

# EXOTIC ZOOLOGY

The Bimonthly Magazine of Cryptozoology  
(formerly titled Cryptozoology Newsletter)

Vol. 2., #3

May/June 1995

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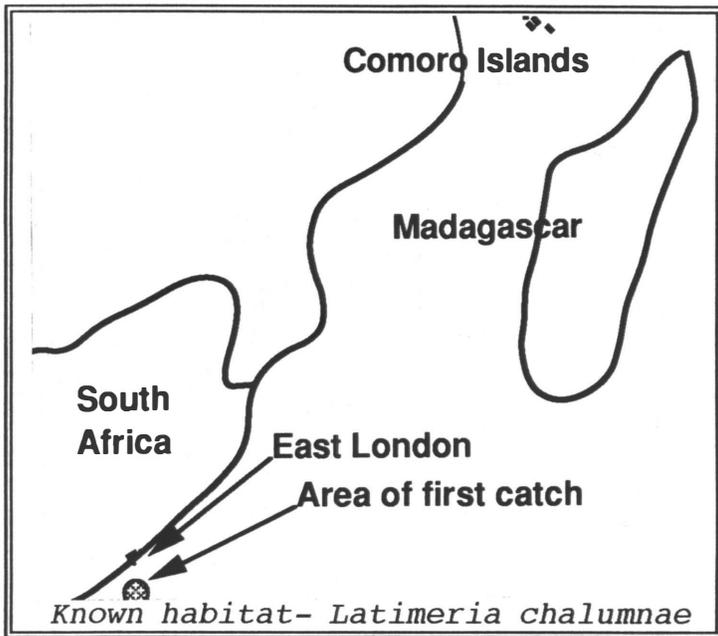
## RECENT DISCOVERIES:

### THE COELACANTH: STILL A PUZZLE

There is no 20th-century animal discovery more famous than *Latimeria chalumnae*. When this Mesozoic fish turned up in a South African trawler's net in 1938, it proved that descendants of a prehistoric species could exist undiscovered long after the end of the known fossil record. The credit goes to Marjorie Courtney-Latimer of the East London Museum, who first realized the fish was unique, and Prof. James L. B. Smith, the ichthyologist who felt "a bomb burst in my brain" when he realized what she had found.

Technically, we're talking about "a coelacanth," since *Latimeria* is the only known survivor of the order Coelacanthini. This fish has many peculiar features, such as an extra joint in the top of the skull and a soft, hollow notochord filled with oil in place of a true backbone. Of special note are the pectoral fins, which look like stumpy, fringed legs. The fishermen who caught the first specimen called it "the great sea lizard." The coelacanth is a member of the lobe-finned fishes, which gave rise to the amphibians, which in turn evolved into the reptiles, mammals, and birds. While it's not our direct ancestor, the coelacanth tells us a great deal about the evolution of vertebrates. It has not, as we shall see, settled the controversy over just how far the living species' range extends.

Since that first catch, well over a hundred more examples have been obtained. Indeed, we may drive this species back into extinction for good. Two scientists, George and Susan Brown, formed the Society for Protection of Old Fishes (yes, the acronym is SPOOF) to promote the sharing of existing specimens and tissue and thus reduce the demand for additional catches.



Now we come to the **still-current mysteries** surrounding this peculiar fish. Its habitat is generally believed to be limited to the area immediately surrounding the Comoro Islands, but the very first coelacanth was caught 1,800 miles away, off South Africa. No more South African specimens have been snagged, but there was a 1991 catch off Mozambique. Were these both strays? Most ichthyologists think so. A few suggest there is a second population, closer to the African coast, but this has never been confirmed.

Even farther afield, two small silver votive figures, of **19th-century Spanish origin**, have turned up. While not exact replicas, they certainly look like coelacanths. Dr. Keith Thomson, author of *Living Fossil*, suggests that, since there is no other evidence for a Mediterranean population, and certainly no case for an Atlantic Coast one, a specimen may have come to Spain in trade from the Comoros.

In 1949, a Tampa, Florida, souvenir shop bought some peculiar scales from a local fisherman. The shopkeeper sent one to Dr. Isaac Ginsberg of the US National Museum, who said it resembled "no other fish scale I have ever seen." He thought it came from a coelacanth or a close relative. But Dr. Ginsberg never heard from the shop owner again. Even the current whereabouts of the sample scale are unknown.

Zoologist J. Richard Greenwell wrote in a 1994 article that similar scales had been reported collected in the Gulf of Mexico in 1973 and 1992. In neither of these cases, however, was the evidence examined by a proper authority.

Most recently, reports have circulated about a coelacanth being caught off Jamaica. This startling tale made some newspapers, but this editor has been unable to confirm it. The above-mentioned Dr. George Brown has heard nothing of it. Dr. Karl Shuker, an English zoologist who was intrigued by the story and also tried to confirm it, now reports that he believes it was a hoax or a case of mistaken identity.

The scale identified in 1947 (Dr. Brown suggests mis-identified) thus remains the only real argument for an American population. Until and unless we have more evidence, this idea remains intriguing but unproven.

**Sources:** Anonymous. 1953. "Capture 'Living Fossil' Fish," *Science News Letter*, January 17 // Brown, George. 1995. Personal communication, April 10 // Greenwell, J. Richard. 1994. "Prehistoric fishing," *BBC Wildlife*, March // Shuker, Karl P. N. 1995. Personal communication, April 30 // Thomson, Keith S. 1991. *Living Fossil: The Story of the Coelacanth*. New York: W.W. Norton.

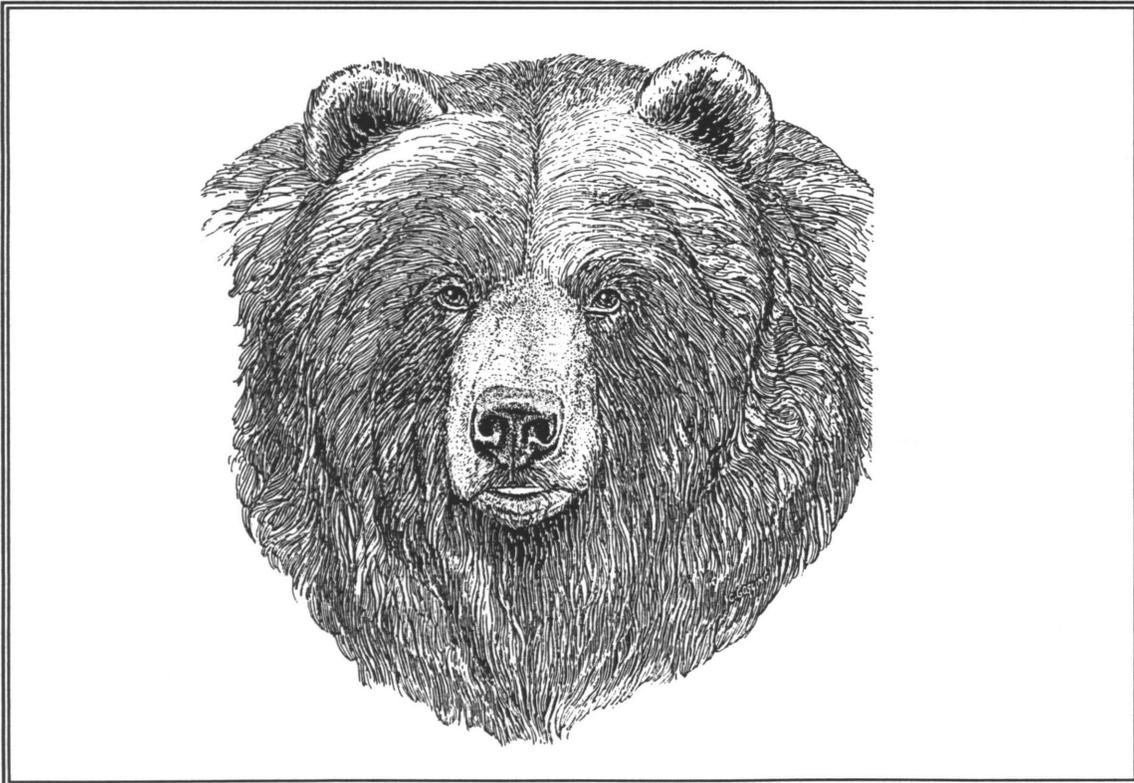
## MYSTERY ANIMALS: BEARS OF THE NORTH

There are two known species of "giant" bears. The brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), varieties of which include the grizzly, the Kodiak, the Peninsula, and the Kamchatka bear, is one. Nineteenth-century hunter John "Grizzly" Adams once captured a live grizzly weighing 1,510 pounds. The other giant is the polar bear (*U. maritimus*), of which one outsized specimen measured over 11 feet tall and weighed 2,200lbs.

Could other species still be at large? In 1864, Inuit hunters in Canada's Northwest Territories killed an "enormous" yellow-furred bear. Naturalist Robert MacFarlane obtained the bear's skin and skull and shipped the remains to the Smithsonian Institution, where they were placed in storage without much notice being taken.

Decades later, Dr. C. Hart Merriam found the specimen in "the nation's attic." Upon closer study, he decided that MacFarlane's animal belonged to a new species. While the specimen resembled the grizzly more than the polar bear, there were differences in the skull and teeth separating it from all other living bears. The skull most closely resembled prehistoric species. Merriam named the animal *Ursus inopinatus*, the "unexpected bear." In 1918 he went further, placing it in the newly created genus *Vetularctos*.

While there were Inuit stories about such bears, no other specimen has been collected. Theories concerning MacFarlane's bear include a freak grizzly, a grizzly-polar bear cross, or a surviving representative - maybe the very last - of a type that should have gone out with the Ice Age.



The brown bear, *Ursus arctos*, by Craig Gosling.

### MYSTERY BEAR (Continued):

Dr. James Halfpenny, a polar bear specialist, doubts the idea of a "throwback" grizzly but notes that grizzly-polar crosses are well-documented. However, no one has properly compared this specimen's remains to those of a known hybrid, so the matter remains unsettled.

Crossing the Bering Strait, we find a scientific report of another mystery bear. Dr. Sten Bergman, a Swedish zoologist, in 1920 was shown the skin of a giant, black-furred variety of the Kamchatka bear. Dr. Bergman, who spent two years studying Kamchatkan wildlife, wrote that the pelt "far surpassed" the size of any bearskin he had ever seen.

Notably, the black bear's pelt was short-haired, unlike the long coat of the normal Kamchatka bear. Bergman's 1936 paper also described a huge pawprint, fourteen and a half inches by ten, and a report of an equally outsized skull. David Day, in his book *Vanished Species*, lists this animal, *Ursus arctos piscator*, as "Extinct(?) ca. 1920."

No specimens have been collected since Bergman wrote in 1936, so the animal may well be extinct. Still, according to Gerald Wood's *Animal Facts and Feats*, survey workers in Alberta, Canada in 1960 discovered a new race of grizzly bears in an isolated valley.

While these bears belonged to a known species, they averaged a weight of 1000lbs., compared to 600 pounds for most grizzly populations.

With this example in mind, could Bergman's bear still survive unknown to us? Terry Domico, in his 1988 book *Bears of the World*, notes that much of the Kamchatka Peninsula has long been closed off for military reasons. Intriguingly, Domico states that a former Soviet official who did have access to the area recently told him the black giants were still reported.

Domico also suggests the giants are a variant of the brown bear, but we can't be sure without a specimen. Does this awesome carnivore still survive? Or was Bergman's specimen the last of its race? And what of MacFarlane's bear? Incredible as it seems, one or even both of these bears just might still be awaiting rediscovery.

**Sources:** Goodwin, George C. 1946. "Inopinatus the Unexpected," *Natural History*, November // Day, David. 1990. *The Doomsday Book of Animals*. New York: Viking Press // Domico, Terry. 1988. *Bears of the World*. New York: Facts on File // Wood, Gerald L. 1977. *Animal Facts and Feats*. New York: Sterling Publishing Co.

**Special Thanks** to Dr. James Halfpenny for his patient response to my questions on *U. inopinatus*.

### NEWS AND COMMENT:

The Eastern Puma Research Network (EPRN) has compiled the **record of Eastern puma sightings for 1994**. 245 cases were reported. These covered 20 states, with Pennsylvania first with 70 sightings and New York having 34. Vermont, where officials have confirmed the presence of pumas, logged only 5 sightings. 39 reports involved black animals. EPRN directors John and Linda Lutz believe that *Felis concolor cougar* (or *Puma concolor cougar*) has survived its presumed extinction and that it has a black color phase undocumented by science. **Source:** Lutz, John and Linda. 1995. "1994 Statistical Review of Puma concolor sightings," EPRN, Box 3563, Baltimore, MD 21214.

## NEWS AND COMMENT (Continued):

Botany, even cryptobotany, is usually outside the subject matter of this newsletter, but a recent event from Australia has important and encouraging implications for cryptozoologists. A stand of 39 pine trees discovered in a tiny, steep-sided valley in the Wollemi National Park stunned botanists who thought this type of tree had been extinct for 50 million years. Carrick Chambers, director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, marveled that the tree discovery was "the equivalent of finding a small dinosaur still alive." The trees, according to an AP description, have "dense, waxy foliage and knobby bark that makes them look as if they were covered in bubbly brown chocolate." The tallest of this previously unknown species of the family Araucariaceae stands 130 feet high.

No sooner had botanists digested this news than a tree from northeastern Queensland was identified by Dr. Andrew Douglas as the only known survivor of a family of flowering trees, the Proteaceae, which had also been presumed extinct for tens of millions of years. **Comment:** Given the central role trees play in their ecosystems, it's reasonable to predict some new insects living on or around them will also be found. **Sources:** AP, 1994. "Prehistoric pines rock botany world," *Colorado Springs Gazette-Telegraph*, December 15, p.A16. Holden, Constance (ed.), 1995. "Ancient Trees Down Under," *Science*, January 20.

## NEWS JUST IN:

1. Yet another sizable new mammal from Vietnam's Vu Quang region has been described. It belongs to a new genus of ungulate and has been named *Psuedonovibos sprialis*. Its native name reportedly means "holy goat." It's becoming ever more clear that those who thought cryptozoologists were wasting their time looking for new species (the late Dr. George Gaylord Simpson, one of the great paleontologists of all time, was among the harshest critics) were completely wrong. More details on this discovery in the next issue.

**Thanks to:** Dr. Karl Shuker for the news flash.

2. An article in *Science* has declared the 1896 "Florida giant octopus" to be a whale, based on biochemical analysis and the structure of the tissues. It also reports, unfortunately, that there is no identifiable DNA present (after a hundred years in formaldehyde) to settle the question once and for all. Since this claim requires a careful study and comparison to earlier analyses, it, too, will be dealt with in detail in the next issue.

**Source:** Holden, Constance (ed.). 1995. "One Sea Monster Down," *Science*, April 14, pp.207-9.

3. According to an item on the Access Excellence Biotech Database (in the America On Line computer service), dated April 4, 1995, a live thylacine (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*) has been spotted by park rangers in northeastern Tasmania. More information has been requested from the database editor as to source, etc..

## RESOURCES

### BOOKS.

Healy, Tony, and Paul Cropper. 1994. ***Out of the Shadows: Mystery Animals of Australia***. Chippendale, Australia: Ironbark. 200pp.

Well-written, -referenced, and -illustrated study of the region's six most interesting cryptozoological puzzles. These include the thylacine's survival on Tasmania, the same animal's possible survival in Australia, alien big cats, the Queensland "tiger," the ape-like "Yowie," and the legendary bunyip. The authors, after a balanced presentation, assign them credibility in about that order, although they actually build the strongest case for the introduced American puma. Healy and Cropper lose scientific credibility only in the final chapter, where they discuss "psychic animals" (apparitions) as an explanation for some of the reports. Zoology and parapsychology are, or should be, completely separate disciplines, and I fear zoologists will discard this otherwise valuable book when they see the word "psychic."

Pianka, Eric R. 1994. ***The Lizard Man Speaks***. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. 179 pp.

The entertaining and informative adventures of a herpetologist on his collecting trips. The main focus here is on Australia. The reader will learn a great deal about lizards, and Pianka includes the stories of his discovery and classification of several new species.

Sylvestre, Jean-Pierre. 1993. ***Dolphins and Porpoises: A Worldwide Guide***. New York: Sterling. 159pp.

Thorough treatment of the world's small cetaceans. Sylvestre includes, among other information, the discovery, taxonomy, habits, appearance, distribution, and common names for each species. Along the way are such cryptozoological tidbits as a possible dwarf spinner dolphin, anomalous killer whales, and species whose identity is in dispute. Beautifully illustrated with color photographs of most species, including many of the rare ones.

Jacobs, Lewis. 1993. ***Quest for the African Dinosaurs***. New York: Villard Books. 314pp.

This book mainly recounts Dr. Jacobs' pioneering fieldwork on African dinosaur fossils. Jacobs includes considerable information about dinosaurs and about reptiles in general. He spends one chapter on allegations of living dinosaurs in the Congo. His tone is overly derisive, but his doubts are logically based on the lack of physical evidence and the fact that the area involved has changed completely since the Mesozoic and is not a "lost world" where relict species are likely to have survived.

Bonner, Nigel. 1994. ***Seals and Sea Lions of the World***. New York: Facts on File. 224pp.

Bonner has written a complete and authoritative guide to the known pinnipeds. He covers the animals' physiology, behavior, and lineage as well as describing every species. Items of interest to the cryptozoologist include the history of two species once thought extinct but rediscovered, the Juan Fernandez and Guadeloupe fur seals, and two species which may be extinct, the Japanese sea lion and the Caribbean monk seal.

## PERIODICALS.

Huyghe, Patrick. 1995. "The Inner Life of Lake Monsters," *OMNI*, January, p.80. Discussion of whether sighting patterns of alleged lake monsters reveal the creatures' habits or just patterns of human activity.

Dennett, Michael R. 1994. "Bigfoot Evidence: Are These Tracks Real?" *Skeptical Inquirer*, Fall, pp.498-508. Alleged sasquatch footprint casts from Indiana are exposed as a hoax.

Boston, Robert. 1994. "Is Bigfoot an Endangered Species?" *Skeptical Inquirer*, Fall, pp.528-531. Scathing review of Dr. Grover Krantz's pro-Sasquatch book *Big Footprints*. (Comment: I'm not a Sasquatch believer, but Boston's position that Krantz, if he accepts any Sasquatch reports, must accept them all, including the obviously absurd urban ones, is completely unscientific as well as unfair. Because I believe in alligators doesn't mean I have to accept reports of them living in New York sewers.)

Skari, Tala. 1995. "The Camera at Work," *LIFE*, April, pp.22-4. Stunning photographs of albinos or white-mutants. A reminder that some "mystery animals" may be known species of rare coloration.

## REVIEW:

From Loren Coleman in *Strange* magazine, Fall 1994: "... Matthew A. Bille...is doing an excellent job of keeping his readers up-to-date on new animal discoveries. Bille has also taken the time to overview the status of such creatures as the giant octopus, the Vu Quang ox, the onza, the Steller's sea cow and the two-finned dolphin. It's well worth your time." **Comment:** The compliment is appreciated, and it brings up the larger question of whether a periodical like *EZ*, which aspires to be as scientific as possible, should ever refer to *Strange*, *FATE*, or *Fortean Times*. I've avoided it so far, but the limited number of outlets for cryptozoological writing means that well-qualified zoologists such as Karl Shuker and Bernard Heuvelmans, have published in these "fringe" magazines. Accordingly, all articles must be judged individually, not just by the magazine title.

## READER RESPONSE:

After the last issue's critique of Richard Ellis' book *Monsters of the Sea* appeared, Mr. Ellis provided a detailed reply. To summarize the major cases involved, he agrees Steller's "sea monkey" would probably remain a mystery. He doesn't see the resemblance I did between the von Gesner drawing Steller referred to and a fraudulent "Jenny Haniver." On the *Daedalus* sea serpent, Ellis sticks to his squid theory. He notes that a squid's body is stiffened enough by its internal "pen" to poke out of the water, and that it can travel at a steady rate by modulating the water flow through its siphon. (Why a squid would behave this way is another question, but we know almost nothing about *Architeuthis*' behavior to begin with.)

My main criticism was that Ellis was too fond of the giant squid as a sea-serpent explanation. He responds that not all giant squids seen have been misidentified, but that enough have been to create the monster myth. I have my doubts about some cases he calls squid, including the *Santa Clara* and *Valhalla* incidents. We have agreed to disagree.

**ELLIS (continued):**

Finally, Ellis voiced his doubts about *Delphinus rhinoceros*, the logo for this newsletter. He notes that recent discoveries and rediscoveries of cetaceans all involved animals with the standard single dorsal fin, and that 176 years without a specimen leads him to wonder if the witnesses saw another species with a remora on its back. His questions are logical: however, noting that Quoy and Gaimard reported seeing a herd of these animals and not just a single specimen, I choose to keep the file on this one open.

**Thanks very much** to Richard Ellis for taking the time to respond.

**EDITOR'S PAGE**

**WHAT'S NEW:**

A lot, obviously. The new title, *Exotic Zoology*, was chosen in tribute to Willy Ley, whose book by that name gathered much of his excellent writing on cryptozoology. I thought as the publication was going "upscale" (at least a little bit), that a new moniker was appropriate. Also, despite the best efforts of serious researchers, the term "cryptozoology" has yet to escape being identified with unsubstantiated "monster stories" and "psychic animals," and it's my hope that *Exotic Zoology* will play to a somewhat wider audience.

**IN CLOSING:**

All interested persons should join the International Society of Cryptozoology, which labors to make searching for unknown or presumed-extinct animals a respectable scientific specialty. Contact J. Richard Greenwell, Secretary, ISC, P.O. Box 43070, Tucson, AZ 85733. The ISC puts out a quarterly newsletter and a journal, *Cryptozoology*. While this editor is an ISC member, *EZ* is not an official ISC publication.

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The editor's book on new, rediscovered, and unconfirmed animals, *Rumors of Existence*, has been slipped by the publisher from the spring 1995 list to the fall, coming out in September. The book, to be published by Hancock House, is 224pp. and lists at \$24.95. The ISBN is 0-88839-335-0. If your bookstore or library fails to obtain it (shame on them), the order desk line is 1(800)938-1114.

**Logo illustration:** the mysterious cetacean *Delphinus rhinoceros*, described by French naturalists Quoy and Gaimard in 1819 and not reported since. Reconstruction by Craig Gosling copyright 1994.