

EXOTIC ZOOLOGY

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Matthew A. Bille, Editor

RECENT DISCOVERIES: THE UNKNOWN HORSES

The horse is probably the second animal humans learned to tame. Our association with these magnificent beasts goes back thousands of years. Despite this familiarity, there are at least four types of horses which are of great interest to cryptozoology.

In the last three years, two new breeds have been discovered. A new type of horse is not a new species, and may not even merit subspecific rank. Still, it is startling that herds of large mammals, especially ones living in association with humans, can exist without the knowledge of science.

Dr. Michel Peissel, a French explorer, discovered the Nangchen horse in Tibet in 1933. This was a large, powerful animal, whose ancestry could not be traced to Mongolian or Arab breeds and whose heart and lungs have reportedly become enlarged to cope with high altitude. Peissel went back in 1995 to study the animals further. He was unable to bring any back for study, but the trip didn't end in failure. While traversing the remote northeastern Tibetan region of Riwoche, Peissel found *another* new horse.

The Riwoche horse bears no resemblance to the Nangchen. Peissel described it as "pony-sized, a little like a donkey but with small ears and a rough coat. It has a black stripe down its back, stripes on its back legs, and a black mane. I thought it looked like cave drawings of horses." Dr. Ignasi Casas, a veterinarian on the team, added, "It looks very primitive and very tough." Casas was able to take blood samples from several horses for DNA analysis.

HORSES (Continued):

The animals are semi-domesticated, running loose most of the time. The local inhabitants rope them when needed to use them as pack animals or mounts. These horses are described as a relict population, inhabiting a valley almost cut off from travelers (Peissel and his expedition stumbled on them only because they were seeking an alternate route home, the pass they intended to use having been blocked by snow.) Peissel speculates the Riwoche horse may be a link between east Asia's last true wild equine, Przewalski's horse, and more modern breeds.

The description is fairly close to that of Przewalski's horse, which merits cryptozoological attention in its own right. Przewalski's is also a small horse, less than fifteen hands (60 inches) high. It is normally brownish or yellow-gray, with a paler nose and underside, and it has the same black stripe and erect black mane as the Riwoche animal. A herd of Przewalski's horses has been released in Mongolia after decades in which it was generally assumed the wild animal was extinct, and only captives bred from a single small group held in Europe still existed. Still, while the last definite capture of a wild horse was in 1947, occasional reports suggest a few may still survive along the Chinese-Mongolian border. It's unknown whether the sightings from this desolate region concern true Przewalski's horses or animals of mixed ancestry. The return of the captive-born animals to the wild, an apparent success, may obscure forever the mystery of whether they still survived on their own.

Finally, consider Europe's wild horse, the tarpan. This close relative of Przewalski's horse was extinct by 1876, but been allegedly revived. The resurrection began in the 1930s at the hands of German zookeepers Lutz and Heinz Heck. The Hecks reasoned the animal's genes still existed in its descendants, and they began a program of "back-breeding." The Hecks mated what they considered the most tarpan-like horses, then matched those offspring that showed tarpan characteristics. After several generations, they had animals which looked exactly like tarpans, and whose offspring bred true to type.

Are these animals really tarpans? The Hecks said yes: some zoologists consider them only a replica, an imitation of the real thing. Apparently, no one has obtained DNA from preserved tarpan skins and compared it to the living animal, but it's an interesting experiment in any case, a bit like a real-life *Jurassic Park*.

Sources: Anonymous. 1992. "Wild Asian Horse to Return Home," *National Geographic*, March // Anonymous. 1995. "Explorers Discover Previously Unknown Tibetan Pony," Reuters, November // Day, David. 1990. *The Doomsday Book of Animals*. New York: Viking Press // Groves, Colin P. 1974. *Horses, Asses, and Zebras in the Wild*. Hollywood, FL: Ralph Curtis Books // Simons, Marlise. 1995. "A Stone-Age Horse Still Roams a Tibetan Plateau," *New York Times*, November 12 // Tsevegmid, D., and A. Dashdorj. 1974. "Wild Horses and other Endangered Wildlife in Mongolia," *Oryx*, February.

Thanks to Sally Duncan, Patrick Huyghe, and Ben Roesch for articles.

MYSTERY ANIMALS: THE STRANGEST ELEPHANT

By Ben S. Roesch

In February and March of 1992, British explorer Sir John Blashford-Snell was trekking through a remote valley in the Bardia region of western Nepal in search of "giant elephants" reported by the locals. Two representatives of these strange elephants, both bulls, were eventually observed - and photographed. The two beasts, living up to their reputation, were estimated to have footprints measuring 22.5 inches across and a height to the shoulders of 11 feet 3 inches, which makes them even larger than the largest-ever recorded specimen of the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*). More striking was the presence of two very large domes on each elephant's forehead, plus a distinctive nasal bridge. These two features are not present on normal Asian elephants, but are characteristic of an extinct species of primitive elephants called Stegodonts.

Of course, the problem is that the Stegodont apparently died out more than a million years ago. But this didn't stop Canadian paleontologist Dr. Clive Coy, as well as Snell himself, from speculating that the giant Nepalese elephants could very well be representatives of the presumably extinct Stegodont.

However romantic and likable, not to mention being a great cryptozoological triumph, the Stegodont theory is now thought to be unlikely. The theory now favored by cryptozoologists, including the eminent Dr. Karl Shuker, is that these "giant elephants" are more likely to be mutant versions of the normal Asian elephant, rather than a Stegodont or even a separate, new species of elephant. One of the reasons behind this more orthodox solution is that a Stegodont surviving to this day is perhaps a little far-fetched (though nothing is truly far-fetched in cryptozoology!).

Another, more scientific explanation, is the fact that the elephants live in an isolated valley, and when a small population of any species of animal is isolated in a region, and begins to interbreed, genetic mutations are bound to crop up over time. But even if the creatures are genetic mutations, they are still quite intriguing, and may even be evolution in the making; therefore, these giant elephants should not be simply dismissed as "freaks," but warrant further investigation. And when these investigations take place, hopefully a specimen will be closely examined by a professional zoologist, and the true answer behind its identity will finally be known.

Sources: Shuker, Karl P.N. 1993. *The Lost Ark*. London: Harper Collins // Shuker, Karl P.N. 1995. Personal communication, August 19. // Shuker, Karl P.N. 1995. Personal communication, October 23.



Normal Asian elephants, *Elephas maximas*. These three are shown with their keeper, *Exotic Zoology* subscriber Beth Johnson, at the Detroit Zoo. Photograph courtesy of Beth Johnson.

READER RESPONSE

A recent issue of *EZ* reviewed the book ***Cadborosaurus: Survivor from the Deep***, by Drs. Paul LeBlond and Ed Bousfield. I found the book intriguing but thought the authors had reached too far by identifying this alleged "sea monster" as a reptile and assigning it a specific name. **Dr. LeBlond replies,**

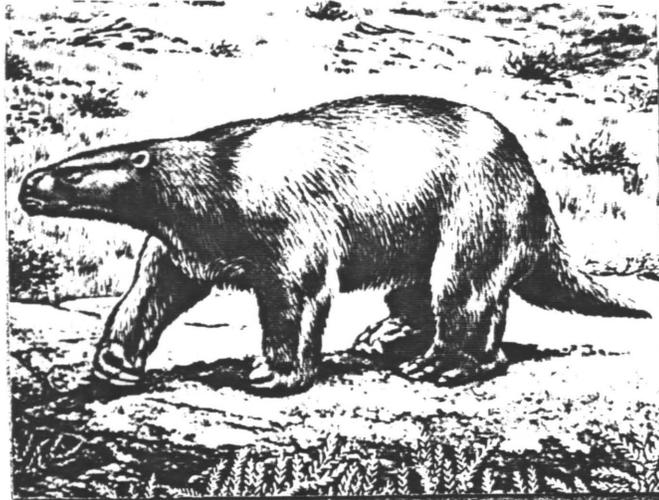
"We had long arguments before opting for the reptilian classification and finally decided to be more definite than not in order to focus the discussion. If this was a matter of betting, I wouldn't risk my money; however, it is a matter of discovery and scientific discussion, an area where one can be a little bolder."

Dr. LeBlond also sent an issue of ***The Newsletter of the British Columbia Scientific Cryptozoology Club***. LeBlond is acting president of this research group. The 10-page sample issue includes news of "Caddy" sightings, Sasquatch activities, assorted news items about new and reported animals, and reviews of books, films, etc. It's published quarterly and is included with membership in the Club, which is \$5 a year. Contact: Dr. Paul LeBlond, 3773 W. 18th Ave., Vancouver, B.C. V6S1B3, Canada.

Also received: the informative newsletter of the 300-member **Society for the Protection of Old Fishes (SPOOF)**, dedicated to study and preservation of the coelacanth. Contact: Dr. George W. Brown, SPOOF, Fisheries Box 357980, Seattle, WA 98195-7980.

NEWS AND COMMENT

We have a new phylum in the animal kingdom. *Cycliophora* represents the first new phylum since *Vestimentifera* was created for the giant tube worms. The animal which required this taxonomic leap, *Symbion pandora*, is a truly bizarre creature. *Symbion* is about the size of the dot on the letter *i*. It was discovered three decades ago on the lip of a lobster, but the initial catalogers placed it in a new genus and left it at that. A reexamination by Peter Funch and Reinhard Moebjerg Kristensen of Copenhagen University showed that *Symbion* resembles nothing else on Earth. It is a sort of bag with a sucker disc on the bottom and a round mouth extending from the front end. Hairs surround the mouth and sweep in tiny food particles. Its unique feature is its digestive system, which collapses and metamorphoses into a new larva. The animal can also reproduce sexually by growing and releasing a "dwarf male," which has nothing except a brain and reproductive organs, and which swims off to latch onto another *Symbion* which is developing a female larva. Dr. Simon Morris of the University of Cambridge calls *Symbion* "the zoological highlight of the decade." (Editor's note: Reports on this animal mark the first time I ever heard anyone describe a lobster as having lips.) Sources: AP, 1995. "Tiny animal in a class by itself," *Colorado Springs Gazette-Telegraph*, December 17, p.A20 // Angier, Natalie, 1995. *New York Times*, December 14. (Also other press accounts and comments sent by readers, including Ben Roesch, Paul Sparks, and Todd Wood.)



The mapinguary, sought in the Amazon by ornithologist David Oren, may be a surviving type of ground sloth. (See Vol. 2, #6).

Illustration courtesy of the International Society for Cryptozoology.

RESOURCES

BOOKS.

Ackerman, Diane. 1995. *Rarest of the Rare*. New York: Random House. 184pp. In this beautifully written travelogue, Ackerman goes in search of some of the rarest animals in the world and visits the scientists trying to save them. Of special interest is her voyage to the island of Torishima to see the short-tailed albatross, or Steller's albatross (*Diomedea albatrus*), which was declared extinct in 1949 but clung to an extremely precarious existence on this speck of volcanic rock. As in Ackerman's earlier animal book, *The Moon by Whale Light*, she displays a poetic, almost magical writing style that brings the reader irresistibly along on her adventures and leaves you with the impression you've actually met the animals she describes.

Pyle, Robert Michael. 1995. *Where Bigfoot Walks*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 338pp. Well-written exploration of the myth and reality surrounding the alleged apelike creatures of North America. Pyle, an ecologist and nature writer, does not attempt to prove or disprove the animal's existence. He goes exploring with an open mind and, while providing insights on conservation, spotted owls, and dedicated sasquatch hunters ("These guys don't want to find Bigfoot, they want to be Bigfoot") makes a strong argument that such primates could find food and remain hidden in the U.S. Northwest.

Shuker, Karl P. N. 1995. *In Search of Prehistoric Survivors*. London: Blandford. 192pp. In this fascinating work of cryptozoology, Dr. Shuker has gathered information on reported animals around the world. His tone is a shade more credulous (or open-minded, if you prefer) than I would like: it is, for instance, almost impossible to credit that the world's largest flying bird is living undiscovered in the Ohio Valley of the United States. Nevertheless, this is an indispensable volume for everyone interested in undiscovered animals. Shuker has done a massive amount of research and shown that in some cases (such as that of the Australian marsupial tiger or *yarri*) the evidence is much stronger than is usually thought. Very well illustrated and almost impossible to stop reading.

Thomas, Elizabeth Marshall. 1994. *The Tribe of Tiger*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 240pp. Thomas, an anthropologist, takes a fascinating if speculative look at cats. Contains information about the "extinct" Eastern cougar, including Thomas' personal sighting.

PERIODICALS.

Bearder, Simon K. 1995. "Calls of the Wild," *Natural History*, August, pp.48-56. Report on the identification of no less than five new species of the small African primates called galagos, or bush babies, based on recording and analysis of their calls.

PERIODICALS (Continued):

Hendrix, Steve. 1995. "Quest for the Kouprey," *International Wildlife*, September/October, pp.20-23. Latest efforts to survey the kouprey, Southeast Asia's critically endangered wild ox, the largest animal discovered in the 20th century.

Shuker, Karl P. N. 1995. "The Florida Globster - Verilly, a mystery," *Wild About Animals*, September, p.9. Good recap of the *Octopus Giganteus* controversy.

NEW SERVICE: SUBSCRIBER DIRECTORY

Since many of our members like to exchange information on new, rediscovered, and unknown animals, we will be publishing a subscriber directory in the May/June 1996 issue. This will include ONLY those readers who want to be listed and will provide the information offered by readers who fill in this form.

Directions: Include as much or as little information as you like. Return the form by April 1, 1996.

NAME: _____

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND (if applicable): _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

SPECIAL INTEREST AREAS (Please list no more than 5):

Reminder: this is voluntary and need only include the information you feel comfortable giving out.

RETURN TO: Exotic Zoology, 3405 Windjammer Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80920, U.S.A.

A WORD OF THANKS: We here at *EZ* haven't always been perfect in thanking those who send in material, especially when the same item comes from two or more sources. So we'd like to take a moment to thank Ray Nelke, Karl Shuker, Ben Roesch, Angel Morant Fores, Michel Raynal, Patrick Huyghe, Sally Duncan, and everyone else who's contributed. *Exotic Zoology* could not survive without your help.

EDITOR'S PAGE

PURPOSE: Cryptozoology is the zoological subspecialty of finding new or supposedly extinct species. The term has been misapplied by some to sensationalized "monsters" and even "ghost" animals. I hope that *Exotic Zoology* can help restore the word's proper usage: the name of a science devoted to collecting evidence.

IN CLOSING:

Interested readers should join the International Society of Cryptozoology, which labors to make searching for new animals a respectable scientific specialty. Contact Richard Greenwell, Secretary, ISC, P.O. Box 43070, Tucson, AZ 85733.

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My book on new, rediscovered, and unconfirmed animals, *Rumors of Existence*, is finally in print. The book, published by Hancock House, lists at \$12.95. The ISBN is 0-88839-335-0. If your bookstore or library fails to obtain it, you can order direct from the publisher by calling 1(800)938-1114. I'd be happy to autograph anyone's copy, but if you send it to me, please include return postage.

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.