a duck's too small.) It looked like it could see over its nose/mouth with just a little skull between the eyes. It should have good vision forward to backward. (Even its neck shouldn't be in the way, lol!)

CONCLUSION:

That's what I remember best from that evening's encounter. My dog also watched it cross the road. He moved from between the front seats to another window behind me to continue watching it go. (I would appreciate his thoughts on the subject . . .)

I don't care if people think this is stupid or contrived. I think I'm lucky on a personal level and cursed on a public level. It's almost impossible to explain to another person what you've seen and expect them to believe you. But, there is or are several odd animals in this

area. They must have what they need to survive. It would be the “conservation area of a lifetime” if photos or video could be obtained to prove their existence. I can’t imagine how long they are going to go without discovery or destruction.

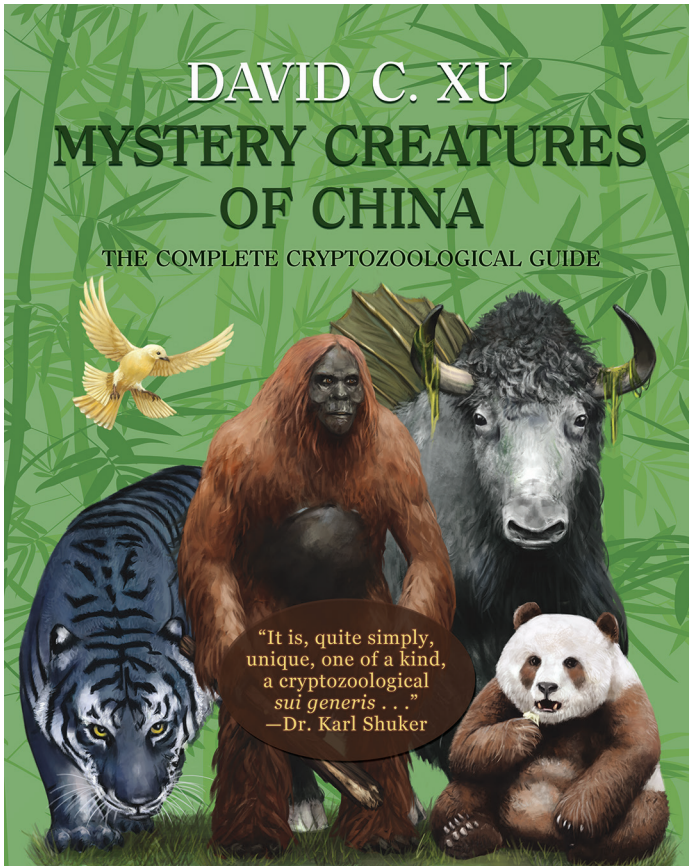
I’ll be stopping in to put a camcorder out every time I’m up there from now on. (I’ve an older Sony with night vision, so I hope they can’t “see” night vision light, that I can leave and not be ruined if someone steals it!).

And of course I’ll be paying more attention to large-sized, 3-toed tracks. Hard to say if anything will turn up. But one thing seems to have evolved at least . . . they aren’t as stupid as science has made most of them out to be. These seem to be “smarter than the rest” . . . but I know what I saw. It wasn’t any lizard or a loose Emu. Even a bus full of kindergarteners would have been yelling “Dinosaur!” because nothing else looks like a dinosaur but a dinosaur.

[She later examined images of a Therizinosaurus, and noted several similarities.]

[Editor’s Note: This is certainly a fascinating eyewitness report. She is going to continue keeping an eye out and may start broaching the subject with locals in the area to see if they’ve seen anything similar. She did note one additional event that may or may not be related. The previous spring, she and a friend were hiking in the hills across from Fly Geyser one evening, when they began hearing loud hissing noises all around them, on both sides of the trail. They were unable to tell what exactly was making the sounds.

I recently got in touch with a resident of Gerlach, who is also a small press publisher and looked like he had some familiarity with at least fictional cryptozoological literature. He had not come across any similar reports (though told me there had been stories of ‘giant coyotes’ in the area), but said he would ask around.]



Mystery Creatures of China
David C. Xu

This enthralling introduction to the cryptozoological folklore of China should be a template for mystery animal books from all over the world. Author David Xu has dug up sighting reports and folkloric animals from across the country, both historical and to the present day. This book deserves a spot in every cryptozoological library.

Freshwater Seahorses

Chad Arment

There are a few Fortean mysteries involving marine creatures that show up in freshwater that will occasionally create newspaper headlines or get passed around on social media. Sharks in rivers or lakes are particularly popular, as are alleged cases of freshwater octopuses. Bull sharks, of course, are well-known for taking advantage of brackish or freshwater systems, at least temporarily; “freshwater octopuses” usually turn out to be pranks.

It was a little surprising to come across mention of possible freshwater seahorses. Certainly, some pipefish are known to inhabit brackish and coastal freshwater in Africa (*Microphis* species, *Enneacampus* species), Asia (*Ichthyocampus carce*, *Doryichthys martensii*), Australia (*Hippichthys heptagonus*), and along the Atlantic coast of North and South America (*Microphis brachyurus*, *Syngnathus scovelli*). True seahorses (genus *Hippocampus*), however, while they may temporarily visit estuarine habitats, including low salinity waters, are not known to reside there permanently. There are two different cases where freshwater seahorses have been suggested, though, and it would certainly be fascinating to discover one.

THE ASIAN FRESHWATER SEAHORSE

In 1979, Dr. George Sprague Myers (1905-1985), ichthyologist and aquarist probably best known for describing the neon tetra, wrote of his long-standing interest in the question of freshwater sea horses. He first learned of such stories when, in 1953, legendary tropical aquarium fish collector A. Rabaut called him to ask, if a dozen or so freshwater sea horses could be collected, who might fund such an expedition?

(A brief detour: Rabaut was the explorer who actually first discovered the neon tetra. Rabaut had been collecting fish in South America,

when “in the depths of the jungle, a native told him of a fish with lights. He followed his instinct and discovered the neon tetra, which he brought to Germany” (Tippit 2009). So, technically, the neon tetra deserves a spot on cryptozoological discovery lists. It was also this event which led Rabaut to become highly secretive about his discoveries, as other collectors quickly found a way to export neon tetras to the aquarium trade for more profit than Rabaut was able to make.)

He went on to say that while collecting (at an undisclosed location) in a large shallow water area, “nowhere near saltwater,” he started to dipnet for insect larvae to feed his catch, and was amazed to find that he had caught a bunch of baby sea horses. He sought adults, but had no luck before he had to leave. Myers couldn’t offer any suggestions for wealthy backers, so Rabaut thanked him and rang off. Myers knew Rabaut had most recently been collecting in Southeast Asia, and suspected that he might have been somewhere in the basin of the Mekong River. In 1977, Myers came across a 1916 paper in the *Bulletin of the Museum of Natural History in Paris*, in which Dr. Louis Roule described a sea horse from the Mekong River (*Hippocampus arnei*; due to a typographical error, this was originally *H. aimei*, but Roule posted a revision shortly after). Two specimens (supposedly male and female) were deposited in the Paris Museum, collected in 1910 by Dr. Pierre



Fig. 1. — Femelle.



Fig. 2. — Mâle.

Roule’s *Hippocampus arnei*, now referred to two prior species.

Arné at the Laos/Thailand border. Myers noted that the specimens should undergo evaluation to make sure that they were in fact distinct, as the sea horses of Asia can be quite variable and confusing. The presence of babies might not indicate a freshwater endemic, as some saltwater pipefish, for example, will enter freshwater rivers.

Later research did show that, in fact, Roule's *Hippocampus arnei* pair were actually female seahorses of two separate marine species. One was *H. barbouri* and the other was *H. spinosissimus*. *H. barbouri* appears to be found mostly in Indonesian waters, so that is unusual, but the hedgehog seahorse (*H. spinosissimus*) is well-known throughout a wide range from Asia to Australia. (Bleher (2016) discovered that Roule's specimens had holes in them, indicating where they had been nailed to a fisherman's hut. So, it's more than possible that they may have been traded from another region rather than sourced in the area Arné claimed he collected them.)

It seems probable that Rabaut's baby seahorses were from a marine species that may have had babies in lower salinity waters, but as Rabaut never disclosed the exact location of his sighting, we have no way to investigate further.

THE LAKE TITICACA SEAHORSE

Lake Titicaca is situated in the Andes, on the border of Bolivia and Peru, and is the largest true lake in South America. It is only slightly brackish, and is home to a number of endemic species (some rather threatened), including the large Lake Titicaca frog, *Orestias* killifish, and *Trichomycterus* catfish. The best-known report of a seahorse here is found in engineer and amateur archaeologist Arthur Posnansky's *Tihuanacu*. It's a brief mention, part of a section arguing that Lake Titicaca was the remnant of marine waters that were landlocked when the Andes rose:

"That Lake Titicaca is what remains of a great suspended body of ocean water, is evinced by the fact that the fauna of the lake—today completely degenerated—is very similar to that which exists in the sea. Several years ago, when the author was engaged in studies and excavations on the islands of the lake, he went on a fishing party organized by the Indians and saw taken from the nets a *Hippocampus* which was degenerated both in form and size." A footnote states: "The Indians believe that this animal is a sort of divinity, like everything that is

strange and inexplicable to them. The author asked them if such finds were frequent, to which they replied that, on the contrary, they were very rare. Furthermore, they added that, whenever such a discovery was made there followed a bad fishing year. . . . Those who made up the party and the residents of Coati Island made an official record of this rare find. At the present time this animal is located in the Museum of Natural History of Berlin: Zoological Section, Posnansky Collection, Series III, No. 1.”

A photograph of the seahorse accompanied this; it appears to have originally been published in a 1911 text by Posnansky, and given the name *Hippocampus titicacensis*. (I’ve not seen that text, but a 1914



*b. Hippocampus
Titicacensis.*

text by Posnansky does provide that name underneath the photo.) In their global revision of *Hippocampus*, Lourie et al (2016) referred to this species as *Hippocampus titicacaensis* (sic?), and denote it a ‘*nomen nudum*’, or a species name that lacks a published description, and is therefore unavailable and shouldn’t be used unless and until a taxonomist republishes the name with a valid description.

It is unfortunate that, for many authors who mention this alleged creature, the validity of the Lake Titicaca seahorse seems to be dependent on which geological model they support (Gregory 1913; Moon 1939). For example, Koepcke (1959) noted that one author rejected the existence of seahorses in Lake Titicaca because he couldn’t reconcile it with his belief in a glacial origin of the lake, while another author, Welter, thought it was strong evidence for his own theory of the marine origin of the lake. (Welter even claimed to have seen at least twenty seahorses himself, among the rushes near a pier in August 1920. I’ve not located a copy of Welter’s 1947 paper that mentions this, but while Garner (1964), again due to his geological preferences, suggests Welter was referring to dried specimens in a market, the context strongly suggests otherwise. Garner does add a few details, such as the sighting occurred about 1920 in the wharf area around the Bolivian village Guaqui.) Koepcke noted that no other zoological collections from the lake had gathered evidence of seahorses, and suggested that perhaps a dried seahorse from the coast had been given to Posnansky, as one market on the Peruvian side of the lake regularly sold marine seashells. Koepcke appears not to have realized that Posnansky claimed to have seen the seahorse removed, living, from the water.

One archaeological discovery in the Lake Titicaca region was a ceramic which, though the head and tail are broken off and missing, clearly represents a seahorse. It was found on Suriqui Island and is from the pre-Incan Tiwanaku culture. It is currently housed in the Museo Nacional de Arqueología Tiwanaku. Numerous images of this ceramic can be found online.

A second large piece of a seahorse effigy ceramic (believed to have been ritually broken as ceremonial pottery) was found buried on the island of Pariti by one of the locals, and is now in the Pariti Museum (Korpisaari and Pärssinen 2011).

Ruiz (2017) notes a few other sightings. Dick Ibarra Grasso, on a school excursion, found one along the shore near Copacabana that

was deposited in formaldehyde with the San Calixto school museum. Unfortunately, that specimen disappeared when the school museum was transferred to new facilities. Mario Montaña Aragón, in his *Diccionario De Mitología Aymara* (1999; La Paz: CIMA), is said to mention his own account of seeing native fisherman remove a seahorse from their nets and immediately return it to the water as sacred, but I have not seen a copy of this text to confirm that.

The native people of Lake Titicaca are the Aymara and the Uru, though only the Aymara language is spoken today. Conde (2018) notes that Bolivian archaeologist Oswaldo Rivera apparently also saw fishermen return a seahorse back to the lake, and that they referred to it as *Challwatayka*, or ‘mother of fishes.’ No source is given for this story, and it sounds very close to the Aragón story, so it may be apocryphal—further investigation is warranted.

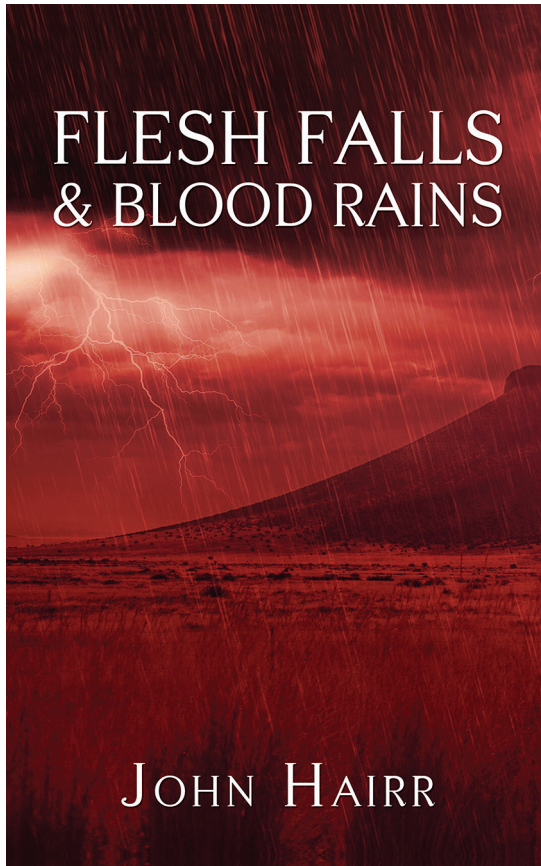
As Bleher (2016) notes, along with the ceramic seahorse piece in the Tiwanaku museum is a dried seahorse specimen with the label, ‘*Hipocampus titcanensis*’ (sic). It’s easy to see from his photograph that this is not the same specimen that Posnansky collected (though Bleher assumes it is), but it’s less certain whether this specimen actually came from Lake Titicaca. If so (perhaps the museum has collection data to confirm), then it might be a second specimen of an as-yet-undescribed species. Bleher mentions also that he met an elderly man on one of the lake’s islands who claimed to have seen the seahorse long ago, somewhere on the Peruvian side of the lake.

It’s interesting to note that in various articles about this seahorse, there’s a running thread of possible threats to the species’ survival: introduced trout and salmon, pollution, lowered salinity. This is why it is so important to actually follow through and locate these significant unknown species, no matter how small. It’s too easy to lose a species if we don’t know it exists.

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Flesh Falls & Blood Rains

John Hairr

Author John Hairr examines the Fortean phenomena known as flesh falls and blood rains, looking at historical cases and what we know (and don't know) about their causes. Often considered 'signs and portents,' these often have their roots in climatological factors far from where they appear.

In Search of Tł'íish Naat'Agíí (Snake-That-Flies)

**Exploring the Prospect of an Unidentified Species
within Navajo and Hopi Lands**

Nick Sucik

[*Editor's Note:* This is a reprint of a paper written by Nick Sucik in 2003, while he was working on tribal lands in Arizona. It offers details on a rarely discussed mystery animal while also providing a window into the often hidden folklore and traditions to which Native Americans hold. Additional notes on 'flying snakes' in North America were published in the now out-of-print volume, *Cryptozoology and the Investigation of Lesser-Known Mystery Animals* (2006). A 2009 news report on Arizona 'flying snakes' can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iGEGAukTpk>. While certainly rare, sightings continue to be reported. One individual posted a video in 2018, claiming that he and his girlfriend saw a 'flying snake' in a Northern Arizona canyon: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=IZ3ZC4oT2No]

Edited by Russell Bates
Images by Aleksandar S. Trivich

Since early in the Spring of 2003 I have been conducting research into what appears to be a form of unclassified and unidentified reptile present within Navajo and Hopi lands in Arizona. In presenting a general report from my ongoing investigation I hope to:

- a) create awareness as to the presence of the potential species in question

- b) receive co-operative assistance and/or a formal endorsement toward current efforts to locate a live specimen, and
- c) understand the Tribe's position toward seeking out potentially unclassified animals within the Hopi Reservation.

INTRODUCTION

As of March 2003 I have been employed as a community coordinator in disputed tribal territories assigned to survey and to assist with the needs of Navajo families living within the Hopi Partitioned Lands. Being originally from Minnesota myself and having been stationed in Hawaii with the US Marine Corps, I found it extraordinarily easy to take great interest in the comparatively unique landscape and ecology of northern Arizona.

During the course of my stay in this region, word has come to me from both the HPL and the Navajo Partitioned Lands residents regarding rumors of strange, seemingly out-of-place animals allegedly sighted from time to time in certain areas. Considering that these vast stretches of terrain relatively are uninhabited, it would not seem impossible that there yet may exist fauna undocumented by modern science. Hence, I've made careful inquiry among the locals to see if there wasn't more to these rumors, that is, beyond mere loose gossip. I in turn have come to hear a long and rather colorful assortment of strange creatures allegedly seen or at least spoken about. This anecdotal bestiary includes within it snakes the size of telephone poles, scorpions the size of dogs, monitor lizards lengthy enough to span across a dirt road, nocturnal gorillas, stalking hyenas, skulking leopards, howling wild men, hostile mermaids, lurking water serpents, and elusive miniature horses that only are seen during early summer mornings.

Some of these alleged entities might be only the result of misidentifications, coupled with local excitement (if not hysteria) and generalized exaggeration.

Case in point: during June 2003, I heard rumors of a hyena being seen by locals in the Big Mountain area. The beast was accused of devouring newborn calves and colts alike, along with having taken down a few sheep as well and, most disturbingly, on one occasion being observed eating dog carcasses. A local man was said to have tracked and killed the beast, the carcass of which area residents then came to view. Some said it was in every way like a hyena, while others

said it was more like a big cat. I reasoned that, if there were any question left lingering over the identity of the animal, its bones should be recovered and brought in for examination. Such efforts were proven unnecessary for, when I spoke to the man in question, he promptly identified the animal as a dog. It was a very unusual dog both in appearance and behavior, but it still simply was a dog.

In spite of this sobering example, there are some stories of particular creatures that have such a consistent pattern that one wonders if there possibly is factual basis behind them. One such rumored animal stands out in particular from the above assortment, in that it widely is accepted as real. Adding credence to its possible existence is the uniformity of descriptions and testimonies regarding its morphology and its behavior.

SNAKE-THAT-FLIES

Among rural Navajos, both traditional and modern, there is enduring recognition of an as-yet unclassified and unrecognized species of reptile, known as *Tł'iish Naat'Agii*, "Snake-That-Flies." Briefly, it is described as a snake (or at least as a snake-like reptile), possessing the actual ability to fly, as opposed to simply gliding, through aid of membranes or expanded skin extending behind the head and fanning out along the body, not unlike the exaggerated display of a cobra's hood.

Initially it may seem unlikely for such an animal to escape detection by science. But such reported reptiles are considered by the local people as a natural presence among the indigenous fauna. During my discussions with area residents, interestingly some of them were puzzled or became confused by an outsider's special attention to this particular animal. Knowledge of "Snake-That-Flies" by no means is limited only to the Navajo. I now understand that such creatures likewise are known to members of the Hopi Tribe, according to one source, as "Sun Snakes." While looking into this matter and also keeping my research colleagues informed of my pursuits, it was inescapable that comparisons would arise with descriptions and traditions that testify to flying serpents from elsewhere in North America.

At present, I've spoken with more than a dozen individuals who actually had sighted a specimen themselves, or at least who knew of a close family member, friend, or acquaintance who had experienced such a sighting. Aside from direct, second-, and third-hand

testimonies, I also sought out and familiarized myself with the local lore attributed to the animals, which time may or may not prove accurate to the nature of the creatures. When speaking with witnesses I've taken great pains not to 'lead' or 'suggest' details or descriptions or otherwise to risk compromising the accuracy of the testimony. And while knowledge or awareness of the serpents almost is common in certain areas, it would not appear to be a matter of common-knowledge so as to be openly discussed and widely understood. It's been difficult in a number of cases to get people to divulge what they know, partly due to the traditional Navajo perception of snakes generally being negative, if not perceiving them as outright evil. And while some regard the serpent as a mere snake despite its extraordinary characteristics, others sometimes regard them as supernatural entities and therefore not a topic acceptable for open conversation.

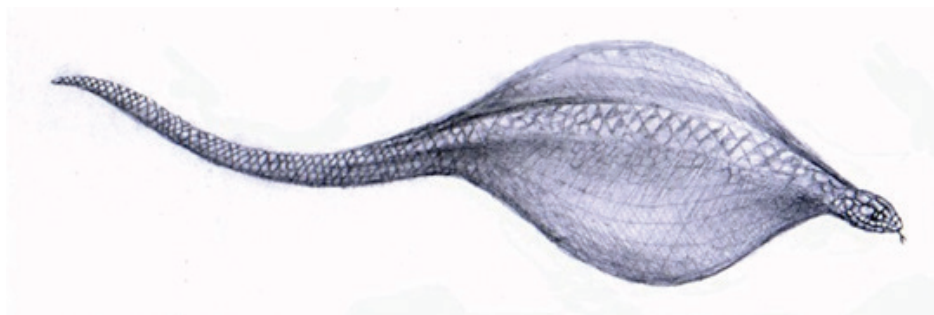
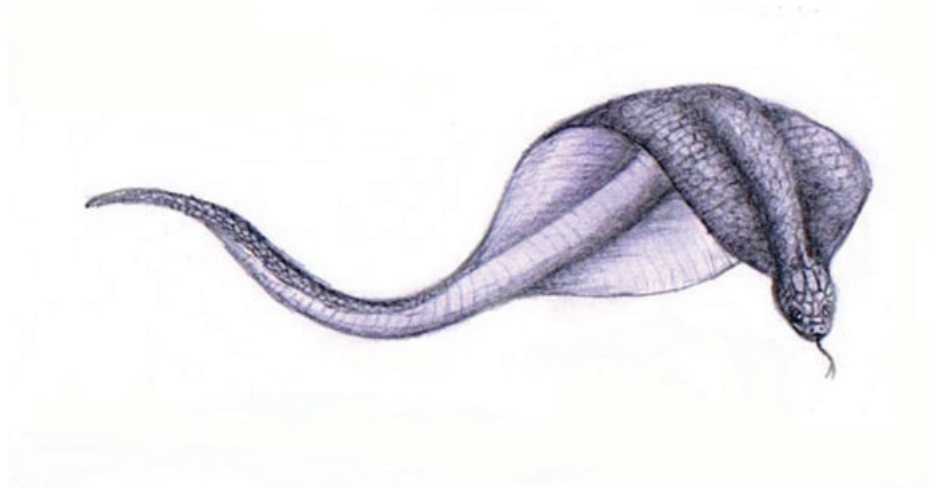
The sightings in this report are by no means the extent of the accounts I've collected, but I've selected those that comparatively offer more in describing particular characteristics.

MORPHOLOGY: GENERAL APPEARANCE

Despite the flying aspect, the general consensus among witnesses and others well familiar with the lore is that the reptiles are a form of snake, as opposed to being a 'snake-like animal.' In some accounts the witnesses cite the sole difference between a snake and the creature they had seen was simply the fact that it was steadily traveling off the ground. Only in cases where the animal was seen at close range was the presence of 'wings' noted. Sizes of the creatures tended to vary anywhere between 8 inches long to 12 feet in length, while the most common response was that they were 'snake-sized.'

COLORATION

Accounts vary where the animal's color and/or colors are concerned. This feature seemed quite secondary in reports by observers and, as most sightings take place from a distance, color seldom is discernible. However, one tribal elder told me the poisonous variant of 'Snake-That-Flies' could be identified by its "red belly."



Witness' composite sketches, though the wings almost always are described as transparent, whereas in these images they are colored.

(Images by Aleksandar S. Trivich)

APPENDAGES

The “wings” undoubtedly are the most peculiar feature, even if they technically may fall short of the definition. Those only having heard of the snakes tend to assume they sport bat-like wings, whereas witnesses mostly have described something far differing. Instead of possessing limbs, the animals sport a retractable membrane that emerges from behind the head and then trails back to either side along a significant portion of the body length. Some have likened it to the expansive display of a cobra’s hood, though both much larger and longer. This membrane is faint in color, almost to the point of transparency or, as one woman put it, “like they were made of plastic.” Thus, it may tend to go unnoticed, creating the surreal image of a snake magically ‘slithering’ through mid-air. In three separate accounts that I have collected, one first-hand and the other two by second-hand, the membranes, or “wings,” were noted as being “very beautiful” with a collage of “rainbow” colors. From these descriptions, such a spectacle sounds as if it only may be observable when light hits the membrane at certain angles.

BIOMECHANICS

That such an animal could persist so long beneath the radar of modern zoology perhaps is creditable to the simple fact that the concept of a *flying* snake likely is an oxymoron. In many cultures, including the Navajo, snakes are deemed dirty or vile due to their earthbound and slithering nature. Flight, in many ways, would be the very opposite of their lowly disposition. Symbolism aside, comprehending how a limbless animal actually could achieve true flight demands mental acrobatics. And that perhaps is the creature’s greatest defense against discovery. Their very existence would defy not only basic concepts of herpetology but also our present understanding of bio-physics.

FLYING

Officially, the only “flying snake” recognized today is a canopy dweller found in Southeast Asia. Its given title is unfitting, as the snake’s aerial feats are limited to a partially-controlled downward glide. Its flattened ribs serve to make the animal ribbon-shaped, thus to slow the descent. Not since the pterosaurs of the Mesozoic Era are reptiles thought to have achieved legitimate flight. The possibility of a true *flying* snake

here in northern Arizona has significant implications beyond being a “new” species. Its means of accomplishing flight entirely would be exceptional to all other (known) forms of flying animals. “Snake-That-Flies,” if confirmed and documented, would be the only animal known to achieve flight without conventional wings.

Most sightings involve the snakes traveling steadily through the air, though some accounts cite gains and changes in elevation, sometimes drastically so, confirming their time in the air is not limited merely to gliding. Most notable are four separate accounts that involve the animals achieving and then maintaining a circular course.

- Workers building a hogan were startled one evening when a “snake” flew inside the incomplete building and flew madly about in a circle, seemingly unable to find its way back out. The workers cautiously tried to kill the creature before it finally escaped.
- Two women related to me a memorable teenage experience they had sneaking out of the Tuba City high school dorms late one night. They made their way through a canyon and had arrived at a reservoir. A hissing noise suddenly was heard, seemingly overhead, which they compared to that made by a jet engine. Through the moonlight they saw a snake-like object diving down toward the reservoir over and over again before lifting back up into the air. The object swooped down at the water until it apparently noticed the girls as they sought to hide behind a bush. Much to their horror, it then flew in circles above them, as if it was aware of their presence. Eventually it flew off and the two fled back to their dorm, feeling much chastened.
- A story from the 1930s describes how a Big Mountain area family held a bonfire after a day of tending their crops, only to have a “dragon” appear above them and fly in circles around the flames.
- In the 1980s, a teenage boy was reported as having shot a flying snake that swooped down at him whenever he neared its dwelling.

PROPULSION

The mechanics of propulsion remain the greatest mystery of an already mysterious creature, though all reports coincide in citing how the entire body is in motion during the animal's flight. The puzzling aspect of the described motion is that it frequently is described as being exactly that of a snake slithering on the ground. One could assume that these exact motions only are being compared in memory to the more standard spectacle, but I've encountered firm insistence that the contortions in every way were like those of a typical snake, only differing by occurring in mid-air. Such claims defy logic, however, as anything that becomes airborne and remains so must force air forward, downward, and aside for aerodynamic lift. The horizontal undulations of reptiles would be worthless in this manner. It is not impossible for a snake to undulate vertically to some degree but it is difficult to imagine one doing so long enough or vigorously enough to lift its own body weight.

As to the role of the membrane, I mostly have been under the impression it serves as a passive sail, directing and somehow forcing air downward to generate lift. One report, however, would suggest they hold a far more active function. In a story told to me since beginning this report, a woman reported a brief encounter experienced by her grandfather and uncle. The men were in the midst of building a shade when a flying snake landed atop a nearby branch. Perceiving it as a good omen, the grandfather reached out and seized the creature behind its head. While in the man's grasp, the serpent began to *flutter* its semi-transparent ("like plastic") oval wings at such a rapid beat they faded out of view (à la the wings of a hummingbird or bumblebee). The man then released the animal and instantly it shot up into the air and flew out of sight. The story also offered some insight as to the size of the snake. She explained that her grandfather was a tall man (over 5'11", at least) and while he held the snake at his chest level, its body still reached the ground.

CONTORTION

Two mentions have been made about flying snakes carrying sticks or twigs. One woman told that her mother saw a flying serpent on the ground that carried twigs by arching over them and pinching them between the bend of its neck and head. This certainly would be impossible in position and function, based upon everything known about

snake skeletons, and it just may be that she misunderstood what her mother had tried to describe. Oddly enough, I have heard another flying snake being seen with a small bundle of sticks that were constricted in its tail! As absurd as these stories sound, they would appear to acknowledge and support the belief that the serpents build nests in cliffs, which will be examined later in this report.

SOUND PRODUCTION: FLIGHT NOISE

Often cited is a type of ‘hissing’ sound, separate from a snake’s threatening hiss, which likely is made while the reptiles are in flight, in many cases even before being seen.

- In the 1930s or 1940s, a Big Mountain resident was out on a morning walk when he heard a growing hiss from off in the distance. His son, who related the story, likened his father’s description of the noise as very similar to a jet engine, like the drawn-out blowing of air. The man looked around until he spotted a snake’s outline in mid-air, sparkling in the sunlight as it seemingly slithered by overhead.
- The two women who recounted their nocturnal encounter near Tuba City described hearing first a hissing noise which they likened to that of a jet engine.
- In 1996 or ’97, a Hardrock area teenager out walking near his homesite heard a snake’s hiss and immediately froze in place. He stood unmoving and carefully looked about. The sound grew louder but he saw nothing on the ground. When he looked up, he saw a snake with thin extended transparent flaps “twisting” its way through midair before it finally landed in a tree.

VOLUNTARY NOISE

Further distancing the creature from standard snakes is the claim that “Snake-That-Flies” emits sounds other than the reported hissing, such as a kind of growl. The only specific example I can cite involved one woman’s account of what she saw and heard when she was a young girl. While that specimen flew through the air, she recounted that it made a “nice” hooting sound, like “looht, looht, looht,” each such hoot seeming to be in time to the reptile’s side-to-side contortions.

HABITAT

A) Nests: Aside from a capability for flight, the dwelling aspect of the reptiles almost is as remarkable. The creatures are reputed to construct cylindrical nests composed of small twigs and erected like towers against cliff walls. At present I have been guided only to one such structure, a collapsed nest in White Valley between Pinon and Hardrock. I have been informed that there is an intact nest near Big Mountain and another is said to be along the edge of a mesa near Hotevilla. I personally examined the White Valley nest and am enclosing photos taken at the scene. I've spoken to Big Mountain residents who claim to have seen the "dragon" nest in their area but so far have failed to inspire anyone to lead me there, as they traditionally and purposely avoid the site. The mesa nest near Hotevilla supposedly is known to (but not exclusively by) an elder residing in Tuba City. Apparently he shepherded a flock of sheep for a Hopi man in Hotevilla and often has watched the nest and its airborne inhabitants from a distance using binoculars.



Originally dubbed "Nest-That-Stands" and built entirely of small twigs, the structure, until relatively recently, stood up along this cliff wall in White Valley. Local tradition maintains the nest had been there possibly for 80 years or more. Shepherders deliberately avoided the site on account of the flying serpent that inhabited the nest. Sometime in the 1980s, rocks above the structure gave way, collapsing the nest into its present position. (The 11-inch shoe seen is for size comparison.)

Exactly how snakes could construct such structures baffles one even more than trying to comprehend their flight without wings. Still, that they “make” nests is repeated over and again, even acknowledged in a Mexican reference that shall be included later in this. It may be that the serpents actually don’t build these nests themselves but, more probably, come to inhabit derelict nests of predatory birds, mainly hawks or eagles. Snakes are opportunistic animals and will inhabit the underground burrows of owls or prairie dogs. However, as stated earlier, I’ve heard two separate references where the snakes allegedly were seen “carrying sticks.”

As to the actual function of the nests and the number of occupants they hold, nothing I’ve gathered so far offers any clue. Based on local lore surrounding the White Valley nest, I have the impression that, until recently, it was a solitary snake that claimed residence. However, from a second-hand tale of the Hotevilla nest, it seemed as though a number of flying reptiles were observed emerging from the aerie.

B) Rocks: More common than nest references are accounts or stories describing *Tl’iish Naat’Agii* residing within rock crevices. The serpents so far only have been cited in areas of rocky terrain. Inquiries about relatively flat areas, such as Teesto, always were fruitless. Stone enclosures may serve as transient homes as certain area stories speak of the serpents suddenly appearing but remaining in that area only for a limited time.

In the Big Mountain area is a conspicuous rock formation known as “Sitting Rock” to the locals. Memory and tradition maintain that it once was the dwelling of a lone flying serpent. High in the rock was a wind-eroded hole or ‘window,’ and the animal had settled within. Below the rock was a well-frequented footpath; both travelers and shepherds long had learned to keep their distance as the snake was reputed for its hostility. Eventually, in the 1920s, locals became fed up with special detours on account of the snake and an effort to smoke it out was made by starting a fire in one of the lower holes. Whether the snake was present at the time is unclear but the attempt either to drive it out or kill it was deemed unsuccessful. It is unclear just when the serpent moved on. Still visible today are discolorations where a fire once was set in a hole below “Sitting Rock.”



Sitting-Rock located off the Hardrock bound road in Big Mountain. Sometime in the early 1900s a specimen stationed itself within the tunneled spaces of the stone. A mark of discoloration can be seen splashed around one opening where, according to tradition, locals set a fire to smoke out the creature.

AGGRESSION

Traditionally the dwellings of flying snakes, be they rock or nest, were avoided, not necessarily as respectful custom but moreso due to the snakes' aggressive behavior.

- In the early 1900s, it is said that a man on horseback passed near Sitting-Rock, apparently uninformed of its territorial occupant. The serpent flew from its hole toward the man and succeeded in biting him on the back of his head, peeling off his leather cap. The rider promptly fled the area, abandoning his cap.
- Twenty years or so ago, a Hardrock teenager shot and killed a flying snake. Whenever he happened to pass nearby, the serpent would emerge from its rock hole, become airborne, and

then swoop down threateningly at him. At last, he came to the area armed with a shotgun and killed the snake, supposedly in mid-flight. (The individual in question died a few years after the event.)

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND PERCEPTION

The Navajo generally hold snakes in negative temperament and this has been something of an obstacle in my inquiries on the matter. If snakes as a topic initially are not considered 'too' taboo, then most times it seems that unprecedented focus on the subject begets hesitation. Whereas traditional Navajos regard snakes as lowly, filthy creatures, I've heard two references of offerings being made toward flying serpents or at least being left at spots where they were seen or were thought to dwell. Likewise, in the story explained beneath 'Propulsion,' the sudden presence of a flying snake was perceived as a good omen. Exactly where this perception originates or even how widespread it is among traditional Navajos remains unclear.

Of course, some encounters with *Tl'iish Naat'Agii* are received differently. A mesa resident of Red Lake told of a neighbor who, many years ago, was caring for her sick daughter. As was the custom when a child was sick, the woman brought the girl to a particular side of their hogan to bask in the sunlight. While they were there, a winged snake flew down, landed on the ground nearby, and immediately coiled its body. The woman apparently attributed the event as a sign pertaining to her usage of peyote in the Native American Church and, as the story goes, she became a pious Christian in response.

While Navajo elders' response to flying snake encounters may deem the experience positive in some manner, it would appear that younger generations hold no such reverence, as recent accounts end with the creatures being killed after having been sighted. One individual I contacted has concluded that the reason "Snake-That-Flies" is rare today simply is due to the persistent habit of killing the creatures upon discovery. If this is true, urgent incentive exists to identify it and recognize it as an endangered species before it is too late.

ETHNOLOGY

If such animals have been present in the region for an extended length of time, as opposed to recent introduction or migration, then one

should expect a form of acknowledgement within tribal belief structure or lore beyond mere anecdote. While I am completely unfamiliar with Hopi acknowledgement at this point, I've been told that the Navajo rituals for the Wind, Rainbow and Lightning Ways all make reference to flying snakes or at least make representation in sand paintings. I've been unable to confirm this, though I am aware of their role in the Bead Chant story. As told, the snakes descend from a sort of celestial dwelling to rescue the main hero who was left stranded in the clouds when his befriended eagle companions fail to carry him any higher into the sky. The snakes succeed where eagles fall short, triumphantly delivering the hero into the sky world.

There is a curious though painfully short reference to flying snakes in Gladys A. Reichard's "*Navaho Religion: A Study of Symbolism*" (Princeton Bolligen Publishing, 1950), which states on page 467:

One of Matthews' informants states that when the animals were people, the birds and snakes built cliff dwellings, and he asks the rhetorical question, "If they had not wings, how could they have reached their houses?" He explained why the snakes were able to help the Eagles and Hawks lift the boy to the sky in the Bead Chant story.

OUTSIDE REFERENCES

Flying snake references are by no means exclusive to Navajo and Hopi lands or to the southwestern United States for that matter. Through the assistance of colleagues, I have been apprised of a small number of written accounts pertaining to the presence of, or the presence of a belief in, snakes capable of flight in other areas of the continent. Adding substantial credence to the matter is how particular attributes discussed in this report find echoes in these outside references.

LEON, MEXICO

The first to be reviewed is titled *The Serpent* by Juana Pequeno and told by Nicole Ruiz, which was found by a research colleague at: www.sanbenito.k12.tx.us/Schools/BertaCabaza/READING%20DEPT/Carmona/Snake/The_Serpent.html

My grandmother grew up in the mountains of Mexico, near a town called Leon. There was talk about a creature named “*a serpe*” or serpent. It was supposed to be a rattlesnake that had gotten very old. It had wings like a bat, feet like an eagle with long talons, and thick black hairs between some of the scales. Its head was just like a rattlesnakes with huge fangs. It built a nest like a birds, between large rocks. Supposedly, it was dangerous because it could bite like a rattlesnake, and it was easier to get you because it could fly. When it flew, it would make a strange humming sound. Whenever one was heard or seen, the villagers would chase it until they killed it. When my grandmother was eight years old, she was chased by a bull. To get away from it she climbed up on a big pile of rocks. When she reached the top, she saw a bird’s nest and there in the middle was a serpent. As it started to uncoil, she jumped off the pile and ran to go tell her father what she had seen. Everybody from the ranch came back and killed it.

Incidentally, while I was in the Marines, a Mexican friend once told me how in the province where he grew up, it was widely accepted that when snakes reached an advanced age, they would develop “feathers.” He felt the evolutionary concept that scaly dinosaurs became feathered birds vindicated the lore. With Quetzalcoatl in mind, I then asked him if there was any mention that the feathered snakes flew. Regrettably, three years later, I cannot recall his exact response.

Whereas the nest-building affiliation and the reference to a “humming sound” certainly ring with familiarity; the bat-like wings, eagle feet and “thick black hairs” appear as problematical features. As it happens, I have heard two separate accounts purported to be sightings of flying snakes yet significantly contrasted from standard descriptions. In both instances the reptile was described as having a horse-shaped head, with bat-like wings and feet. Both accounts cited the presence of hair on the creature’s otherwise scaly body. Presented with these three references to flying snakes sporting bat-wings and limbs, I cannot but wonder whether an entirely separate type of flying animal unknowingly has been intertwined within the matter. However, this confusion

needn't distract from simultaneous traits acknowledged in Mexican lore and in that of the Navajo.

OKLAHOMA

In personal correspondence, Kiowa professional writer Russell Bates has told me that, during the Depression Era as cars were abandoned for the more feasible and affordable horse, thus allowing travelers a greater exposure to surrounding wildlife, stories began to emerge of flying snakes being seen in the Wichita Mountains of Oklahoma.

FLORIDA

Richard Muirhead, an English researcher with a particular interest in reports of unusual reptiles, came upon an interesting passage in a book called "Myths of Ancient Science" by Edmund Goldsmid published in 1886: 'Hieronymu Benzo, in his account of the New World and of the French expedition to Florida, in chapter 4 on page 480 it states:

"I saw a certain kind of Serpent which was furnished with wings, and which was killed near a wood by some of our men. Its wings were so shaped that by moving them it could raise itself from the ground and fly along, but only at a very short distance from the earth."

SOUTH CAROLINA

This final example comes from no less than the *New York Times*, dated Wednesday, May 30, 1888, page 3:

Columbia, S.C., May 29.—Closely following the appearance of the hand of flame in the heavens above Ohio comes a story from Darlington County, in this State, of a flying serpent. Last Sunday evening, just before sunset, Miss Ida Davis and her two younger sisters were strolling through the woods, when they were suddenly startled by the appearance of a huge serpent moving through the air above them. The serpent was distant only two or three rods when they first beheld it, and was sailing through the air with a speed equal to that of a hawk or buzzard, but without any visible means of propulsion.

Its movements in its flight resembled those of a snake, and it looked a formidable object as it wound its way along, being apparently about 15 feet in length. The girls stood amazed and followed it with their eyes until it was lost to view in the distance. The flying serpent was also seen by a number of people in other parts of the county early in the afternoon of the same day, and by those it is represented as emitting a hissing noise which could be distinctly heard. The negroes in that section are greatly excited over the matter. Religious revival meetings have been inaugurated in all their churches, and many of them declare that the day of judgment is near at hand.

At this stage, it perhaps has become unnecessary to highlight the patterns of continuity that bind these unrelated references.

CONCLUSION

Pursuing evidence of “Snake-That-Flies” may have become a race against time. The majority to whom I’ve spoken on the matter believe the animals are on the decline, if not already extinct in some areas. What contributes to their demise, beyond human agency, is unclear. What is clear is that, without ‘discovery,’ without proper recognition, and without subsequent monitoring, the species very well may be lost even before it is ‘found.’ (All that having been said, now it just has been made known to me that there apparently was a sighting just last year near Shungopavi.)

Seeking out the creatures need not entail lengthy search and survey efforts into areas of previous sightings. If an open atmosphere were created that conveyed official interest in the animals, say, via the media, it might inspire those familiar with active dwelling sites to step forward and submit their knowledge of potential locations. Winter actually may prove the better time to seek this information, as traditionalists tend to discuss reptile matters more openly under reassurance that the creatures sleep, cannot hear their names, and therefore are unlikely to appear or to cause harm.

In addition to the significant implications “Snake-That-Flies” would hold for science, its ‘discovery’ would hold much benefit for the tribes, perhaps even as a tourist magnet. In turn, it might draw in a

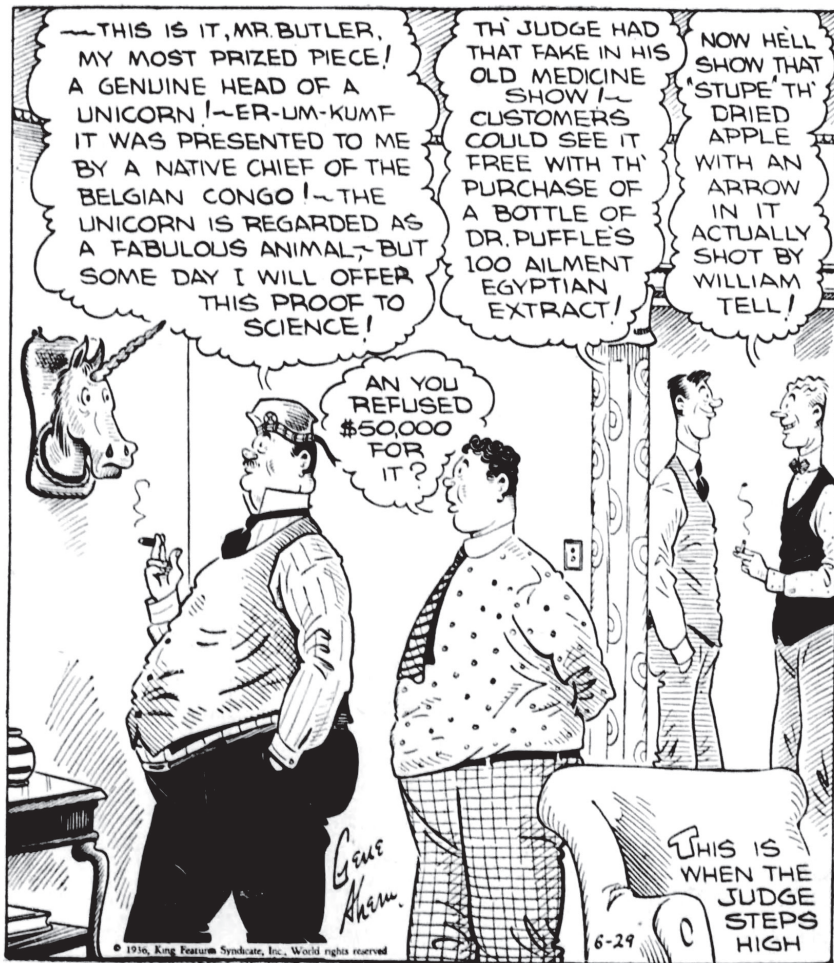
considerable amount of welcomed revenue, especially in the light of news that the Mojave station will be closing in two years.

Finally, the greatest implication such a discovery may merit is that, acknowledgement of such an animal would vindicate the rationality of traditional tribal knowledge and culture. Historically the tendency has been to dismiss native conceptual understandings of matters pertaining to nature, only to have many of them validated years later. The symbiotic relations of humans and animals, the medicinal values of particular flora, and even the intertwining complexities of ecosystems in the New World are just a few examples. As well, ‘discovering’ and proving such a creature, which long has been known to tribes of the Southwest, would serve to remind that Indo-European science has observed these continents only for five hundred years. And that there remains a lot of ‘catching-up’ to do with those native peoples whose devoted study of this land outstrips the scientific observations by twelve thousand years and more.

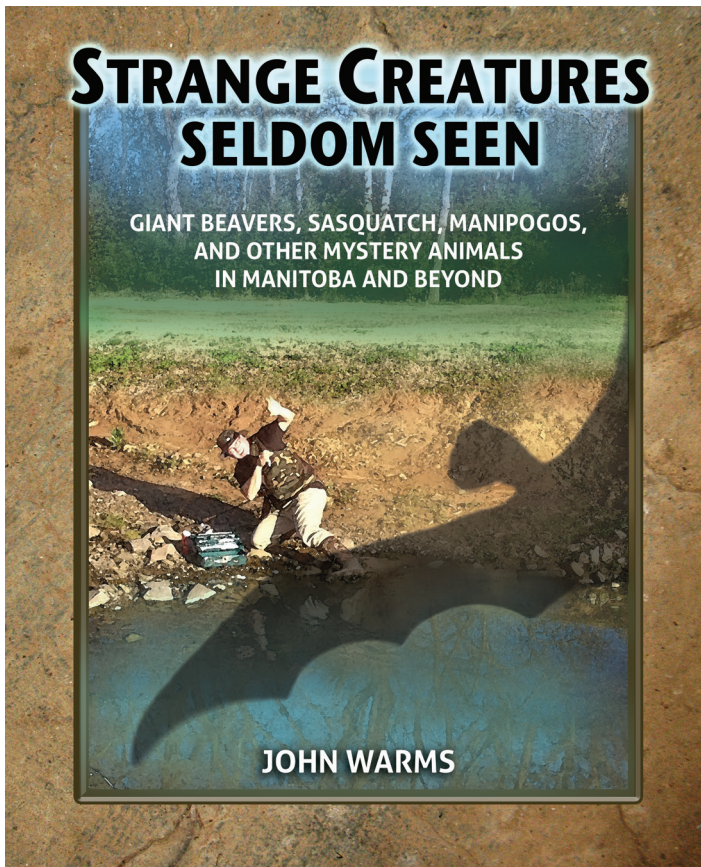
[*Editor’s Note Part Deux:* There is no doubt that the idea of a flying reptile of this sort will engender immediate disbelief in many people. For a cryptozoological investigator, it isn’t a matter of belief in or against a particular ethnozoological entity, it’s a belief that the matter should be investigated. Ethnozoology by its very definition is uncertain and subjective; “snake” may not actually mean an ophidian, regardless of what the eyewitness believes. The creature, if it exists, may be some sort of invertebrate, for example, that resembles a snake. Eyewitnesses may be unreliable in their ability to adequately distinguish and classify physical characters and behavior. All reports must read with a critical eye.]

Judge Puffle

---By Gene Ahern



1936 Newspaper Comic, Judge Puffle



Strange Creatures Seldom Seen

John Warm's

Canadian author John Warm's offers one of the most detailed looks at the cryptozoological sightings from the province of Manitoba. Sasquatch, lake monsters, flying creatures, giant beavers, and many other strange creatures are described. John is active in field work, trying to obtain evidence that will prove that these creatures actually exist. This is a must-have book for your cryptozoological library.

Book Reviews

Exotic Aliens: The Lion and Cheetah in India

Valmiki Thapar, Romila Thapar, and Yusuf Ansari

Aleph Book Company, 2013

Reviewer: Simon E. Townsend

Researchers into the history of the introducing of large iconic predators beyond their established natural range have little in the literature to assist them. While there is a very great deal more information concerning the reintroduction of large predators to their historical range, especially in North America and Africa, it does not usually involve negative comment apart from livestock interests. *Exotic Aliens* by Thapar, Thapar, and Ansari however, is a departure from this and indeed has been seriously controversial, especially in India.

In essence this volume makes a contention that was at once bitterly received in some wildlife circles and at the same time very exciting in its novelty to those naturalists who attempt to gather evidence of 'out-of-place big cats' in other parts of the world. Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States all have very active researchers into this phenomenon. All three of the above authors researched historical data extensively in a quest to find records relating to the lion and cheetah existing in the Indian subcontinent beyond the time of the establishment of city states. Their suggestion is that as references to these two species earlier than this period are virtually non-existent, but those to the tiger are abundant, it is likely that lion and cheetah were introduced into the Indian subcontinent by way of trade and as gifts to potentates. These animals were considered worthy and valuable gifts and continued to be imported up until the time of Indian Independence.

Apart from this book's general interest and intelligent readability, it serves as a model for any researcher desiring to go into print. The notes and references used in the compilation of this book are extensive. They equate to the authors indeed making a good case. However the detractors, especially Asian lion and cheetah experts and serious supporters Divyabhanusinh Chavda and M. K. Ranjitsinh in 'Lion and Cheetah in India: A Critique' (*Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*, 110(1), Jan-Apr 2013, pp 3-21) are damning. However that does not concern this review. What is of greatest import is that references are not just extensive but accurately interpreted. It removes some of the chance that a scholarly bunfight as above may not ensue if a budding researcher wishes to make a possibly controversial statement.

The book itself has a total of 304 pages, numerous black-and-white illustrations, and a series of gorgeous Mughal hunting scenes and some contemporary cheetah photographs in full colour as well which complements the text. As mentioned above, the bibliography is extensive and the notes and index are comprehensive and useful.

Out-of-place large felids by their very nature are the most likely to exist and be recorded of all large cryptids according to this writer. Perusal of *Exotic Aliens* has value to the researcher in its example of efficient, even ruthless, gathering and interpreting of records. This book deserves a place in the library of all serious cryptozoologists with a penchant for out-of-place big cats.

Panther Tales and Woodland Encounters: Seeing is Believing

Judith Victoria Hensley

2018 (Self-Published / CreateSpace)

Reviewer: Chad Arment

There is a vast wealth of cryptozoological data to be mined in the Appalachians. Regardless of whether any unrecognized beasts actually haunt those hills, there are plenty of stories about Bigfoot and other strange beasts, especially 'panther tales.' Sightings of big cats (cougar or black panthers, particularly) are common, yet there are very few purposeful efforts to collect, collate, and evaluate such stories. So, I was interested to hear that a Kentucky author/newspaper columnist had put together a book on the subject.

The book itself seems to be primarily made up of responses to a social media query the author posted regarding mystery cats in the Appalachians, with a few responses outside that area. (There are also submissions from a student folklore project.) As such, there is no follow-up or evaluation of the stories, they are simply presented ‘as is.’ (Some stories are as short as a sentence, others run a few pages.) Hensley notes at the end of the book that she is just a ‘story teller,’ and that these stories are not intended to be scientific evidence; the reader is left to make up their own mind on the subject.

As folklore, this is a very ‘broad stroke’ effort. There are some common folkloric motifs that crop up, such as panther screams that sound like a woman in pain, or evidence (photos) that disappears. From a folkloric standpoint, you can certainly determine that panther folklore is alive and well in the Appalachians. Beyond that, however, it’s distinctly a mixed bag for cryptozoology. Some accounts are frustratingly low on details. Some stories simply are on the lines of ‘I saw/heard a panther.’ There is also no attempt to sort sighting reports into regions. As anyone who investigates mystery cats is aware, it is very easy for eyewitnesses to mistake other animals for big cats (especially black ones). So, a witness may be perfectly honest in believing they saw a black panther, yet still be mistaken about what they saw. There’s no way to determine from these stories any level of reliability. At best, this book may point to regions where further research may be warranted. (Assuming the story in question actually give a location; some do, others don’t.)

This is one of those books that preach to the choir; if someone already believes that the big cats exist, they may add it to their library. It’s unlikely to convince anyone else. The book may be of interest for a small Appalachian library ‘local interest’ bookshelf, but there is so much more that could (and should) be done with interviewing witnesses that I don’t think I can recommend it for a serious cryptozoology library.

Meeting with Monsters: An Illustrated Guide to the Beasts of Iceland

Jón Baldur Hlíðberg and Sigurður Ægisson

JPV útgáfa, 2008

Reviewer: C. A. McCormick

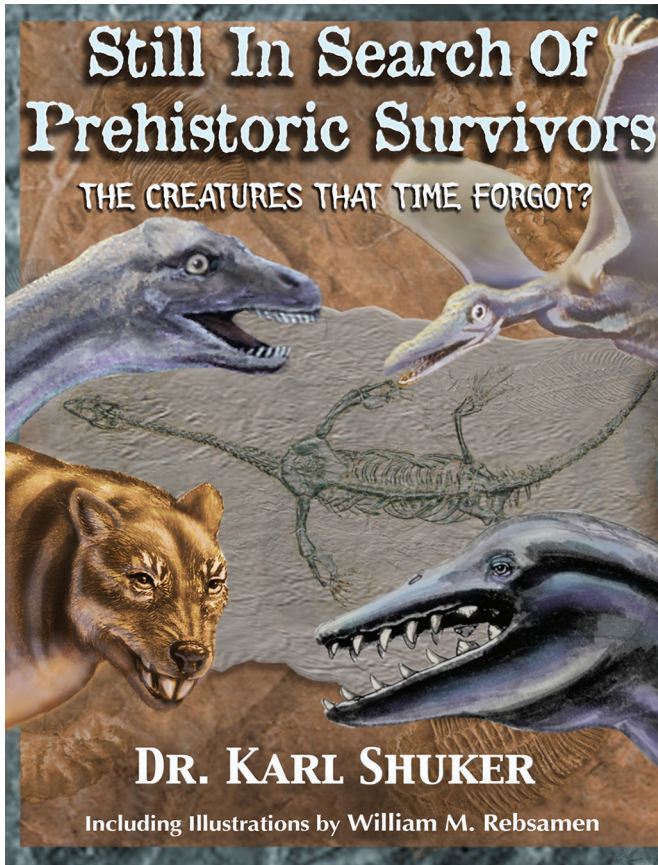
Admittedly, this may be a very elusive book for U.S. readers. The review copy of *Meeting with Monsters* was, in fact, obtained in Iceland, specifically Egilsstaðir, on the shores of the ‘monster lake’ Lagarfljót.

Hlíðberg’s art is so fantastically well-realized that it makes the hunt for this distant book worth it.

The thirty monsters are depicted with a naturalist’s eye and have an inordinate attention to detail. For instance, the Hot-Spring Bird looks like it would fit right in to an ornithological volume . . . aside from the bony feathers on the wings and feet used to minimize contact with boiling-hot water! In another instance, the feet of the Water Horse are figured to demonstrate how they can be both adapted for swimming and appear ‘backwards’ to a more casual observer. This methodology pushes the work into the realm of ‘speculative zoology,’ but other creatures push it back into fantasy: cat/fox hybrids, unicorn-bears, and *two* island-sized beasts.

Other elements—apparent surviving plesiosaurs, arthrodire, and archaic whales—are undoubtedly cryptozoological. The overall effect of the illustrations is far from a hodgepodge; they create the impression of a fantastical hidden world where mythology is colliding with reality. Ægisson’s text in *Meeting with Monsters* is largely concerned with re-telling the folklore and anecdotes, and explicitly avoids critical commentary. These pieces of lore would be totally unknown to the English-speaking world if not for this effort, which is really commendable. The artistic decision to avoid almost all commentary is perhaps the weakest part of this book. It would have been useful for readers if there was a paragraph at the end of some entries mentioning, for example, the connection between Shaggy Trout and *Saprolegnia* infections, or that the names of many of the whales have been connected to known species of cetaceans and pinnipeds. It is further odd that the ‘bloop’ sound phenomenon is mentioned in-text since, not only is it no longer regarded as mysterious, but it would seemingly break the tone the book was going for.

Any quibbles with *Meeting with Monsters* are truly minor; it is an absolute must-read for anyone interested in folklore, speculative zoology, or cryptozoology. The Skate Mother must truly be seen to be believed.



Still in Search of Prehistoric Survivors

Dr. Karl Shuker

This expanded update of Dr. Shuker's classic book is well worth obtaining. Reports of creatures thought long extinct fill the cryptozoological literature, and Dr. Shuker examines them with an eye towards likely explanations while pointing out where new discoveries might be made.

THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF NEW
AND REDISCOVERED ANIMALS



FROM THE LOST ARK TO
THE NEW ZOO-AND BEYOND
DR. KARL P.N. SHUKER

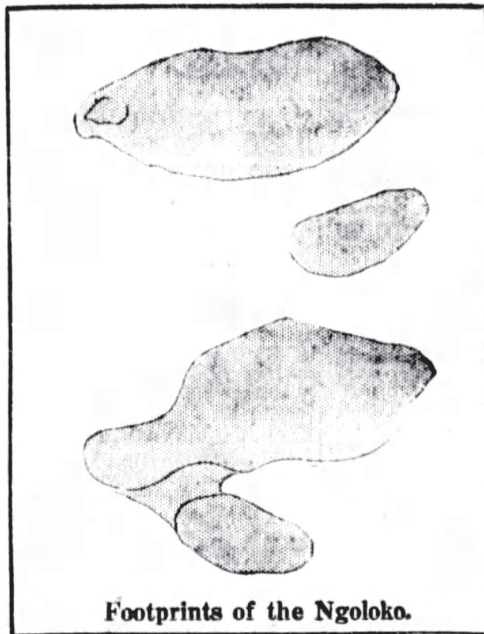
The Encyclopaedia of New and Rediscovered Animals
Dr. Karl Shuker

This updated edition of an encyclopedia of zoological discoveries and rediscoveries makes fascinating reading for wildlife lovers and cryptozoology fans. New and entrancing species throughout the animal kingdom pour from every well-illustrated chapter.

The Ngoloko

J. A. G. Elliot

The following reprint is from *Blackwood's Magazine* (Nov. 1917). It was first published anonymously, but a 1933 collection gave the author's name, Lieut. J. A. G. Elliot, who is known to have published a few other articles during that period about his travels in Africa. In 1920, a condensed version of this article was published in various newspapers, along with a tracing of the 'spoor' of the mystery animal (shown below). Alice Werner noted in *Myths and Legends of the Bantu* (1933) that she was told the Ngolooko was more like a giant snake; she thought that the creature Elliot wrote about sounded more like the mythical Ngojama. Either way, she noted, the spoor tracing appeared to be an ostrich track.



THE NGOLOKO.

(A MYSTERY OF THE AFRICAN BUSH.)

THE day's march is done, camp is pitched, and the headmen and elders of the locality have come and gone. The evening sun lights up a long expanse of still lagoon, whilst away in the distance the white crests of waves mark the swell of the Indian Ocean breaking upon the coral reefs that guard the lonely shore. Half a mile to the right, on the edge of a low sandy cliff, and almost hidden by baobab-trees and thick vegetation, stand the ruins of an ancient Arab mosque. But the fast-falling night peculiar to the tropics soon blots out the landscape, and it is time for a "sun-down," a bath, and change. Dinner and bed follow in due course. Once more it is morning; but the tide is out, and a delay of several hours ensues before the "safari" can board the two small dhows that have been brought in for our use. As I go down to the larger boat, a black snake glides across the path. "A bad omen, Bwana," says one of the boys; "we had better turn back and go another day." I reply: "Such things are only applicable to black men, and not to me." The incident is quickly forgotten in the bustle of stowing away the loads, getting all on board, weighing anchor, and pushing off. I seize the tiller of my boat, my cook takes command of the other. The sails go up together, and in a few minutes we are racing over the waters of the lagoon, with the south-westerly monsoon blowing almost right behind us. The larger dhow slowly forges ahead of the other, and as we do so the Arab boatmen pass jeering remarks. I steer for an indistinguishable point in a bank of mangroves. As we approach, the sail has to be changed from one side to the other, and then in a few minutes we glide up a creek into the forest. In ten minutes or less the sail is stowed, and we slowly pole up a winding waterway. What with overhanging branches, shoals, and sharp turns, the steersman has his work cut out. It is a weird sensation passing through a mangrove swamp in this way. As far as the eye can penetrate through the forest, all is water and very still. An occasional bird, a gurgle of the rising tide, the swish of the boat—and that is all. Even the porters are hushed for a time. The even tenor of our way is, however, brought to an end by our grounding on a mud-bank. Now all is changed: everybody tells everybody what everybody should do. A pandemonium of voices and curses follows as the cook's dhow, with flaunting shouts, safely passes by. At last, with a deal of pushing and loss of breath, we get clear and pro-

ceed as before, except that now the men take up a boat-song, in which the chorus is sung as a solo and the verses by all the rest. As a consequence the soloist is the only one whose words are distinguishable, and begin—"Fatuma 'napenda mi." The sense of the remainder is, however, fairly obvious, and tells of how the fair Fatuma, married to an old and ugly husband, bestowed herself on one more appreciative of her charms.

Still the mangrove forest goes on. It seems endless; but an open space of water allows the sail to be run up for a short time, and soon after a glimpse is caught of the offending boat as it rounds a corner ahead. More mangrove swamp follows, and then a creek, opening into a large lagoon. The sail is up to stay; we are no longer sheltered by the trees, and with the full force of the breeze we overhaul and pass our opponents. A tow rope is offered, but angrily declined. By this time we are getting fairly close to the sea; a bank of low sand-dunes separates us on one side, whilst on the other a desolate outline of low-lying country offers no hospitality. Ahead the unchecked waves of the ocean are seen breaking into the mouth of the lagoon. Being a person whose admiration of the sea is limited to a standpoint on *terra firma*, it becomes clear that a landing should be made without undue delay. A solitary canoe lies tied up near the shore, so we direct our course towards it. There is no cove,

no shelter, and we land by merely running the dhow ashore. The second boat arrives a few minutes later, and all disembark. A native's foot-prints in the soft sand now guide us through a quantity of the silver-leaved uvuzi-vuzi bushes and self-sown mivinji trees (the casuarina) to a path which takes us, half a mile or so farther on, to a small settlement consisting of twenty or thirty huts huddled closely together; several goat "bomas," raised 10 or 12 feet above the ground, denote also that here wild animals abound. Camp is pitched on a knoll, from which a fairly extensive view can be obtained over a small plain and the more distant bush or forest country beyond. Towards the sea, however, there is thick vegetation, also a belt of mivinji close to and parallel with the shore; whilst mangroves thrive in primeval glory in all the swamps and low reaches near by. A little farther afield great spaces of dry sandy mud, quite destitute of any vegetation except for an occasional low bush, possibly a variety of stone-crop, render the aspect as desolate, God-forsaken, and forbidding as can well be imagined. Except for the small settlement referred to above there are no inhabitants, for the few wandering Wa-Sanye, or wild bush-people, can hardly be counted as such. The day passes without anything of special notice, but it so happens that there is to be an eclipse of the moon,¹ and instead of turning in at the

¹ Night of July 4, 1917.

ordinary time, I draw my chair up to the camp fire to watch the phenomenon. A dozen natives and others are already sitting round, too, roasting mealie cobs and eating them. As I quietly smoke my pipe, I listen to what they are saying. It is about nothing in particular, but as the shadow gradually creeps over the face of the moon one man says that such things are uncanny. They all agree; and talk of the fish that has been recently caught at Zanzibar with words of the Koran found naturally marked upon it;¹ also of the child lately born at Mombasa with three legs, two faces, and four eyes. These happenings are interpreted as spelling the speedy downfall of the Germans—a long-hoped-for wish. Then some one mentions the black snake seen that morning—what did that portend? Asmani strikes in too, "And did we not start this journey on the fifth day of the week?"² And as the proverb says, "Rats that leave their holes on a Wednesday never return."

"True," says Juma, "and when the moon hides her face 'tis a bad time for the children of Adam. We heard the spirits in the mivinji trees wailing as we passed beneath them; they knew what was about to happen."

"To happen to the moon or to us?" says another.

"Who can tell?" continues Juma; "but when spirits walk abroad 'tis well to be indoors. However, we are in the hands of Allah."

It is now just on midnight, the eclipse is full, and I am on the point of going to bed, when "oo-ee!"—we all lift our heads, for the sound though distant is clear and penetrating.

"What is that?" I say. No one answers. Then another "oo-ee!" nearer this time, and with a note in it that sets one's hair on end.

"What is that?" I repeat more peremptorily.

"The Ngoloko!" whispers some one.

A couple of extra logs are thrown on the fire, and all close in.

"What is the Ngoloko?"

"A jinn," replies Juma.

"Nonsense," I protest, "you are all going daft; you had better go to bed, as I am."

"I am not going to sleep whilst a Milhoi is about," says Asmani; "nor I," "nor I," join in the others.

"Well then, in that case, let us hear about this devil. What do you know, for instance?"

"I know what I have been told, and no more. Originally the Ngoloko was a good spirit, and lived with all the others

¹ A photograph of this remarkable fish is reproduced in 'The East African Standard' of July 7, 1917. The markings are not artificial, and are in Arabic characters. An Arab, who was in Zanzibar and has seen it, reported the writing to be: "La illah la illah la" (There is no God but God) on one side, and "Shani Allah" (A miracle of God) on the other, which is only a slightly different version to that given in the newspaper.

² According to the Swahili calendar Friday is equivalent to our Sunday, and Saturday is called "Juma Mosi," or "first day"; and consequently Wednesday is Juma Tano, or "fifth day."

in friendliness and happiness; but one day it did something wrong, so it was chased away and taken up to heaven. After a time it was driven down again by shooting-stars, and appeared on earth as a Milhoi, to be shunned by all. That is why the creature lives an isolated life away in the forests and mangrove swamps, and is comparatively seldom met with. When it lies down it sweeps a place clean, it feeds on honey and drinks blood, herds the buffaloes and drinks their milk, or kills them and eats them as it thinks fit. It smells worse than a lion, and any one who has skinned the latter is not likely to forget what that is like. It will change its form so as to enable it to approach its victim, and will speak any language under the sun."

"That reminds me of the story of the Röch in the book of El Boohari," breaks in Seif bin Mohammad. "There we learn that once a wicked people climbed on each other's shoulders until the topmost one put his ear to the roof of the sky and listened to the words of Almighty God, who, becoming very angry, told His servants to cast out the intruder. Then the wicked people were bombarded with fire, brimstone, and shooting-stars until all fell down, the survivors—many blinded—returning to the earth in the shape of the Röch or Ngoloko, and destined to live ever after in desolate places."

"This is all very well," I

interpose, "but has any one ever *seen* the Ngoloko?"

"Yes, I have," says Sheikh Ali bin Nasur; "but it is not a thing to laugh at, and I, an old man and an Arab, say it. Well, sixteen years ago, when I was about forty years of age, and before my beard grew white, I was on my way from my shamba¹ at Kikombe Tele to Malindi. It was about 7.30 P.M. There was no moon, but the night was not dark. As I was getting near the sea-shore I heard a woman's voice shouting 'Eh!' three times, some distance in front of me. I thought it must be a woman who was on her way home and was frightened of the dark. I went on down to the shore but saw no one. I thought it peculiar, but walked on. After a time something made me look round, and then I saw a woman of little over medium height following about 100 paces behind. But she was not walking so much as springing along in high bounds. I stopped, and so did she. Then I walked on, and she followed. Again I stopped, and she did the same. I knew then and from the way she walked that she was no daughter of Eve. She was a Milhoi. She followed me along until we came near the big white rock,² and there she disappeared into the bush. There was no path anywhere near. She wore loose dark clothes, but I could not see whether they were skins or not."

"A poor story," I observe

¹ Shamba—property, or cultivated land.

² A well-known sailing mark, about $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ mile north of Malindi.

when he came to the end, "and one that is not going to make me believe in your jinn. Obviously a girl was on her way home in the dark and was frightened of the look of your beard. Probably she thought you a Milhoi."

"It is not so, Bwana; this is the month of Ramathan and I would not perjure myself by saying what is not true; besides, call on Aohmed for his story, for he, too, has seen the thing."

And then Aohmed bin Abubaker begins as follows: "One day, about seven or eight months ago, I went to Mambrui from Malindi, as I so often do. I crossed the Sabaki river by the ferry, and pursued my way as usual along the sea-shore. It was midday, and very hot. Suddenly I noticed a human figure of great stature, about eight feet high, standing near the beacon on the hill on my left. The giant came down towards me, and as he did so he changed his form to appear more like that of an ordinary man. When he got about fifty paces off he called out to me, 'Aohmed bin Abubaker, my dear brother, stop a minute—do.' I stopped. Then I saw that he kept one arm hidden behind his back, and that the hand of the other terminated in a great hook. He was clothed, and had a gourd slung close under an arm. His hair

was of a reddish-yellow colour and fell back from his head in a wild tangle as far as his waist. His own colour was that of an ordinary man (a native). His face was that of a human being, but broad. He had a large thumb on each foot. When I saw this terrible thing advancing on me with a springy walk, I thought my last day had come, and I covered my eyes in my terror and called out—

"Allahu Akbaru Allahu Akbaru
Allahu Akbaru Allahu Akbaru
Ashehadu Anlaa Ilaha Illa Illahu
Ashehadu Anlaa Ilaha Illa Illahu
Ashehadu Anna Muhammada Rasulu
Ilahi
Ashehadu Anna Muhammada Rasulu
Ilahi
Haiya Allah Swalaat
Haiya Allah Swalaat
Haiya Allah Lifalaah
Haiya Allah Lifalaah
Allahu Akbaru Allahu Akbaru
La Allah illa l Allah.¹

"When he heard that, he knew he was overpowered. He turned aside and went back to the hill. As soon as the way was clear I ran off as fast as I could, and after getting to what I thought to be a safe distance, looked back. There he was still climbing up the hill, and as he got near the top he took to his original form, and finally crossed over the summit and was lost to sight."

¹ Translation of the Athani—

"God is Great (*bis*).

I believe that there is no other God but Allah (*bis*).

I believe that Mohammad is the servant of God (*bis*).

Come and pray (*bis*).

Come and be virtuous (*bis*).

God is great; there is no other God but Allah."

"Was it a male or female?" I inquire.

"I don't know; but it was supernatural."

"As it had long hair, and showed remarkable cunning, it must undoubtedly have been a she-devil; however, no self-respecting Ngoloko could possibly stand a prayer like that."

After a short break Hamis wa Ismail, who had just joined our group round the fire, starts to relate an adventure of his own. "It was," he said, "about sixteen years ago that I went one day with a Swahili carpenter to cut some wood in a mangrove forest near the Tana river. We came upon a medium-sized marsh bare of trees; we had not been there long before my friend signalled me to keep back, as if something were coming. I looked, and saw a Milhoi crossing the marsh from the other side. It came up to about six paces of the carpenter, and began conversing with him, asking him all about the people in his village by name. It had a shuka or scarf round the neck and partly over the head. I saw the creature had three fingers, one armed with a claw. It also had a gourd under its arm. One eye was blind and the other all askew. There was a certain amount of hair on the cheeks. It had three toes and a thumb, and big flapping ears. Its skin was of a grey colour, but covered with long sparse black hairs. It had no tail. A galla shuka was the only sort of garment it wore. The Milhoi was about eight feet high, and not very broad. Its arms and

legs were thin. The carpenter said, 'I know you to be a Ngoloko,' upon hearing which it promptly fled uttering piercing shrieks, and holding up the shuka in its outstretched arms."

"This is beginning to get interesting," I remark; "can any one tell us something more?"

And, with a little persuasion—for a native is very shy of speaking of a jinn, though you, reader, might not think it from this story—Mohammad wa Njamhidi commences as follows: "I have been a fisherman all my life, and live at Kijiwe Tanga, where the following occurrence took place. It must have been about twenty years ago, and I was not bent and crippled with age as I am now. I had two fully grown-up children. One day I went into the bush to cut wood, leaving them on the seashore doing something or other to the canoe. After a while they ran up and said, 'Did you call, father?' I told them I had not. Then I asked them from what direction they had been hailed; and they pointed. They also said that they had been called by name. I went with them to near the shore, and peered very carefully in the direction indicated. Then I saw a very tall man standing in the bush. I could see one arm, and the hand ended in a hook; the other was held crosswise, and buried in his shaggy chest. I knew at once it was a Ngoloko, and I quickly ran away before he could catch sight of me. It was a long time before I ventured near that spot again."

As I now look back to that night I must confess that it was with a distinctly creepy feeling that I finally turned in, but rest, breakfast, and a bright sun next morning made any qualms I had entertained the night before look nothing less than absurd. My work took me that day some eight or nine miles away, and on my way back to camp, which had not been shifted, I left the footpath I had been following, and, in spite of the midday heat, struck off after some game. I was not much more than half a mile from camp, and was crossing one of the bare spaces of dry sandy clay mentioned before, when I came upon a spoor such as I had never seen to that day. My boys noticed it too, and we all stood looking at it for some little time.

"What has passed here?" I inquired at length.

"The Ngoloko!"

"How old is this spoor?"

"About twelve hours."

Others agreed.

"Twelve hours! Then it was just about the time that we heard that cry!!!"

"Yes, Bwana; we told you it was the Ngoloko, and you would not believe us; now you know how it was that we did not sleep."

And I did, for the tracks were indisputable; and they were tracks of a creature I should not care to meet without a loaded rifle at hand.

A reproduction of the footprint was taken on the spot by placing a piece of paper over the track and marking

the outline with a pencil. In ordinary soil this would not have been possible; but here, on the crusted sandy mud, conditions were ideal. We followed the spoor for a quarter of a mile, examining, measuring, and comparing it with human tracks.

As a result of my observations I obtained the following data:—

- (1) The animal is a biped.
- (2) The print had been made by a pad and not by a hoof, except that, at the point, a deep and sharp hole demonstrated the presence of a large nail or single claw.
- (3) A thumb-mark of considerable dimensions was a special feature; there was no trace of toes, except in one case, where very slight indentations by such seemed to have been made.
- (4) A heel was observed; but the weight of the animal was usually cast forward on to the main portion of the foot and thumb.
- (5) Its weight was judged to be at least twice that of an average man, and probably more.
- (6) A certain part of the spoor showed the animal to be walking very slowly; there the stride measured eighteen inches from tip of the toe of one foot to the heel of the other. It had also taken several gambols at one place, and crossed his legs when doing so. When travelling

at what I should imagine to be a jog-trot, the stride measured eight feet; two strides were found to be nine feet; whilst a considerably greater distance, it is presumed, could be covered when at top speed or jumping.

The above facts seemed of such interest that I determined to push my investigations further, and by great good luck came upon one Heri wa Mabruko, whose story I give, as far as possible, in his own words. It should be remembered, however, that the actual details he furnishes are the result of direct questioning. Also, it should be added, that he never seemed once to hesitate, being quite clear and certain in all his answers. He spoke as follows:—

"A long time ago I went out with some Swahili friends into the forest to tap the wild-rubber tree. It was in the Witu District. A Mboni man (a type of bushman) accompanied us. We were at short distances apart, busy at work, when the Mboni caught sight of a Milhoi stalking us from behind. So he let drive with his bow and arrow, and struck the creature, who immediately ran off. We followed, and found the Ngoloko about 400 or 500 yards beyond the place where he had been hit. When I came up, he was lying outstretched on the ground, and still breathing. It was a male, about eight feet in height, and in breadth just about the same as two ordinary men standing together. He was covered with

a great mass of long, thick, grey hair. It was especially long over the head and upper portions of the body, a single hair being quite a yard in length. He was built like a man, but he was no child of Adam. He had but one finger and one thumb on his hand, the former terminating in a single hooked claw $2\frac{1}{2}$ or 3 inches long. The foot possessed a very large prehensile thumb and three toes, one ending, as in the hand, in a great claw. The face was hairless, displaying a dark skin. Nose very prominent and with two nostrils. The mouth was small, but larger than a man's; and the teeth were big. His ears resembled those of an elephant, and were each about the size of my two hands fully extended when holding the wrists together. The cheekbones were prominent. Forehead low and retreating, like a leopard's. Chin likewise. I did not notice the colour of the eyes, which were big. The eyelashes joined on to the hair round about the face; I did not look at them particularly. The smell was awful, and about ten times as strong as a he-goat."

The foregoing statements, together with the evidence afforded by the examination of the spoor, lead to the conclusion that there exists in the district referred to a remarkable and monstrous creature hitherto unknown. The species to which it belongs, its habits and its general appearance, can only be conjectured, for the difficulty of obtaining reliable evidence from those who have

seen this terrifying beast is much increased by the atmosphere of the supernatural surrounding it, and the more we investigate the more difficult does it become to distinguish between fact and fiction. Moreover, in this instance, superstition springs from a religious source—a fact which may, perhaps, be regarded as evidence of the existence of the Ngoloko having been long known by the native tribes.

The statement of the man Heri wa Mabruko is more reliable than are those of the others. Who, indeed, would not be able to give a more accurate and detailed account of a dead than of a live Milhoi, a live Milhoi perhaps advancing to attack? We may, then, fairly attach considerable weight to his observations.

He mentions the Ngoloko as being eight feet in height. This is corroborated by two other observers on two distinct occasions, while a third observer on another occasion said the Ngoloko he saw was "very tall." We may, therefore, be fairly confident that the height of the animal is much as stated. I ought, however, to remark that in certain instances proximity reduced its apparent stature—a fact which may perhaps have been due to the animal having adopted a crouching attitude when approaching its prey.

Its breadth is not authenticated with such certainty. That its weight is considerable we know from the tracks.

Heri wa Mabruko mentioned the presence on the hand of a single claw and of a thumb, both of which particulars are

referred to by other observers. He also mentioned the presence of a very large thumb on the foot: the accuracy of his observation is confirmed by the spoon.

His statement as to the ears being like those of an elephant is confirmed by Hamis wa Iemail.

His observation regarding the mass of hair about the head and upper part of the body is only indirectly confirmed. Sheikh Ali bin Nasur speaks of loose dark clothes, and conceivably he might, at night, have taken the mass of hair for such; Ahmed bin Abubaker mentions a wild tangle of hair falling back as far as the waist; and yet another observer talks of a shuka or scarf—an optical delusion possibly due to the excitement of the moment.

Its colour is generally described as grey, but the skin itself is dark.

We may conclude, then, that the Ngoloko or Milhoi is probably a variety of gorilla or chimpanzee, but more of a pure biped than either,—that it is about eight feet in height, and has a mass of grey hair which is especially long about the head and upper body, elephantine ears, a retreating forehead and chin, large eyes, a single claw—2½ to 3 inches long—on hands and feet, as well as a prehensile thumb, also on both hands and feet, of remarkable size and strength. Such is the Ngoloko as we can fairly reasonably picture him—a carnivorous denizen of the forest and mangrove swamps—a big and hideous brute, which one would, if alone and unarmed, have no particular ambition to meet.

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