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Notes on the Jhoor of Gir

Tony Gerard

Several years ago while working on the History Channel series *MonsterQuest* (don't judge me), I had the opportunity to spend time with the renown Indian herpetologist Rom Whittaker. We talked about various Indian cryptid legends, among them the Jhoor of the Hiran reservoir. I knew little of this alleged cryptid beyond the name, location, and the fact that it was supposed to be some type of water creature. Rom had worked in the area years before and knew the stories. He said local people were vehement that the Jhoor existed and was different from a crocodile. After returning from India I followed up with Rom asking if he knew of any recent sightings. He offered to have a contact in the area check for any recent Jhoor stories. Here is a excerpt from his email to Ms. Rupali Ghosh:

“Someone from the USA wants to find out about a mythical ‘monster’ called a jhoor in Hiran lake in Gir. I heard about this thing from Maldharis in 1975 while doing a croc survey. It is supposed to come out of the deep water at night and catches both people and animals and drinks their blood. I told them they were confusing it with mugger but they were emphatic that it was real. Since the lake goes way down sometimes I don't know how they still can believe in it.”

Rom's reference to a “mugger” refers to the mugger crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*). Ms. Ghosh was willing to travel and find out, so I sent some money and later she responded with the following report.

“Visited Gir dated 21st May 2009, in search of jhoor, the findings are as follows.

“Gir sasan 160 km from Rajkot city. The first point we discovered is everyone knows about it and also, they knew it stays in water. Devaria sanctuary staff, Mr. Dave said jhoor means crocodile, and he will be writing all about Gir, after he retires from job. A person working with the sanctuary who came to Sasan with us said that Punabhai of Kameleswar dam knows much about jhoor. We tried to get permission from the on duty forest officer, to go inside sanctuary for meeting the Maldharis at their ness. He refused to give permission, as we need to get official letter from concerned organization with the details and purpose of visit.

“Finding no other means, we approached some local farmhouse worker, to take us to the ness not within the sanctuary.

“First Maldhari we met is Ismailbhai of Lakkadvera village, (via Valchhel village 7 km from Sasan) aged around 65 years, said he has seen ones in his life that is in the year 1965-66, when drought hit Gujrat. They went to Kameleshwar dam after a news of killing of a calf by jhoor. They recognize it by seeing the dead body, as it appears like everything from the body has been sucked out, leaving skin and bones. They (villagers) started throwing stones to the water, when a strange animal came out for a moment with strong claws, long legs, and head, and a body of an elongated turtle with hard upper body part. He also said that Punabhai of Kameleswar dam knows better than anybody in Gir. Jhoor mainly kills domestic cattle, rarely deers, and as they are much cautious about their cattle, than wild animals, so not much aware about the wild kill. Jhoor normally target cattle who goes deep in the water and it has a very strong grip like lizards. A few times he has seen kill of jhoor. As per his opinion there may be a chance of live one in Kameleswar dam.

“From Valchhel we proceeded to Haripore ness, settlement village for Maldharis, where we met Khimbhai (age about 85), described same as Ismailbhai, and he said he has seen wild animal kill too of deers, nilgai, as well as cattle, about 40 years from now in Hiran river and Kameleswar dam. He also referred Punabhai of Kameleswar dam and may be a little chance of a live one in the same place. His son suggested we may try with a live net by allowing it to pass through deep water of dam.

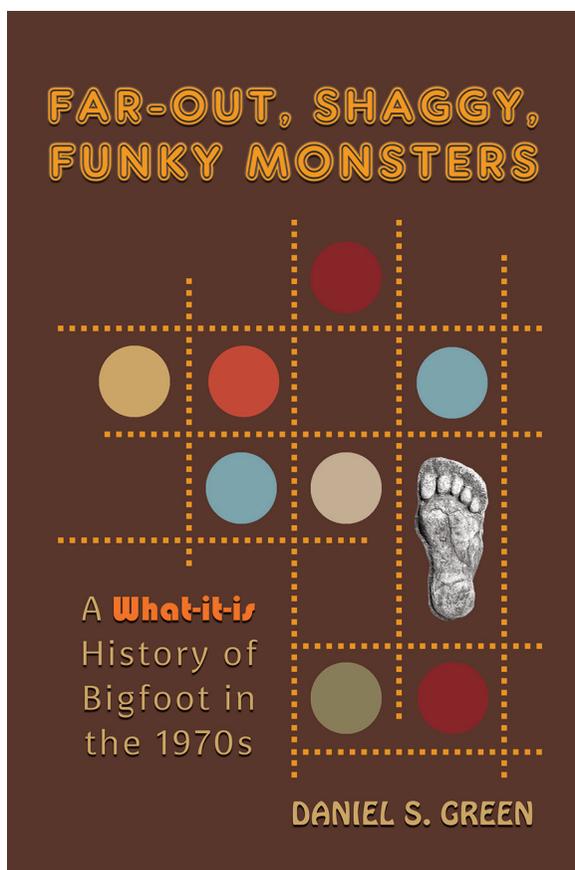
“From there we moved to Vaniabav ness to meet Lalbhai (age about 70). He described the same story and said he has seen twice in his life, once in Kameleswar dam and ones in the river near Gidharia ness. He also referred Punahai of Kameleswar dam, and others who stays near the dam.

From there went to Jasa village (54 km from Sasan) to meet Jivanbhai, the oldest person who worked with various farms in Sasan, but could not meet him as he was out for some family function.

“So overall picture shows we need to meet Punabhai, for which I need a permission. For that I need an official letter for working with a project like this.

“Rupali Ghosh”

As it turned out *MonsterQuest* was canceled not long afterward, so there was never any further follow-up. If anyone is ever in the Gir region of India, here is a potential cryptid ripe for investigation!



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.

Evidence of Red Wolves in the Ouachita Mountains

Brandon Lentz

The published story of the red wolf (*Canis rufus*) begins in the late 1700s. Naturalist William Bartram spent much of the 1770s exploring the wilds of Florida, keeping meticulous notes of the flora and fauna he observed. In 1791, his notes were compiled and published into a book now known as *Bartram's Travels*. Bartram described wolves that displayed taxonomic differences from the wolves that lived in other parts of the continent, namely color variance. He reported observing a pack of wild canids that exhibited black, white, and spotted coats. He surmised the animals were a subspecies of the gray wolf, and dubbed them *Canis lupus niger*.

They remained as such until 1851, when naturalists James Audubon and John Bachman published *The Quadrupeds of America: Volume 2*. Audubon and Bachman, in this book, were first to use the red descriptor. The authors studied all manner of fauna in Texas and the bordering states, where they observed wolves with a red color variance that was not seen in any other part of the continent. They hypothesized the distinctive red color was a result of the gray wolves of the north occasionally breeding with Bartram's black wolves in the south. Audubon and Bachman assigned to it the unique species Linnaean classification of *Canis rufus*.

In 1889, Harvard taxonomist Outram Bangs designated the Florida wolves as a separate species under the name *Canis ater*. In 1905, mammologist Vernon Bailey officially acknowledged *C. rufus* as a distinct unique species, albeit restricted to Texas. Forty years of classification debate followed until 1945 when zoologist Edward Goldman assigned the Florida and Texas wolves under the same *C. rufus* designation.

Sadly, the population had already suffered massive losses by this time. Industry took over Texas. White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus*

virginianus) reached a historic low, mostly due to loss of habitat. With their main food source scarcely available, combined with state mismanagement of predator control programs, red wolves could no longer sustain a healthy population.

By 1920, *C. rufus* had virtually disappeared from the southeast. By the 1930s, only two known viable populations remained in the wild. One in southeast Texas; the other in the Ouachita Mountain Ecoregion in Oklahoma/Arkansas. By 1944, those were thought to be wiped out. The species continued to struggle until 1980, when they were officially declared extinct in the wild. Only captive animals remained.

That brings us to today. Thanks to species recovery programs and a protected status, a small handful of wild red wolves remain, all of which are in North Carolina. The current known population is believed to be around 40 animals.

Known population. Could wild red wolves still exist outside of North Carolina?

There are examples of mammals previously thought to have been extinct that have been rediscovered in the wild. Kashmir musk deer (*Moschus cupreus*) were thought to have disappeared from Afghanistan in the 1940s, until an expedition led by U.S. scientists confirmed the species persisted until at least 2008. Vanzolini's bald-faced saki (*Pithecia vanzolinii*), a large fluffy-haired monkey endemic to the Amazon, was thought to have been extinct since 1937. That changed in 2008 when primatologists rediscovered a population in a remote Brazilian watershed that had not been explored for decades. The most notable example is the New Guinea singing dog (*Canis lupus dingo*), which was thought to have been extinct for a half-century. Remarkably, a 2016 expedition to the New Guinea highlands revealed evidence of the rare canid's existence in the form of a footprint in the mud. Subsequent camera trap operations captured 15 individual animals, including pregnant females.

These examples share a common theme: Each species was rediscovered in extremely remote, inhospitable areas yet undeveloped by man.

The Ouachita Mountain ecoregion also features areas that are largely undeveloped. There, a group of citizen scientists in the North American Wood Ape Conservancy (NAWAC) are taking part

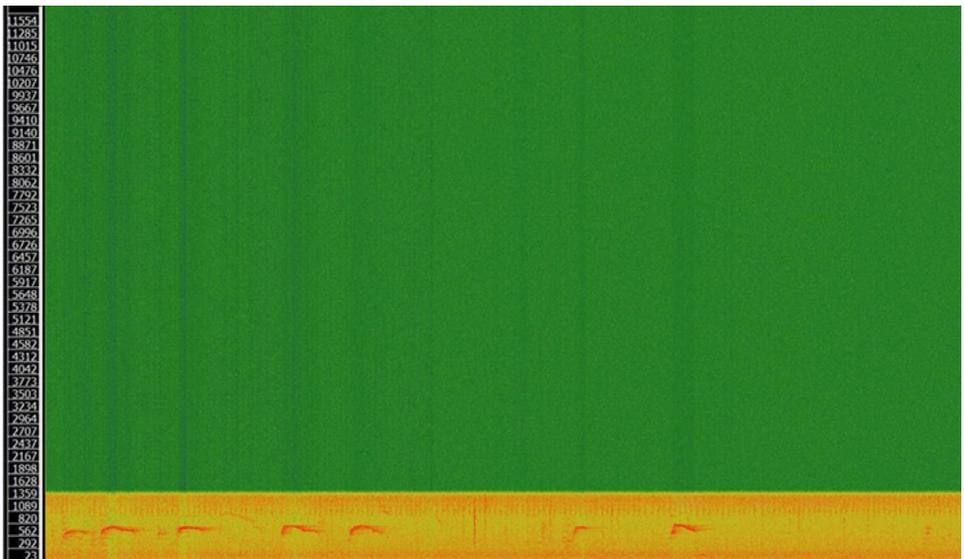
in an ongoing, observational-field-study expedition deep in a valley near the Oklahoma/Arkansas border. The NAWAC hypothesizes that there is an unrecognized species of bipedal primate living in the region. Its mission is to offer substantial evidence of the species to science and government to gain official recognition and federal protection. Toward that end, the NAWAC uses every tool at its disposal.

In 2018, the NAWAC purchased and deployed two Wildlife Acoustics Song Meter SM4 autonomous recording units to aurally track wildlife in the area through recordings of their vocalizations.

On the night of September 19th, 2018, one of the units captured seven canid-like deep, moaning howls. I happened to be there on an expedition at the time and heard the howls in person. They struck me as too sustained and deep for a coyote. The file is available for download [here](#).

For comparison, you can hear an example of a captive red wolf's howl, captured by the Wolf Conservation Center in New York, on [YouTube](#).

A spectrogram of the howls revealed the vocal range of the animal to be well within those of *C. rufus* and nearly twice as long in duration as those of *C. lupus*.



A visual hertz comparison of the unknown Ouachita canid and those of wild red wolves captured in the 1970s by Professor Howard McCarley show the close parallels of each.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
Species			Start frequency (Hz)		Highest Frequency (Hz)			Duration (s)						
Coyote		Average - (Range)	603-680 (475-1260)		872-1062 (528-1500)			1.6-2.6 (1.0-4.2)						McCarley, H. (1975) J. Mammalogy 56:847-856
Red Wolf		Average - (Range)	396-555 (352-630)		491-792 (396-990)			3.0-5.5 (1.0-6.0)						McCarley, H. (1978) J. Mammalogy 59:27-35
Unknown canid		Average - (Range)	562 (492-632)		709 (632-767)			3.7 (2.1-4.3)						
Details:														
howl 1			562		632			3.3						
howl 2			562		709			4.3						
howl 3			632		694			3.7						
howl 4			562		738			4.3						
howl 5			539		738			3.9						
howl 6			492		708			2.1						
howl 7			539		767			2.8						

Recall that red wolves were believed to have disappeared from the Ouachita Mountain Ecoregion nearly eighty years ago. The howls captured here may suggest otherwise.

It is within the realm of possibility that a wild pack of *C. rufus*, long thought to have gone extinct west of North Carolina, are persisting undetected. Habitat conservation is paramount to the survival of every creature in the Ouachita biome to which the NAWAC remains committed. Research in the area is ongoing.

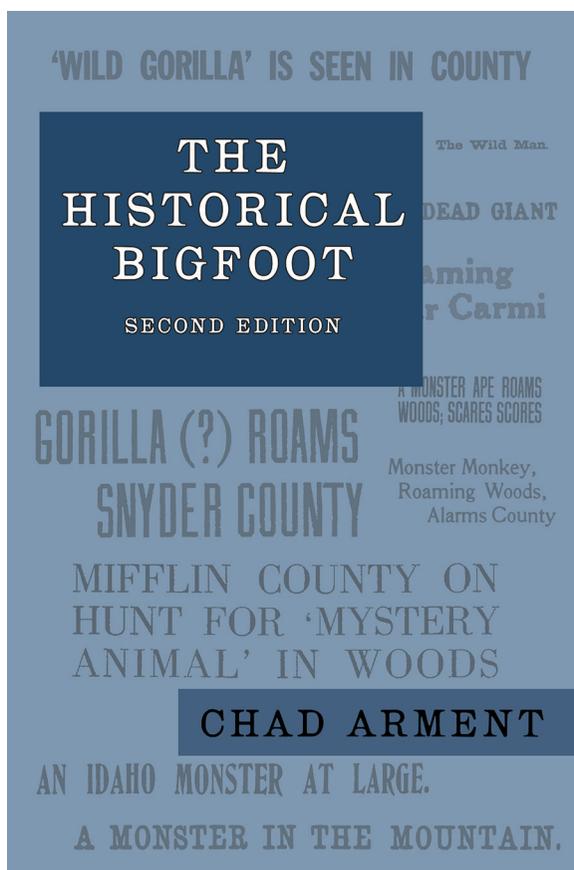
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McCarley, H. (1978). Vocalizations of red wolves (*Canis rufus*). *Journal of Mammalogy*, 59(1), 27–35.



The Historical Bigfoot
Second Edition
Chad Arment

Hairy wild men, wandering yahoos, what-is-it's, gorillas in the woods, and more manlike beasts roamed the newsprint of North America long before the word "Bigfoot" became cemented in popular culture. This updated and expanded edition lays a groundwork for understanding the folkloric variation in Bigfoot stories, necessary for any critical cryptozoological investigation.

Notes on Intergeneric Hybridization in Snakes

Chad Arment

Usually, when a snake hybrid is discussed, it involves two species within the same genus (an interspecific hybrid). This is particularly true with wild-caught snakes, where you might have a hybrid zone between two species' natural ranges, or just a one-off accidental breeding event. A zoo or reptile hobbyist with inadequate caging might inadvertently produce a clutch of hybrids, or a snake breeder may deliberately cross two related species in order to move a desired mutation from one to another, as happened when a Great Plains rat snake with the scaleless mutation was crossed with a corn snake—the former species being rather 'plain Jane,' compared to the more colorful (and profitable) corns.

Intergeneric hybrids (between snakes of different genera) are less likely to occur, but provide interesting subjects for behavior and morphology. The best-known examples are in North American colubrids. *Pantherophis* (rat snakes), *Lampropeltis* (king and milk snakes), and *Pituophis* (bull and pine snakes) have hybridized readily in captivity ('jungle corns' are the trade name for a corn snake/California kingsnake cross), and there are several known examples from the wild, as well.

Generally, deliberate hybridization is frowned upon in the professional, conservation-minded zoo trade, as well as with serious herpetoculturists striving for locality-based, "natural" lineages. (Taxon changes can be problematic for both groups, as captive populations may end up mixing animals from different locations which years later are split into separate species.) There are a few hobbyists who engage in deliberate hybridization attempts either because they want to see if it can be done, or because they enjoy the unique

combinations of pattern or coloration produced, but such crosses don't always make it into the professional or hobbyist literature.

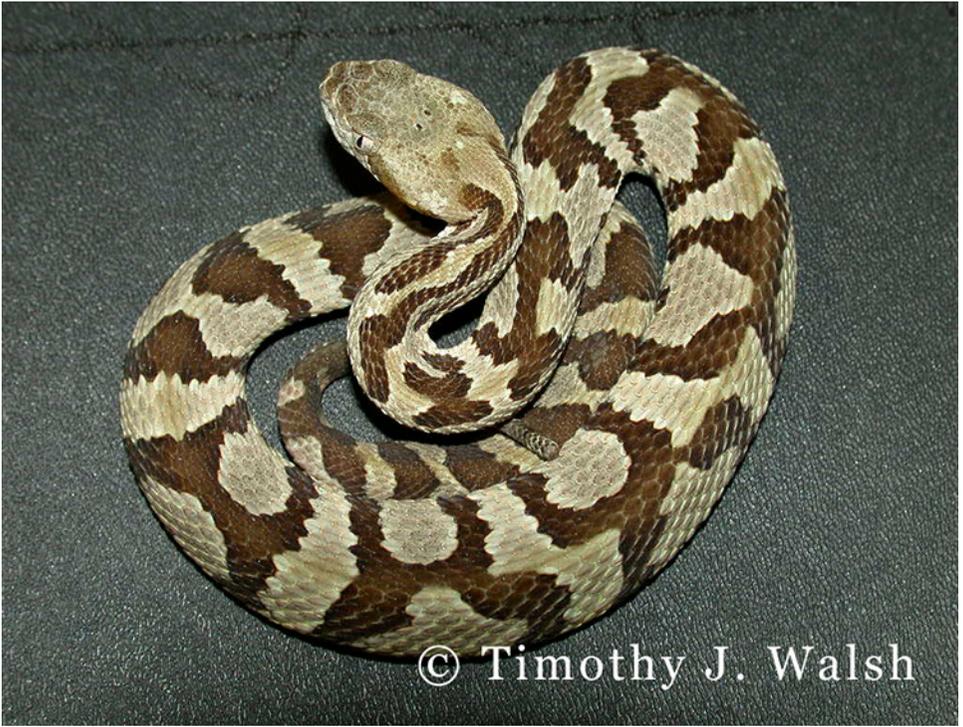
What I hope to do here is to look at reported records of intergeneric hybridization, particularly noting a few cases which don't seem to have been published prior to this.

THE TIMBER RATTLESNAKE-COPPERHEAD HYBRID

In the early 2000s, I heard rumors of a rattlesnake-copperhead hybrid produced by a zoo. An early forum posting (I've since lost track of where I first saw this; it may have been on sci.bio.herp or one of the Kingsnake.com forums) only stated that it occurred in a 'southern' facility's mixed native species display. Without knowing the exact facility, I had no way to follow up on this. Only recently, a former keeper at the Knoxville Zoo shared (on the 'Crotalus' Facebook group; Jay Eubanks, Aug. 2019) the memory of seeing this hybrid behind the scenes at the Tennessee Aquarium. In response, another individual shared a photo of the snake's cage signage, confirming that such a snake existed. This provided me with enough details that I was eventually able to locate the senior herpetologist at the facility at that time, Timothy J. Walsh (now Collections Manager at the Bruce Museum), and he kindly shared what he recalled about the snake, a copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix*) and timber rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*) cross. It was actually one of about six that were born alive (a few others stillborn). Walsh was only at the Tennessee Aquarium a short time after the snakes were produced, so wasn't privy to their ultimate disposition. (He did, however, provide me with several images of one of the young hybrids, along with permission to publish them here.)

The admin of another Facebook group ('All Things Agkistrodon'; Frederick S. Boyce, March 2020), contacted Dr. Harry Greene (herpetologist and author of *Snakes: The Evolution of Mystery in Nature* (2000)), who also confirmed the hybrid snakes' existence and noted that he had actually kept one of the snakes in his lab, before passing it on to another herpetologist at San Diego State University (where it eventually died). The disposition of the hybrid siblings is currently unknown.

Agkistrodon hybrids (cottonmouth x copperhead) are known, numerous *Crotalus* hybrids are known, and there has been one case



© Timothy J. Walsh



© Timothy J. Walsh



of a *Sistrurus-Crotalus* hybrid found in the wild (Bailey 1942), but this is the known first case of *Agkistrodon-Crotalus* crossing. This surprised many herp enthusiasts, because copperheads and timber rattlesnakes are known to den together overwinter, emerging together in the spring; if they can hybridize, why haven't we found hybrids in the wild? Is there normally some sort of pre-mating barrier? This could be a very interesting research project, looking for hybrid introgression in these snakes' populations.

OLD WORLD, NEW WORLD RAT SNAKES

As previously noted, *Pantherophis-Pituophis-Lampropeltis* crosses are not at all uncommon in captivity (reported as early as Fankhauser (1996)). What is less well-publicized is that *Pantherophis* has been crossed with a number of Old World rat snakes by various hobbyists, inadvertently or on purpose. In some cases, crosses may have been noted on the now defunct HerpHybrids.com forums, but with little detail (e.g., corn snake x Russian rat snake). Tribal classification within the Colubrinae is still debatable (exactly what makes up the 'Lampropeltini' is more than a little confusing), but Utiger

et al. (2005) made a good case for all of the following Old and New World rat snakes and kin to be considered tribe 'Coronellini.'

EASTERN RAT SNAKE (*Pantherophis alleghaniensis*) x
BEAUTY RAT SNAKE (*Elaphe [Orthriophis] taeniura*)

An accidental cross by a South African keeper, who caged the parents together, thinking the two species were too distantly related to produce offspring.

<http://forums.kingsnake.com/view.php?id=1652565,1654363>; Feb. 2009

<http://www.sareptiles.co.za/forum/viewtopic.php?f=30&t=10826>; May 2008

CORN SNAKE (*Pantherophis guttatus*) x
JAPANESE RAT SNAKE (*Elaphe climacophora*)

Multiple cases known.

<http://forums.kingsnake.com/view.php?id=1652565,1654363>; Feb. 2009

<http://farbvarianten-lexikon.de/detail.php?name=Japanese-Corn&titel=Japanese-Corn>, accessed March 21, 2020.

CORN SNAKE (*Pantherophis guttatus*) x
RADIATED RAT SNAKE (*Coelognathus radiata*)

An accidental cross that was put down by the owner.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150215090545/https://www.herpcenter.com/threads/lampropeltini-tribe-info-needed.18615/>

CORN SNAKE (*Pantherophis guttatus*) x
LADDER SNAKE (*Rhinechis scalaris*)

Deliberate hybridization resulting in six offspring.
'Hybrid Reptiles Collection' Facebook group; August 25,
2014

TWIN-SPOTTED RAT SNAKE (*Elaphe bimaculata*) x
IMPERIAL MILK SNAKE (hybrid, *Lampropeltis getula californiae*
x *Lampropeltis triangulum campbelli*)

Deliberate hybridization, single offspring did not
survive long.

[https://www.facebook.com/UkHybrids/photos
/a.1435787550002439/1435787890002405/](https://www.facebook.com/UkHybrids/photos/a.1435787550002439/1435787890002405/)

PYTHONS AND BOAS

While a few of these are from zoo records, most are deliberate
herpetocultural crosses, particularly spurred by carpet python and
ball python enthusiasts looking for more spectacular animals.

BURMESE PYTHON (*Python molurus*) x
RETICULATED PYTHON (*Malayopython reticulatus*)

Trade name is bateater python.

[https://retrieverman.net/2010/01/30/the-unusual-
python/](https://retrieverman.net/2010/01/30/the-unusual-python/)

BALL PYTHON (*Python regius*) x
RETICULATED PYTHON (*Malayopython reticulatus*)

Trade name is baltic python.

<http://thereptilereport.com/nerds-ballretic-cross/>

BALL PYTHON (*Python regius*) x
WOMA (*Aspidites ramsayi*)

Trade name is wall python.

<https://thereptilereport.com/woma-x-ball-python/>

<https://thereptilereport.com/awesome-hybrid-python-pair/>

BALL PYTHON (*Python regius*) x
CARPET PYTHON (*Morelia spilota*)

Trade name is carpall python.

[https://snakeeaters.tumblr.com/post/4506282413/
carpet-python-x-ball-python-carpall-hybrid](https://snakeeaters.tumblr.com/post/4506282413/carpet-python-x-ball-python-carpall-hybrid)

CARPET PYTHON (*Morelia spilota*) x
BLACK-HEADED PYTHON (*Aspidites melanocephalus*)

[https://www.flickr.com/photos/davidstinson/
11770709963](https://www.flickr.com/photos/davidstinson/11770709963)

CARPET PYTHON (*Morelia spilota*) x
WOMA (*Aspidites ramsayi*)

Trade name is coma python.

<https://thereptilereport.com/awesome-hybrid-python-pair/>

CARPET PYTHON (*Morelia spilota*) x
MACKLOT'S PYTHON (*Liasis mackloti*)

Banks and Schwaner (1984) reported on a male carpet python that successfully bred with both a Macklot's python and an amethystine python, at the Royal Melbourne Zoo.

Trade name is carplot python.

CARPET PYTHON (*Morelia spilota*) x
AMETHYSTINE PYTHON (*Simalia amethystina*)

See above.

CARPET PYTHON (*Morelia spilota*) x
BLOOD PYTHON (*Python curtus*)

<https://thereptilereport.com/coastal-carpet-x-black-blood-python/>

YELLOW ANACONDA (*Eunectes notaeus*) x
Boa constrictor

Ernst et al. (2014) reported a single viable offspring resulting from the mating of a female *Boa constrictor* and a male anaconda at the Paris Natural History Museum. Hybrid 'boacondas' were also produced by a UK breeder prior to 2014.

<https://thereptilereport.com/boaconda-beauty/>

<https://ball-pythons.net/forums/cache2.php?img=http://img.tapatalk.com/d/13/09/06/aza8a2y3.jpg>

YELLOW ANACONDA (*Eunectes notaeus*) x
RAINBOW BOA (*Epicrates cenchria*)

Tom Crutchfield, a well-known reptile dealer, noted that he had once purchased an accidental clutch of hybrids from an Ohio breeder.

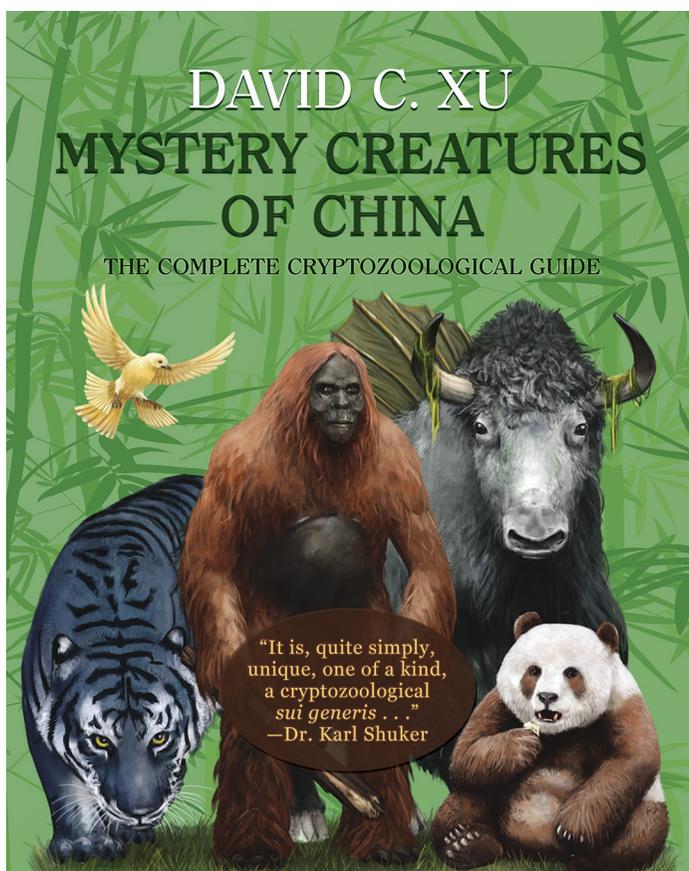
<http://forums.kingsnake.com/viewarch.php?id=1748833,1748978&key=2009>

Acrantophis x Boa

Ernst et al. (2014), cited a post on the website HybridHerps.com, which is no longer accessible. Archived discussion (Archive.org) suggests that it has been done (*Acrantophis* includes the Madagascan ground boa and Dumeril's boa), but there don't appear to be any additional details.

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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.

“Jabba the Hut”: An Undescribed *Cyrtarachne* Spider Species from the Philippines?

Tony Gerard

Cyrtarachne is a genus of nocturnal orb-weaving spiders common in South Asia. Many spiders in this genus have elaborate abdominal patterns, some mimic birds dropping, others mimic (in my opinion at least) heads of predators such as mantids. As of April 2019, there were fifty-five species scientifically described in the genus. One species, *Cyrtarachne tuladepilachna*, was described from a specimen collected on Mindanao in the Philippines in 1989. In a quick internet search, it is the only *Cyrtarachne* species I could find described from the Philippines.

There has been relatively little biologic survey work done in the Philippines, especially when compared with the great biodiversity of invertebrates found there. Sadly, the natural areas of the Philippines are being destroyed at an ever-increasing rate. Agricultural herbicides and insecticides are used with wild abandon and little regulation. Almost any slope short of completely vertical may be cleared with little regard for future erosion or landslide potential. The rapid growth of the population has made vegetable farming a boom business if a farmer manages to hit the market right. In a country where poverty is often the norm it is easy to understand this environmentally unfriendly response to a potential economic windfall.

My wife is from the highlands of Luzon in the Philippines. Typically, we make a trip there every other summer. Part of those trips always involves lots of “nature geeking” with Filipino friends. I post many observations on the website iNaturalist. One night in the summer of 2017 I photographed an orb-weaving spider on some family property near the village of Tinoc, in Nieva Vizcaya. This piece of property is an oasis of minimally disturbed habitat in an expanding sea of vegetable farms. I didn’t notice until later that, when the pic is inverted, the spider’s abdomen pattern was a cartoon-like face,

complete with nostrils, eyebrows and three teeth. My wife commented he looked like “Jabba the Hut” from Star Wars. The spiders stayed in the same location for the three nights we were there.

I posted the observation on iNaturalist. A colleague there later commented that it was probably in the genus *Cyrtarachne* and probably an undescribed species.

In July of 2019 we again returned to the Tinoc area, but this time we had only one night to spend. Even more natural habitat had been converted to vegetable farms and the smell of agricultural chemicals was ever present. We were curious to see if we could find the “Jabba the Hut” spider again. We had no luck in the original location, but we did succeed in a vegetation-lined watercourse not that far away. My eagle-eyed wife, Berna, found the second specimen. The abdominal “face” on this specimen looked a bit more sinister than the original specimen, but it was obvious it was the same species.

This is a very interesting species, probably surviving on very limited time.



The original 2017 “Jabba the Hut” spider specimen as discovered



The second specimen, found in 2019

Facial Displays: A Spider Gallery

Chad Arment

There are more than a few spiders (and numerous other invertebrates) that have facial patterns or eyespots on their abdomens (or wings, etc., in other groups). Generally, these are believed to be anti-predator threat displays, but this isn't well-studied in all species. In some cases, it may simply be pareidolia, or seeing patterns (like faces) in random shapes. In any case, here are a few faces to think about whenever you walk through the forest and straight into a silky-tasting web stretched across the trail . . .









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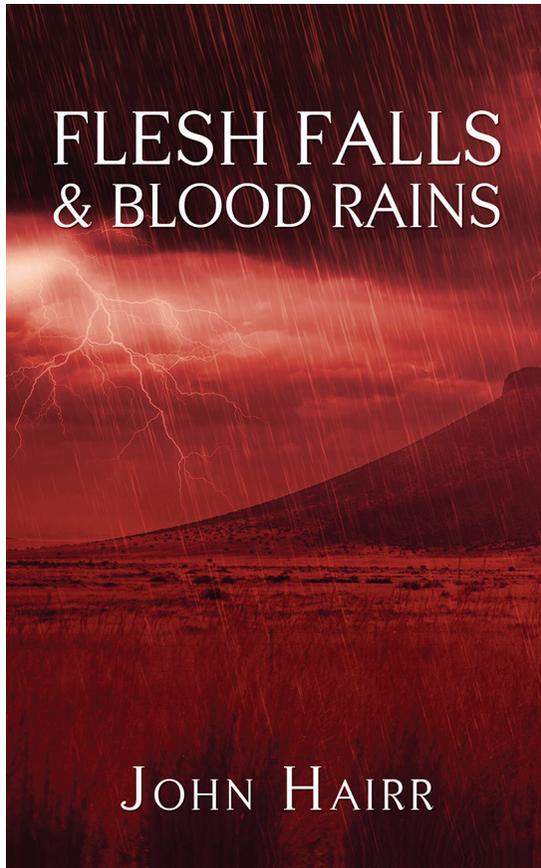


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Credits

1. Hawaiian happy-faced spider, *Theridion grallator*
(Melissa McMasters)
2. Orchard web spider, *Leucage venusta*
(Gail Hampshire)
3. Crab spider, *Misumenops tricuspidatus*
(Ryszard)
4. Kidney garden spider, *Araneus mitificus*
(Azhar Ismail)
5. Cat-faced spider, *Araneus gemmoides*
(Canton Becker)
6. *Araneus* sp.
(Peter Pearsall/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
7. Adanson's house jumper, *Hasarius adansoni*
(Bill & Mark Bell)
8. Lynx spider, Oxyopidae sp.
(Chun Xing Wong)

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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.

Panther Hunt: When a Black Panther is Killed

Chad Arment

“Black panther” sightings have been occurring regularly in North America since the early 1900s. (Occasionally prior to that, though most newspaper accounts in the 1800s are stories, not necessarily factual news items, likely written to fill space and entertain readers.) Sometimes they were thought escaped exotics, sometimes they were believed native (whether a melanistic cougar or something else). When there’s a black panther sighting, there’s usually a black panther hunt. Over the years, there have been cases where black panthers have been shot, or killed in some other fashion. These are a few of those stories.

1921: MATT TODD’S PANTHER

This story starts near Independence, Missouri, on the outskirts of Kansas City. Horne’s Zoological Arena Co. was a wild animal procurer that operated in Jackson County, east of Independence. The company supplied zoos, circuses, and wild west shows with animals from around the world. In October 1921, an eighty-pound black leopard recently arrived from India broke out of its cage and hightailed it into the countryside (Anon. 1921a; Anon. 1921f). It wasn’t long before “fiery eyes” were being reported throughout the county; close to a thousand volunteers and their dogs searched a thirty-mile radius in vain (Anon 1921c; Anon. 1921d).

In early November, though a sighting came in from Hunnewell, Shelby County, quite a distance from Independence, there were also reports from Warrensburg, Johnson County, much closer to Independence (Anon. 1921e; Anon. 1921g). Then, a farmer in Mulberry, Bates County, about sixty miles south of Independence, captured a black leopard after he found it eating a chicken (Anon. 1921h; Anon. 1921i). Using ropes and his eight hounds, Edward Cummings managed to catch the cat alive after it had killed two of his dogs (and gave him a

deep gash on the leg). He planned to show it in downtown Kansas City before returning it to the zoo.

That really should have been the end of the story. But, early December 1921, Matt Todd, a farmer in Houston, Texas County, was out fox hunting near Ellis Prairie north of town, when his dogs kicked up a large black feline. Todd shot and the cat ran off. It was a quarter mile before the dogs could force it to take a stand, so that Todd could use his shotgun to finish the chase. The cat weighed 65 pounds and was six feet long “tip to tip.” There had been no suspicion of such an animal in the area prior to this (Anon. 1921b; Anon. 1921j). Todd wasn’t even sure what it was until he brought it into town, where he was told it must be the escaped leopard from Independence (despite being about 250 miles from that location). If it wasn’t for the foresight of the Houston *Herald* editor, we’d have very little to go on here, but he suggested that Todd have his photo taken with the cat before sending it to the zoological company. Todd did arrange to have the cat sent back, though the offered reward was dropped to \$10 when they found out it had been shot.

But was this actually the Independence panther? What happened to the captured panther from Bates County? Did the Horne company simply take advantage of an extra skin? Or did the black leopard actually travel all that distance? Lane E. Davis (1968) of the Houston *Herald* brought up similar questions after he re-interviewed the aging Matt Todd, noting that there was a great deal of dense, wooded country between Texas County and Independence. He noted that while Todd received \$10 for the animal, no one actually confirmed to him that it was their cat; they may simply have sent the money for the trouble taken in shipping it. (A brief blurb in a local town gossip column from 1921 is also worth noting: “Well, it seemed for awhile that the black leopard was killed, but Mr. Horne seems to think he has had it all this while right in the zoo (?)” (Aunt Beth 1921), suggesting that the Hornes knew this was a different cat.)

Davis had first heard about the Matt Todd panther story in 1953 (LED 1953), after someone recalled the story after the newspaper had published a few local black panther sightings. Several individuals in the Houston area had seen a large black feline (“too big for a dog”), both at that time and going back a couple of years (Anon. 1953).



Matt Todd (on right), with the black leopard.



A second published version of the photo.

(There had also been a sighting in the Licking area, southeastern Texas County, the year prior (LED 1952).)

This was the start of several years' worth of sighting reports: near the Caney Mountain refuge (LED 1954); near Mountain View, "black, about five feet long with a tail about three feet in length" (LED 1955); several sightings near Oak Hill (Noe 1956); on a Bado area farm, during daylight hours, as a black panther the size of a collie dog eyed the witness for a few seconds than "nonchalantly slunk away into the underbrush" (Anon. 1958); and a trapper who found "panther"-sized tracks (LED 1959). Sightings slowed down after that, but popped up occasionally (such as a 1965 report that a farming couple watched as one "wandered across the field sniffing about where the cattle had lain the night before" (Anon. 1965e)).

Was Matt Todd's panther a leopard? It appears so. The photographed animal looks more like a leopard than a cougar. It was first described as "unquestionably of the cat species, very dark, almost black in color, with spots on its sides" (Anon. 1921b). In Davis' first interview (LED 1953), Todd noted, "There were brown spots on its coal black coat. The spots were about the size of a quarter but you couldn't see them unless the leopard was in the sun. It looked solid black in the shade." But there don't appear to be any simple answers as to how it ended up in Texas County.

1958: THE TALLABOGUE PANTHER

The majority of historical black panther accounts are hit-and-runs. They show up one week in the newspaper, and you never see mention of them again: little follow-up, no pictures, just a rumored encounter and the cat (or carcass) disappears. (Outside of some snark from a neighboring county's newspaper editor, anyway.)

This one is no different, and is a good example of the type. In early January, a local African-American man, Otis Chapman, was hunting in the woods in "Talleybo swamp," a few miles north of Forest, Mississippi. His dogs caught a deer's scent and gave chase, at which point Chapman heard a "banshee-like wail" that locals had been reporting from the woods for several months. Chapman dropped the game he had shot previously, stepped behind a tree, and watched as a large six-foot-long black panther approached. As it came near the

dropped game, Chapman shot it four times with his .410, and the animal dropped dead (Anon. 1958a).

Chapman reported the kill to City Marshal H. B. McCrory, who recounted all of this to the reporters. McCrory noted that chickens, calves, and hogs had been reported missing or killed at local farms, and tracks of a big cat had been reported around the region.

Initially reported at 350 pounds, McCrory later noted that he meant to say the animal was in the 200- to 250-pound class (Anon. 1958c). McCrory reported that he and others went out to where the panther was killed and found the location of the shooting, and plenty of blood on the ground, but no body (Anon. 1958b). So, as with so many other accounts, we are left with nothing more than a story.

The “Talleybo swamp” won’t be found in a Mississippi atlas, but you can find the area on Google Maps easily enough. It’s the area along the Tallabogue Creek, just west of Tallabogue Road, just a few miles north of Forest (and just east of Route 35). Tallabogue is a corruption of the Choctaw phrase “tala bok,” or “palmetto creek.”

1963: THE JUNGLELAND PANTHER

1963 started out bad for black panthers. At the San Diego Zoo, keeper James Tuttle was feeding the big cats when he pulled the wrong lever, allowing Jet, a 140-pound melanistic leopard, into the safety cage, a wire-enclose passage behind the exhibit caging. A 14-year-old boy watched in horror: “I saw the panther leap through the air and jump on a man’s back—then I heard a low grunt. There were no screams.” The big cat shook him by the back of the neck and nearly ripped off half the man’s face. Tuttle was bleeding badly by the time zoo attendants managed to corral the leopard, and died on arrival at the hospital (AP 1963b).

Just a few weeks later, a two-year-old, sixty-pound female black leopard (freshly imported from Thailand) escaped from Jungleland, a private zoo in Thousand Oaks, California, that provided animals for Hollywood. The cat had escaped by climbing through a feed-bin door that was supposed to be locked. The Jungleland director said it looked like someone had purposefully opened it. (Or perhaps the cat managed to do it on its own; a visitor to the zoo reported that he had earlier seen the cat diving through the feed opening when a keeper was tossing it food, but was forced back with a pole before it could escape.) A large

posse was immediately formed, but had no luck. The county sheriff noted that the cat could easily disappear in the hills, and that there had been reports before of a black panther in the area: "Who knows? Maybe they'll mate" (Anon. 1963a; Anon. 1963b). The County Animal Control director noted that an African lion of unknown origin had been loose in the hills between Jungleland and Camarillo for some time.

It turned out that rather than heading for the hills, the black panther hid within the Jungleland compound. One of Hollywood's first "singing cowboys," actor and later gospel-singer Stuart Hamblen met up with his hunting pal Ronnie Page (with their dogs) to help with the search. He noted, "I was thinking if he goes out and catches a child it would be a terrible shame," well aware that a man had been killed by one in San Diego only a few weeks earlier. They walked their dogs around the compound without catching a scent, suggesting the cat hadn't left the area. Hamblen carried his 30-30 rifle, while Page had a



Associated Press Wirephoto.

Swan Song for a Panther



Stuart Hamblen and Ronnie Page look at the black panther killed by Hamblen with a single shot in semi-darkness beneath a zoo building in Thousands Oaks, Calif., yesterday. The pan-

ther, brought to the U.S. from Thailand only three weeks ago and described as extremely dangerous, had been the object of a big hunt for 36 hours. (A PWirephoto)

pistol and flashlight. Entering the compound, they tracked the cat to its hiding place under a warehouse, as visitors continued to enjoy the animal exhibits nearby. The cat was cornered, and they were hoping to capture it alive, but Hamblen realized the crouching cat was going to spring when its ears kicked back and it snarled: "I hated to shoot him." The cat's demise ended the 36-hour hunt (AP 1963a).

So what's the significance of this account? Following this event, photos of Hamblen and the dead black panther were published in hundreds of newspapers across the country, from coast to coast. This is one reason I have no patience for conspiracy theories that black panthers (or other mystery animals) are being deliberately suppressed. People (and newspapers) love a strange story. If confirmative evidence of a true, undescribed species of black panther (or a melanistic form of the known cougar) is ever obtained, there will be plenty of venues to distribute the news, after it is properly evaluated. The evidence just needs to reach the right people. That's not a given, though. Take our next example . . .

1965: GRANDPA WALL'S BLACK PANTHER

Clarence T. "Grandpa" Wall, one of the last Orange County, Florida, homesteaders, was, at the start of 1965, living in a tent in a "camp" with his dogs, chickens, ducks, and Shetland pony back in the brush off Goston Foster Road behind the Herndon Airport. He had fought in World War I, and worked as both a construction worker and photographer, before retiring to camp in the woods (Doolittle 1965a).

One day, Wall reported to the Orange County sheriff's office that a panther was taking his ducks. They told him to contact a game warden. Wall stated that the next night, as the moon was rising, he spotted "as big a panther as I ever saw, and I lived five years in the Big Cypress Swamp in the Everglades." It was on the edge of the lake, about to spring into the water. It wasn't black, but a "tabbit" (vernacular for tabby?), described as having grey and brownish spots like a bobcat. He only had five-shot in his 16-gauge shotgun, and though he fired once at it, he believed he was too far away to do much damage. The cat squalled and jumped backwards, disappearing into the bushes. He said the cat's reflected eyes were 30 inches above the ground (Lane 1965b). Wall suspected the cat was a female with young, as she'd been in the area for a while. (Newy Breland reported seeing a panther cross the

road in front of him while driving on Kirkman Road the prior week.) The local game warden, though he hadn't yet spoken to Wall, suspected it just was a fox or bobcat (Anon. 1965d). Wall noted that he had killed a couple panthers in the past, one at St. John's Marsh during the Depression.

The warden wasn't the only skeptic. A local sports columnist (Underwood 1965) argued that a true "panther" isn't found in Florida, only cougars, and those only in the Florida swamps. But, unusual felines continued to be reported in Orange County. Air Force Sgt. Jack Coffey took a couple of shots at a dark colored animal descending the tree in his back yard; it disappeared into the weeds (Anon. 1965c). G. C. Powers of Conway heard an animal in the brush in his back yard one night; he shined a light, reflecting on a pair of eyes as big as quarters about four inches apart and two feet off the ground. The animal appeared to be all black and screamed before disappearing (Anon. 1965b). A similar animal ("coal black," "about 30 inches high . . . its body was about the same length") was seen by Harold W. Greene back near the airport a few nights before (Anon. 1965a).

Mrs. Lois Eads, of northeast Orange County, said she had known about a panther pair in the area for almost six years. The male was black and the female was brown (and larger than the male). Mrs. Eads was well acquainted with local bobcats, and discounted them as a mistaken identity: "There are so many bobcats around here I don't pay 'em hardly any mind," as she pointed out their tracks to the visiting reporter. The pair of panthers had had cubs a couple years prior in a cave along the Little Econlockhatchee River. She suspected that Wall had shot the female, and that it might be dead, causing the black male panther to roam the area looking for it (Lane 1965a). (Her family's home was about seven miles from Wall's campsite.) She hoped that no one would hurt the cat, even though the panthers might occasionally take a chicken or other livestock: "They've got to eat." (She noted that a buffalo on the nearby J-Bar-J Ranch had been killed by a panther. The ranch owner confirmed that a calf had been killed two years prior. A later note on the subject stated that a calf was found devoured except for head and hooves, and they thought only a panther could have done that (Wadsworth and Stout 1965).)

In mid-February, as he was getting ready to retire for the night, Grandpa Wall heard a ruckus in his chicken coop (where he kept

bantam chickens). He ran out, grabbing a pair of large pruning shears, thinking that a raccoon had gotten in with the chickens. Instead he saw what he claimed was one of the “big cat’s cubs.” He clubbed it with the heavy shears and killed it. He then skinned and nailed it to the wall of his shed. The cat measured 35 ½ inches from tip of nose to tip of tail. He didn’t believe it was an ordinary domestic cat, and noted that he had seen the mamma panther near the camp site several times the previous week. He thought she was weaning her cubs and dropping them off at different locations.

Unfortunately, there’s no record of where the skin ended up or that it was ever examined by an expert. There’s nothing in the photograph to give us any clue to its actual identity, whether known species or something unknown. It remains, though, one of the very few alleged photos of a “black panther” from North America.



GRANDPA WALL WITH PANTHER HIDE
... And pruning tongs he used to kill animal

In 1967, Wall was arrested for contributing to the delinquency of minors, though he claimed that the “seven drunk boys” had invaded his camp and refused to leave when he asked them to. The boys’ mothers wanted him ousted from the camp. (Anon. 1967). Only a few months later, Wall was disarmed and transported to his son-in-law’s cabin in Ocala for “safe-keeping” after he stuck his shotgun in a fifteen-year-old boy’s stomach for trespassing (Dudley 1967). (The teen was also armed. Someone had set fire to Grandpa’s tent a few weeks earlier, so little wonder he was testy.) Wall doesn’t seem to have stayed in Ocala long, as he ended up back in Apopka, where he died in August 1968 (Yothers 1968). He was in his late 60s, though his given age varied in news stories.

A BLACK PANTHER SKIN IN THE CHARLESTON MUSEUM?

Alexander Sprunt, Jr., (1898-1973) was raised in Charleston, South Carolina, son of the minister of the town’s Scots Presbyterian Church. An early interest in birds soon became a lifelong passion. He attended Davidson College in North Carolina for three years, before entering (in 1918) the U.S. Navy to serve for two years. On his return, he took up an unofficial apprenticeship with Arthur T. Wayne, a major contributor to South Carolina ornithology, learning skills in identification, collecting, and skin preparation. In 1924, Sprunt took a part-time position at the Charleston Museum, mostly as taxidermist and exhibit preparator. When Wayne died in 1930, Sprunt and a colleague updated Wayne’s *The Birds of South Carolina*. Having grown up reading nature books, Sprunt began to write more, including becoming the natural history columnist for his local paper. In 1934, Sprunt was hired by the National Audubon Society to be their Southern Representative, supervising the sanctuaries throughout the southern states. The NAS also used his speaking ability in a wildlife film lecture series, where his popular talks were illustrated with motion pictures (Buchheister 1976).

It was during one of his travels for Audubon that Sprunt encountered a black panther in the western portion of Lower Matecumbe Key. Sprunt’s 1964 account places this in the winter of 1937, but his 1938 column puts it in January of that year. Sprunt (1938) stated: “In January the writer had occasion to make a night run from Tavernier, on Key Largo to Marathon, on Key Vaca, a distance of about forty-eight miles one way. On the return trip, which was made about midnight,

the writer was fortunate enough to see of these panthers. Naturally, not much more than a long glimpse was obtained, and that was not as satisfactorily as might be wished for, but it was enough. The creature happened to be on one of the old banks of the railway, a rather high embankment, and on the approach of the car, it ran down the bank, its eyes glowing like a pair of large lanterns. It dived into a thick scrub of vegetation between the highway and the old tracks, from which it could not be routed. True, the effort to dislodge it was made pretty close to the car, and only by throwing pieces of rock and trash into the thicket, for intimate contact with the black prowler was not desired." It made an impression, as he noted in 1964: "I was driving at night . . . when, across the road in front, leaped a large black animal, its long tail held high and curved at the tip, limned in perfect detail in the headlights. It was there, it was gone—but it was a black (melanistic) panther."

What is more intriguing, however, is that Sprunt had actually obtained a skin of an alleged black panther from the Keys. Sprunt (1937) notes that while on an inspection tour of the Audubon sanctuaries in the Keys (this would have been in 1936), he was talking to one of the Audubon wardens, Jim Durden, who casually mentioned that a trapper he knew had caught a black panther the night before. This of course interested Sprunt, and they went to the trapper's cabin to take a look. It was tacked to the side of the cabin (Sprunt 1964), and the trapper agreed to sell it for five dollars. Sprunt took it home and presented it to the Charleston Museum. The mammologist there, Burnham Chamberlain, was pleased, but "remarked that it was too bad I had not secured the skull also!" So, the next trip down, a month later, Sprunt visited the trapper and asked him what might have happened to the cat's head. "He scratched his own for a minute or two, then said he 'reckoned' he had pitched it 'over there by them mangroves.'" A short while later, Sprunt had located the intact skull, "nicely bleached and well cleaned by insects!" The skull was deposited along with the skin.

Only Sprunt's 1937 column gives much detail on the skin itself. It was a "kitten," no size given ("the writer was told on a more recent trip to the Keys that the old panther and another youngster had been seen since his former visit"). "The skin is as black as a coal, not a light spot on it." Sprunt speculated that this black variety might be a race of Florida panthers endemic to the Keys.

While the skin has been mentioned in Dr. Thomas Barbour's *That Vanishing Eden: A Naturalist's Florida* (1944), there doesn't appear to be any scientific examination of the skin in the published literature.

Interestingly, another black panther was allegedly killed in the Keys in January 1937 (Anon. 1937). The news account stated: "A black panther was shot and killed 1 ½ miles south of Caribbee in the keys, it was reported by James S. Harris, Charles A. Harris and Frank Martin of Miami, who are camping north of the Hillcrest Colony at Snake Creek. The animal was killed by James Harris with a 12-gauge shotgun. Harris, who is 67 years old, resides at N. W. Ninety-fifth street and Thirty-second avenue. The three Miamians encountered the panther while hunting and trapping coons. They said it was the first black panther they had ever seen. It measured 3 feet 10 inches in length and 14 inches across the shoulders."

Does the Charleston Museum still have the black panther skin and skull? I emailed the Curator of Natural History, Matthew Gibson. He told me that he'd actually been contacted before about this specimen, so though he can't access his notes at the Museum right now (due to the Covid-19 restrictions), he did recall that the cat had been examined at some point and determined to be a large feral cat. This is not a surprise, of course. Anytime we hear about a domestic cat-sized skin (sorry, Grandpa Wall), we need to recognize that a feral cat is probably the culprit. Still, the more (testable) specimens in museums, the better.

There are very few serious investigators of black panther sightings anymore. The subject doesn't carry the panache of Bigfoot research, and too often, the investigator isn't interested in critically examining the evidence. So, all we get are sporadic headlines with little detail and no zoology-based analysis. I do think there is a legitimate biological mystery underlying certain aspects of the folkloric miasma, though it may not be an unknown species. I've discussed some alternative ideas in my book, *Varmints*.

We have the technology to scientifically examine hair samples of suspect felines, but resources (funding) to adequately collect and test such samples are lacking. That is something to consider if you're a student looking for a biology problem to investigate.

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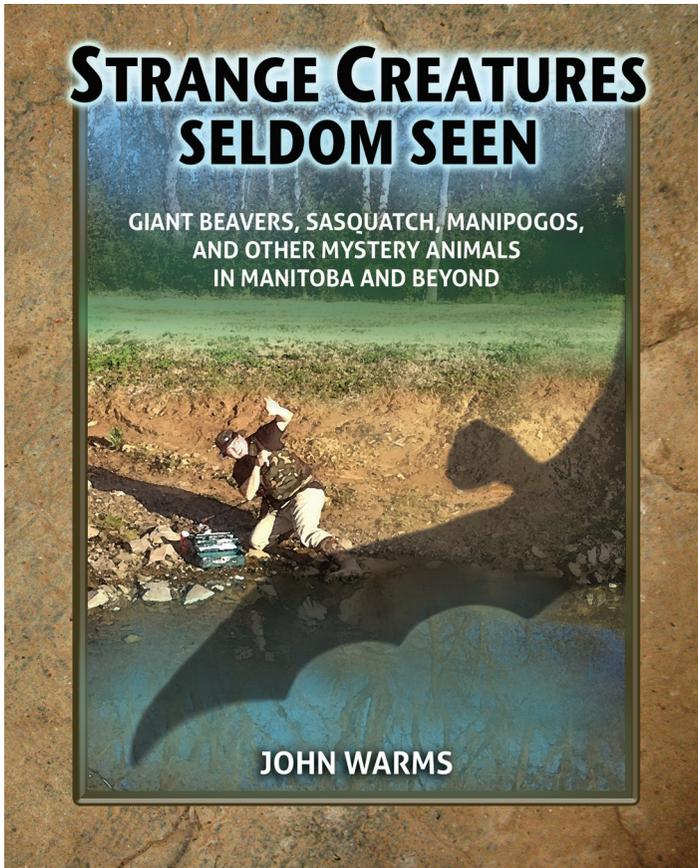
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Strange Creatures Seldom Seen

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.

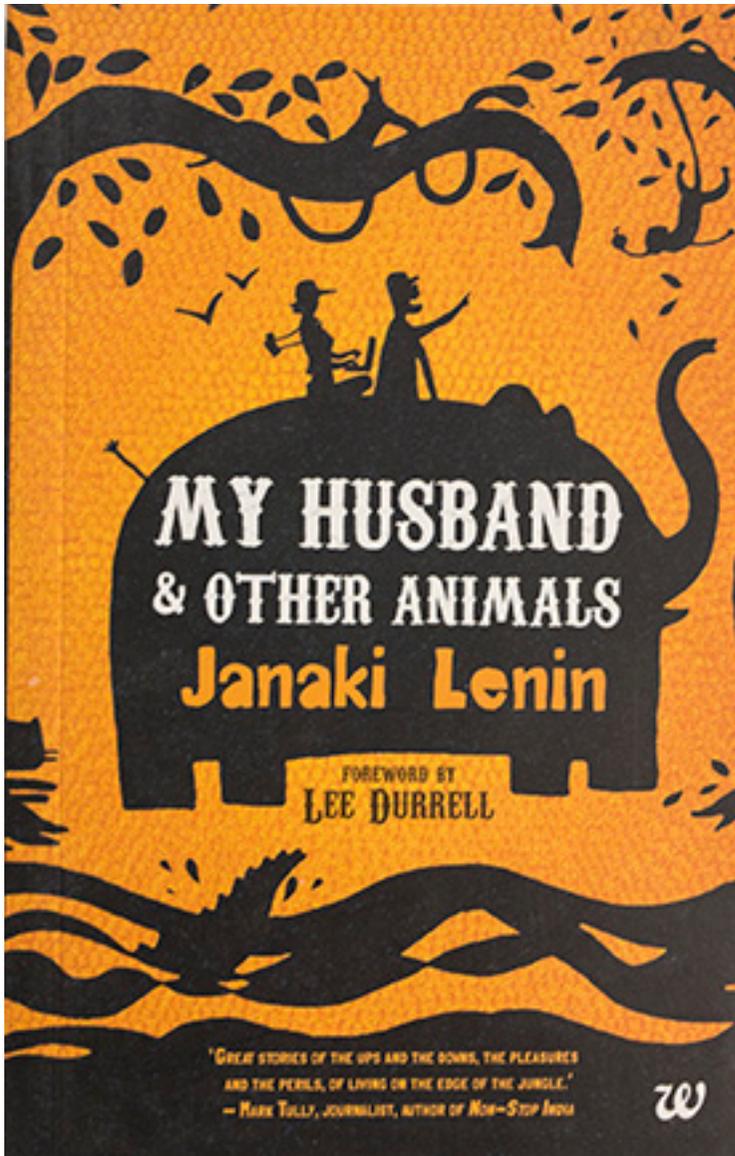
The Smokey Cat of India

Tony Gerard

Years ago I worked on a film shoot in India where I had the privilege to hang out with renowned herpetologist Rom Whitaker. Among the many things we discussed was the possibility of species yet to be scientifically described. One which Rom mentioned I found particularly intriguing. It was a feline allegedly found in the Western Ghats of India. He referred to it as the “Smokey Cat.” It was supposedly leopard sized, but without any type of pattern. When I asked why he didn’t just think it was a population of odd color morph leopards, his response was that he’d known a number of people personally who had seen one, some of them even biologists, and that it had physical characteristics different from leopards.

In the years since, Rom’s wife Janaki Lenin, has written several interesting and entertaining books about life with Rom and Indian wildlife. In her book *My Husband and Other Animals*, she devotes a section to the Smokey Cat.

She relates that they first heard of the Smokey Cat from a friend, Santosh Mani, who had been a tea plantation manager for over 40 years in Munnar, Kerala. He had twice seen a Smokey Cat in the same area over a five-year period. He’d had a sighting in the early afternoon, so he’d gotten a good look at it. Upon enquiring with the Mudhuvan, the local tribe, he found they were familiar with it, calling it Pogeyan Puli, which translates to “smokey cat.” They distinguished it as clearly different from a leopard, tiger, or jungle cat. Later they spoke with a friend who was a Kerala Forest Department official. While hiking in Eravikulam National Park, he was climbing up a steep hill when he looked up to see a Smokey Cat on a ledge above him. They exchanged a look and the cat beat a quick retreat. Another friend, Sandesh Kadur, a professional wildlife photographer, had also seen a Smokey Cat at Eravikulam. During his daylight sighting he watched what he described



Janaki Lenin's book, *My Husband and Other Animals*, includes a short chapter on the Smokey Cat.

A variant of this chapter appeared in her column in [The Hindu](#).

as a “jungle cat on steroids” calmly crossing a grassland. He was afraid if he moved the cat would see him and run, so he didn’t get a photo. At the time he’d never heard of the Pogeyan Puli. Years later he was commissioned by the BBC to make a film about the mystery feline. He set out camera traps in the area, but after 200 trap nights had no success.

Santosh Mani later phoned Janaki to say he’d at last discovered the identity of the Smokey cat—he said it looked exactly like the picture of an Asiatic golden cat (*Catopuma temminckii*). Current range estimates place the golden cat in Southeastern Asia, but it is unknown from peninsular India. (Most occurrences of the Asiatic golden cat in India are along the very eastern edges (Chatterjee, et al., 2018; Ghose, Sharma, and Murali 2019; Gouda, Sethy, and Chauhan 2016). See map.)

Mohan Alembath, a former forestry department official, agreed with the golden cat appearance. He sent Janaki a link to a golden cat video from Indonesia, saying the Pogeyan Puli looked exactly like it. He had seen the cat once, from 50 meters as it crossed the road. He related, “Until I saw him, I had believed the Mudvan were spinning a yarn. I am 100 per cent sure Smokey exists.”

In the summer of 2019, I had the opportunity to return to India. Our friend Yatin Kalki was doing king cobra research out of Agumbi Rainforest Research Station in the Western Ghats. The research station has been started by Rom Whitaker years before. He chose the area in particular because the local population seemed to have a more enlightened and forgiving attitude toward snakes and other wildlife than many parts of the country. My family was spending the summer in the Philippines, so since we had family to leave the kids with, we invited ourselves for a visit and Yatin was kind enough to oblige.

Agumbi is a herper’s dream, but while we were there I also remembered to inquire about the Smokey Cat. As it turned out the site manager at the station, Kumar Sringeri, had actually seen such a mystery cat more than once. In the Agumbi area it was referred to as Hulikurka. Yatin and another friend, Nisarg Prakash, were good enough to serve as translators, and I had several conversations with Kumar about the Hulikurka. Kumar related that two of his sightings were of the cat crossing the road. On the more recent sighting he said the cat ran down the road away from him for a good ways before crossing the road in front of him, so he had a good view of it. He described it as chestnut brown in color (he actually indicated an old bamboo table as



Red points: Locations where the Asiatic golden cat has been confirmed in India: (top) Neora Valley National Park; (middle) Buxa Tiger Reserve; (bottom) Dampa Tiger Reserve Sanctuary.

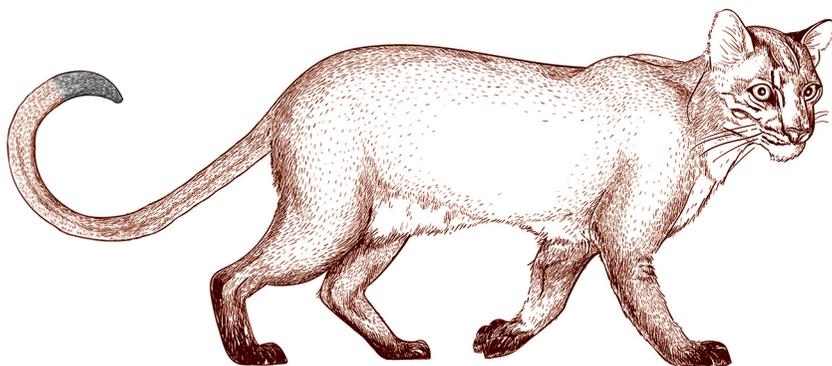
Blue points: Locations with Smokey Cat sightings: (top) Agumbe Rainforest Research Station; (bottom) Eravikulam National Park.

(Map data ©2020 Google, Mapa GISrael, ORION-ME)

being about the color) with a black tipped tail. He also noted that the cat had a ruff under its chin, “like an old tomcat.” He related that the Hulikurka posed no danger to humans, but that they hated dogs. “You can tell by the sound a dog makes when it is being killed by a Hulikurka,” he said.

He also said that in about 2013 or so a young Hulikurka had been captured alive in the Agumbi area. Two teenage boys were hunting with a pack of six dogs. The dogs jumped a Hulikurka and gave chase. The cat eventually took shelter in a hollow log, but unfortunately for the cat, its hind quarters were still exposed. The boys managed to call off the dogs and catch the somewhat injured cat alive, but not without both receiving some serious scratches themselves. They brought it back to the village, but they both needed medical treatment, and it was Kumar who drove them to the hospital. When he returned with the boys, they found the village elders had decided the boys had no business capturing the cat and had set it free.

While Kumar was firm in his belief that the Hulikurka existed as a distinct part of the local fauna, other biologists I spoke with at Agumbi were not so certain. My friend Yatin found the Hulikurka intriguing but noted that in his experience may witness descriptions did not agree. The landowner where Yatin was currently radio tracking a king cobra claimed his dogs had been killed by a Hulikurka. He described it as brown, but with some black mottling and a long dog-like snout,



The Hulikurka



Jungle Cat
(Vipul Ramanuj, [Wild Ark Nature Photography](#))



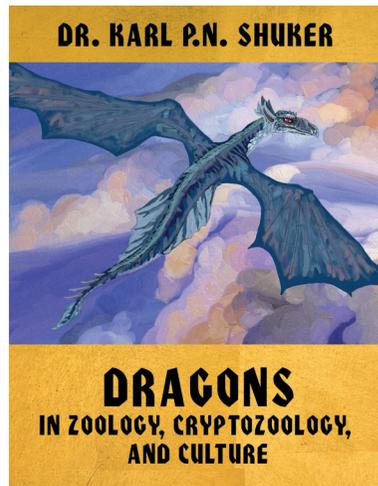
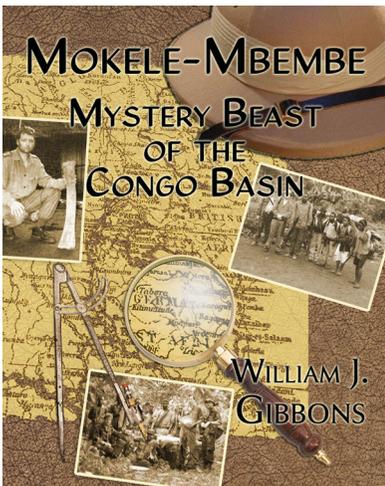
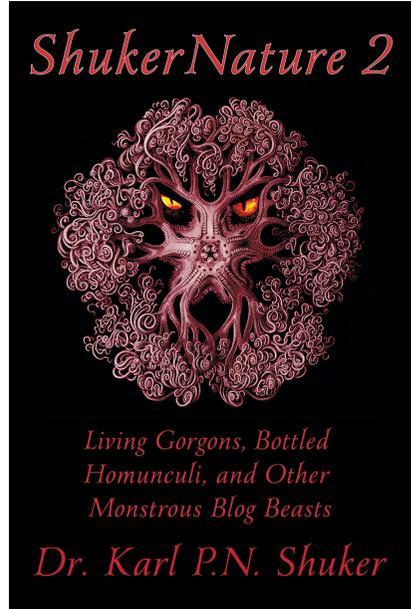
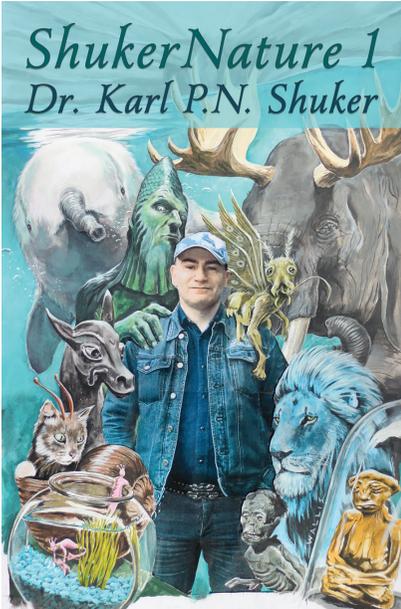
Asiatic Golden Cat
(Marie Hale)

not particularly cat-like. Both Yatin and wildlife photographer Vipul Ramanuj noted that the forestry department and various biologists have many, many camera traps out for hundreds of trap hours. While these traps capture plenty of leopards, tigers, and other wildlife, they have yet to come up with a Hulikurka photo.

The Hulikurka or Pogeyan Puli definitely appears worthy of further investigation. If I may be indulged with injecting a personal opinion, so often cryptids “occur” in areas only after nature in that area has been beaten into submission. Once the wolves, bears, cougars, or whatever else once inhabited the area are gone, then the black panthers and chupacabras begin to appear. It’s as if we humans have a psychological need for that scary thing in the dark woods. The forests of the Western Ghats still have plenty of scary, dangerous things in the woods. Tigers, leopards, elephants, and the largest venomous snake on planet Earth make their home here. There is no need to invent a mystery animal, especially one less scary than a leopard, to fill the void—it’s already filled by real creatures. I think this particular cryptid stands a fair chance to be a real animal.

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Book Reviews

Beyond the Secret Elephants

Gareth Patterson

Tracey McDonald Publishers, 2020

Reviewer: Chad Arment

“An open mind is central to science.” With these opening words, field biologist Ian Redmond sets the stage in his foreword to a remarkable book on a little-known cryptozoological subject. Author and conservationist Gareth Patterson has spent his life working with the fauna of South Africa. His research into the elephants of Knysna Forest has shown that a small but viable population remains: they “exist quietly, hidden in secret places in their enormous range of hundreds of square kilometres of dense forest and mountain fynbos.” This, despite several announcements by government officials pushing the idea that the population is functionally extinct.

While studying these elephants, he became aware of the Otang, reported by the local forest-dwelling people, and apparently a relict hominoid. Over the years, he heard more and more stories, and even encountered the creatures himself. Despite misgivings about writing about the Otang, he has put together an eminently readable and informative book that should be on the (digital) shelf of every serious cryptozoology enthusiast.

Among the sighting encounters are scattered accounts of the Knysna Forest itself, the different species (especially the elephants), the habitat, and the people who live in and around it. As events unfold, the author brings us humor, tragedy, wonder, and a respect for this very unique part of Africa (home to the Cape Floristic Region, smallest of the six floral kingdoms of the entire world).

The Otang will certainly be new to many enthusiasts; yet it is also very similar to ‘man ape’ accounts in other parts of the world. The investigation will feel like *deja vu* to researchers: collecting sighting encounters, a few unexpected personal sightings over nearly two decades in the region, searching for spoor or footprints. (Footprints are occasionally found, one reasonably clear photo is shown near the back of the ebook; unlike with elephants, there is little other physical evidence to be found. This is a shame, as the author has experience with collecting samples for genetic testing.)

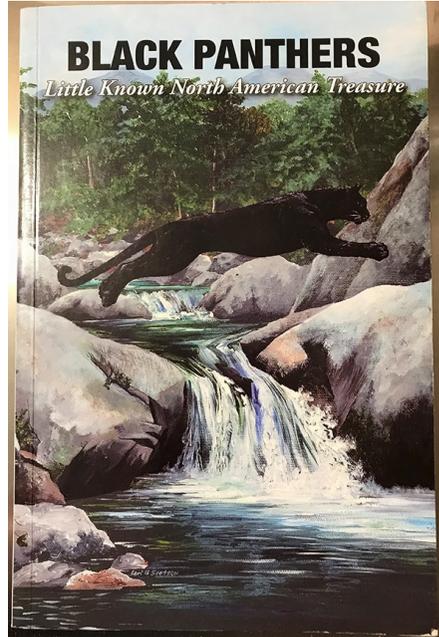
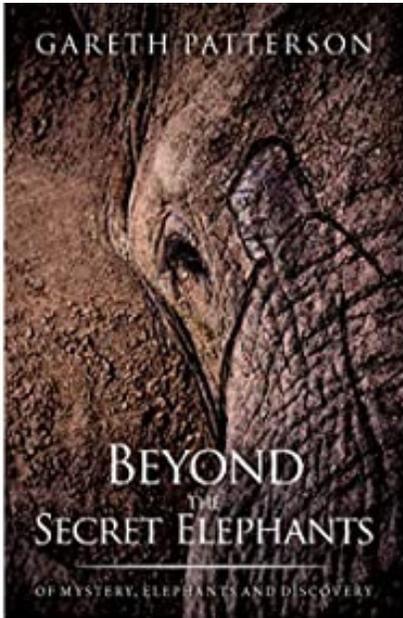
Cryptozoology researchers will find other stories of interest. Patterson relates a telling conversation overheard between a couple of Knysna locals, showing how the (often government-fueled) myth that the Knysna elephants are extinct continues to grow. An older man tells another: “Back in the 1970s, admittedly, yes, the Knysna elephants were around . . . but they have all died out since then. It was inevitable anyway. It couldn’t be helped. In the end there was only one old female wandering aimlessly around on her own. But there hasn’t been any sign of her for a good few years now. . . . Some of the locals . . . like to keep the story going, it’s good for tourism. Every once in a while someone will claim to have seen an elephant, droppings or footprints. Then this might get into the local rags. Funny thing is . . . these so-called sightings or whatever, usually take place in the season when the town is bulging with visitors. It is a great story for them to go home with. You know . . . ‘legendary Knysna elephant sighted’, and the fools go home believing it!”

Yeah, we’ve heard that narrative before.

Besides this title, there is very little in the English language in regards to African mystery apes. This probably isn’t surprising as many of the people throughout Africa don’t speak English (or at least not as their first language). European colonists came from France, Germany, Portugal, the Netherlands, and elsewhere. I suspect there is a lot of cryptozoological data yet to be mined (or at least translated). Patterson discusses briefly one such investigation by Dr. C. K. Brain, Curator Emeritus at the Transvaal Museum, into the ‘waterbobbajaan’ or ‘water baboon.’ (This was written up in a 1998 *Fortean Times* article by Sian Hall.) For those not limited by the English language, look for Bernard Heuvelmans’ *Les Betes Humaines d’Afrique*, and Jacqueline

Roumeguère-Eberhardt's *Dossier X: Les Hominidés Non Identifiés des Forêts d'Afrique* (now available on Kindle, still in French).

Beyond the Secret Elephants is available from many online book-sellers as an ebook. A print version only appears to be available in South Africa at the current time.



Black Panthers: Little Known North American Treasure

Alfred Willis

Panther Research LLC, 2007.

Reviewer: Chad Arment

This is a gem of a book on a mystery animal that doesn't get much serious attention. I discovered it while working on the black panther article elsewhere in this issue; it was a surprise, as there aren't many books on the subject (my own *Varmints* surveys a bit of territory here, and there is Michael Mayes' *Shadow Cats*).

Most of the book is made up of sighting reports that Willis has gathered, primarily from Virginia, but from other states also. As any

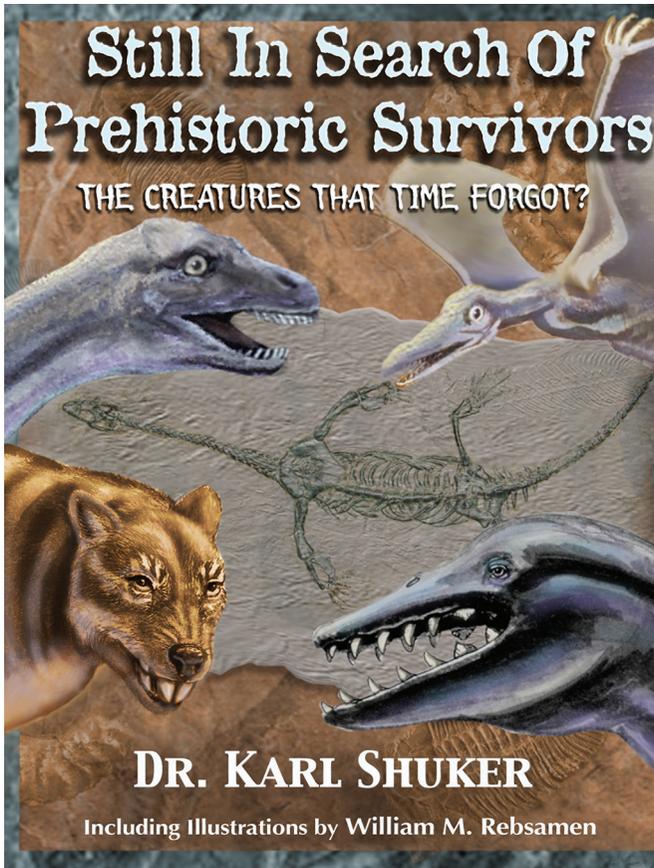
cryptozoology investigator knows, sighting reports are folklore, but they include data which can be used to develop a research strategy which (hopefully) will eventually lead to a viable solution to the mystery.

I am not as optimistic as the author, perhaps, that there is a 'one size fits all' solution to the black panther problem. I strongly suspect that there are a number of significant factors contributing to the creation and continuation of black panther folklore. One factor, in certain regions, may be an unrecognized biological species (whether scientifically or biogeographically unknown), but other factors are more likely in play. While the author touches on some of these ideas, this is not the thrust of his book.

Overall, the descriptive accounts of the cats themselves are better than we often see in small press books. The author has made sure to try and record important details.

One interesting area the author discusses is the disparity between the published record of historical black panther accounts (very sparse) versus the oral history that he has recorded. I'm not ready to jump aboard the idea that different words were necessarily used to signify a black panther (there's far too much flux in language and description for wild cats in historical records), but I do think we should start building a historical repository of such accounts. (You would think that early trappers/traders in the 1700s would have records of black felines. Perhaps the lack of such suggests a nineteenth century introduction.)

In any case, this is a great little book, and if you are a mystery cat enthusiast, it's worth picking up if you find it in a used bookstore.



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.

STRANGE ANIMAL KILLED



Utterly strange to North America, this South American "paca," was killed yesterday in a chicken coop at Nicholson. Joe Kolijeski holds the animal, which was exhibited in front of the Tom Taylor Store, Linden Street, where it attracted crowds of curious. The animal, identified by William Stanaka, assistant to Elizabeth Taylor, director of the Everhart Museum, is to be stuffed and placed in the museum. It is believed to have escaped from a carnival or circus.

From 1939, this paca a good example of an out-of-place animal likely sourced from a traveling menagerie. Pacas were strange enough to make an impression on visitors, while being easy to acquire from animal importers. (Scranton, PA, *Scrantonian*, Oct. 29, 1939)

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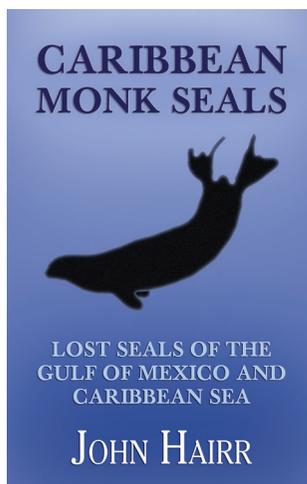
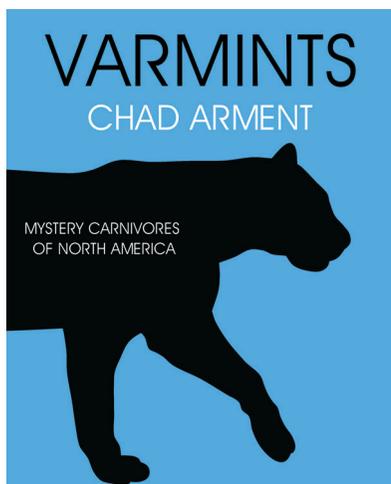
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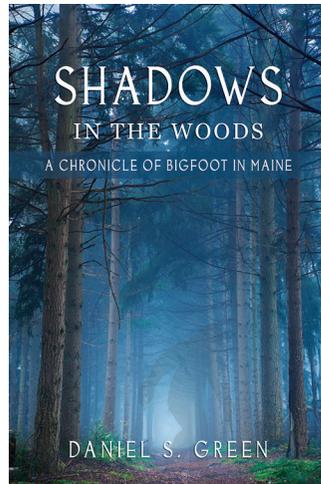
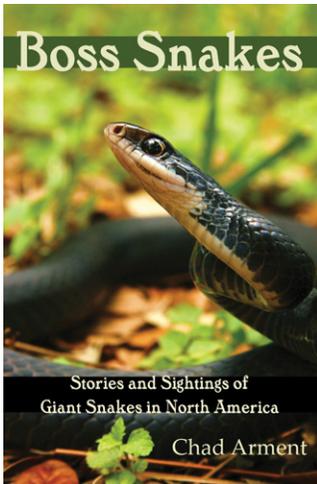
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corroborates such). You can contact me through the
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