



EXOTIC ZOOLOGY

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REDISCOVERIES: THE CONGO BAY OWL

The history of zoology is replete with stories of animals which have been collected one time and never seen again. These type specimens often come to rest in obscure corners of museums, sometimes to be forgotten, or nearly so.

Now one animal has been rescued from this scientific purgatory. The Congo bay owl (*Phodilus priginei*), also known as the Itombwe owl, has been known since 1951 from a single specimen collected in the Itombwe Massif of what is now Zaire. It had never been reported before, and there were no confirmed sightings between that sole discovery and 1996. In fact, there was only one unconfirmed sighting, which came from the neighboring nation of Burundi in the 1970s. Due to the total lack of information, the International Council for Bird Preservation listed the species' status only as "indeterminate."

It took 45 years, but the little African owl has been found. A team from the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Zaire Institute for Nature Conservation penetrated the Massif, a wild region in eastern Zaire, to survey its animal life. Here, in the largest undisturbed montane environment left on the African continent, they captured a female Congo bay owl.

Once again, an almost-unknown and problematical species has been vindicated. This discovery gives hope that other solitary specimens - which include the Kenyan spotted lion and a never-classified antelope of Liberia - may yet emerge from the shadows.

Sources: Hart, John. 1996. "Congo Bay Owl Rediscovered," *Wildlife Conservation*, October, p.10 // Mountfort, Guy. 1988. *Rare Birds of the World*. Collins: London.

MYSTERY ANIMALS: MORE YETI QUESTIONS

In the last issue, we reviewed the status of the yeti and some of the evidence advanced in favor of this alleged primate. That evidence, as we saw, is widespread but not very firm.

For a thorough understanding of this subject, it's necessary to put the yeti in context. The yeti is only one out the large primates (at least ten in all) reported from every inhabited continent except Europe. This is one of the major stumbling blocks in obtaining scientific credibility. It is one thing to ask a primatologist to accept there is an unclassified ape at large. It is quite another to argue that the globe is literally swarming with them, all uncaught and unclassified. That claim, made seriously by many cryptozoologists, is extremely difficult to believe, and that in turn makes many specialists unwilling to consider that *any* of these alleged animals exist.

This problem raises the standard by which evidence is judged. The current situation is that the only evidence that will result in full acceptance of any unknown large primate is a type-specimen.

As of now, no case meets that standard. The yeti is known mainly from tracks and local traditions, plus a few reports by Westerners. The same statement applies to most of the others, including Africa's *agogwe*, Sumatra's *orang-pendek*, China's *yeren*, Siberia's *chuchunaa*, and South America's *di-di* and *sisemite*. The sasquatch adds some disputed film evidence and many recent sightings. Anthropologist Myra Shackley has put forth a great deal of effort to prove that relict Neanderthals, known as *almas* and by many other names, inhabit Mongolia and the Pamirs, the mountainous region where Pakistan and Afghanistan meet what used to be the Soviet Union, and the Caucasus mountains.

Publicity concerning the search for unknown apes has led to a great deal of interest by fiction writers and film-makers. In addition to the apes of Michael Crichton's *Congo*, there are at least two feature films in development on the yeti, including one in which a yeti battles martial-arts master Jean-Claude Van Damm. The other is a Disney project with the working title *Esau*. In this case, at least, a researcher has been working to assemble some factual background. Two novels about surviving prehumans, *Neanderthal* and *Almost Adam*, are also being adapted to film. John Darnton's *Neanderthal* includes some allegedly true *almas* material as background to its highly improbable story of a remote valley hiding "thousands" of surviving Neanderthals.

Cryptozoologists must be open-minded, and generally hate to write off a seemingly insubstantial story that may prove to have been important. Still, some prioritization is necessary. Researchers must sort through the many reported primates and decide which cases, if any, most plausibly point to a real animal.

Sasquatch or Bigfoot is the most widely reported of all, but is still highly problematical. There are thousands of sightings and footprint reports, and supporters say would it be impossible to fake them all. Critics, like anthropologist Kevin Wylie, note that sasquatch appears to be very different - perhaps too different- from all known nonhuman primates.

YETI (Continued):

Among the apes, for example, there are no true bipeds. There are no solitary apes and no nocturnal ones. There are none living in the type of forest environment offered by the Pacific Northwest. Sasquatch, in short, breaks a lot of rules. That does not prove it's nonexistent, but, once again, it raises the standard for evidence.

Sasquatch has found a place in modern American culture, where it is used to sell trucks, tires, etc. Officially, it remains unrecognized. (There was a 1978 newspaper report that the animal had been placed on the Endangered Species list. When queried, though, the Fish and Wildlife Service replied that no such recognition had been extended to this "legendary creature.") Sasquatch-like creatures are widespread in Native American lore, but the stories are difficult to evaluate. The Salish word from which "sasquatch" is derived refers to a supernatural creature, not an animal. On the other hand, when Ivan Sanderson asked one Indian about the subject, the reply was a derisive, "Oh, don't tell me the white men have finally gotten around to that."

Primatologist John Napier accepted Sasquatch, but doubted the almas. He wrote that the inhabitants of its rugged homeland make the animal sound too common, as if it should be easy to find. He recounts the story of one Caucasus resident who was asked if the almas was mythical. The man, proud of his people's rich mythology, was actually offended that anyone would think it included something as common and boring as the almas. It was reported in 1985 that 5,000 sightings and 50 footprints were on file with the U.S.S.R. Geographical Society.

It is this creature which may be represented by zoologist Bernard Heuvelmans' *Homo pongoides*, the ape-like man. Heuvelmans' type specimen is the famous Minnesota Iceman, a hairy corpse six feet (180cm) tall. Heuvelmans, along with Ivan Sanderson, examined this traveling exhibit (frozen in a block of ice) in 1968 and was convinced it was genuine. The Iceman was being shown by one Frank Hansen, who told at least three different stories of its origin. Heuvelmans believes the true tale is that the Iceman was shot in Vietnam during the U.S.-Vietnamese war and was smuggled into this country. However, he has only secondhand reports to substantiate these events. There are indeed reports of an ape-man in Vietnam (the *Ngoi rung*, or forest people), but, as elsewhere, no hard evidence.

Whether the Iceman is a real animal or a clever hoax (a 1982 article in *OMNI* even named the alleged hoaxer as the late makeup master Howard Ball), the thing's current whereabouts are unknown. It isn't new for science to accept a description based on a now-lost type specimen. After all, no one doubts Peking Man, whose bones have been missing for over fifty years. *H. pongoides*, however, represents such a startling claim that some reluctance to accept it is understandable - at least until the mysterious corpse surfaces again.

Just to further confuse the issue: As noted above, many who accept the Asian ape-man reports believe they concern Neanderthals. This is one thing that *H. pongoides* clearly is not. The corpse's head bears no resemblance at all to the broad, heavy-browed Neanderthal type.

As mentioned in the last article, the best piece of yeti evidence is the footprints photographed by Eric Shipton in 1951.

YETI (Continued):

Conservationist Daniel Taylor-Ide wrote that Shipton should have photographed several prints, not just one, so the stride could be examined. (Many books include an alleged picture of the yeti's trail, but this actually shows a goat's trail. This error was misunderstood or misrepresented by skeptical author Joe Nickell, whose book *Entities* claims that Shipton photographed nothing but goat footprints.)

Still, the footprint which was photographed begs explanation. Taylor-Ide, in his book *Something Hidden Behind the Ranges*, suggests it was a melted-out overprint of a bear's hindfoot on top of the forefoot. While Taylor-Ide is clearly convinced, he does not explain how such an overprint could have produced the separation between the first two toes and the last three. A bear's toes are quite evenly spaced, and melting would run them together, not spread them apart. The mystery remains.



Length: 13 inches (33 cm)

Width: 8 inches (20.3 cm)

Width-length index: 61

(human range 34 to 40)

Shape in the 1951 Yeti footprint photograph.

The bottom line is that the yeti and other alleged primates are, at best, supported by an intriguing but not conclusive collection of local traditions, reports, footprints, and hair samples. For now, the motto of science remains *habeus corpus*, or "bring the body forth!"

Comment: I cannot accept the idea of a half-dozen or more large unidentified primates. I try to keep an open mind and wait for the hard evidence to surface. As to Heuvelmans' *H. pongoides*, I'm inclined to think it was a hoax. It doesn't resemble any known fossil from the hominid or pongid lines, and the mystery of its origins casts more doubt. I concede that Heuvelmans, an expert, has seen it, and I haven't. Still, even experts can be wrong.

Sources: Anonymous. 1982. "Big Foot Fraud," *OMNI*, September // "Endangered Species Paper Plugs Bigfoot Hunters' Guns," 1978. *Colorado Springs Gazette-Telegraph*, January 25 // Fay, John. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1988. Personal communication, November 22 // Napier, John. 1972. *Bigfoot*. New York: Berkeley // Sanderson, Ivan T. 1961. *Abominable Snowmen*. Philadelphia: Chilton. // Shackley, Myra. 1983. *Still Living?* New York: Thames & Hudson // Wylie, Kevin. 1980. *Bigfoot*. New York: Viking.

Correction: The first article in this series stated that Tony Woolridge made his "yeti" photograph in 1988. It was actually 1986. Thanks to reader John Moore for pointing this out.

NEWS AND COMMENT

A **once-famous zoological curiosity** is now living in quiet retirement. Twenty years ago, **Oliver the chimp** was being shown to the public by an owner who suggested he was a young sasquatch.

Oliver never did grow into a sasquatch. In fact, he didn't look like one to begin with. On the other hand, he never looked quite like a normal chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*), either. Habitually bipedal, with a small, balding head and a surprisingly humanlike expression, he puzzled everyone who saw him. Animal trainers called Oliver, imported from the Congo as a baby in the early 1970s, the smartest chimp they ever saw.

During his show-business career, Oliver was apparently never tested to determine his heritage. Now living out his days at a Texas facility called Primarily Primates, Oliver is finally going to be checked out. Dr. Gordon Gallup, an anthropologist, is planning genetic tests to determine whether Oliver is just an aberrant chimp, a hybrid between a chimp and a bonobo (*Pan paniscus*), or something really strange. Gallup has even been quoted as suggesting Oliver could be a human-chimp hybrid. In Oliver's case, the question will soon be settled. The testing will be done by Dr. David Ledbetter at the University of Chicago. **Comment:** Stories of human-ape crosses have been around forever, but there are no documented cases. Even if such a cross is genetically possible (which I doubt), Oliver is a poor candidate: he looks far more like a chimp, albeit a peculiar one, than a human or anything else. **Source:** MacCormack, John. 1996. "Middle-age 'missing link' finds peace," *Denver Post*, October 6, p.13A.

News Clips: A good fact sheet on the **presumed-extinct Eastern Cougar** (*Felis concolor cougar* or *Puma concolor cougar*) can be found of the WWF-Canada Website at www.wwfcanada.org/facts/cougar.....Dr. Clyde Roper's much-publicized expedition to search for the **elusive giant squid** *Architeuthis dux* has been called off after failing to attract the needed funding...The IUCN has issued its **1996 "Red List"** of threatened animals, which includes one-fourth of the world's 4,600 known species of mammals (full list available on the IUCN's Web site at www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/index)...According to an October 8th dispatch from Reuters, Egyptian police have shot **two as-yet-unidentified animals**, resembling dogs or hyenas, which terrorized the town of Armant...Two Japanese geneticists want to use DNA from **frozen mammoths** to recreate the species, with elephants serving as surrogate parents. Kazufumi Goto and Shoji Okutsu first have to find undamaged DNA. Even if they do, other experts doubt their chances of success.. According to the television documentary *The Lost Mammoths* (shown in the U.S. on the Discovery Channel in October), experts studying the strange-looking giant elephants of Nepal have confirmed their DNA does not match that of mammoths. The British scientists who've examined the DNA do speculate that inbreeding among these Asian pachyderms (*Elephas maximus*) has brought out characteristics of even more primitive elephants known as stegodonts.

NEWS AND COMMENT (Continued):

Extremely primitive organisms called arhcaea, first collected in 1982 from a deep-sea hydrothermal vent and originally thought to be bacteria, have now been studied genetically and classified as a most unique form of life. The archaea are believed to represent the **third major branch of life** on Earth, joining the prokaryotes (bacteria and blue-green algae) and the eukaryotes (all creatures with cells containing nuclei). (Thanks to Ben Chapman for two news items on this story and one on the mammoth.)

Yet another discovery from Vu Quang: Dr. Nguyen Thai Tu has learned that the region harbors a **previously unknown fish** of the genus *Crossochelius*. The new species is 20-25 cm long with a silver underside and a gold stripe down its back. The announcement from the World Wide Fund for Nature called Vu Quang "a lost world...possibly teeming with new species." **Source:** Anonymous. 1996. Reuters dispatch, September 27th. **Also from Vietnam,** Edwards's pheasant (*Lophura edwardsi*) has been confirmed in the wild for the first time since 1928.

RESOURCES

BOOKS.

Taylor-Ide, Daniel. 1995. ***Something Hidden Behind the Ranges***. San Francisco: Mercury House. 298pp. Taylor-Ide, born in the shadow of the Himalayas and fascinated since boyhood with the Yeti story, here recounts his personal search for the animal. He never did find it, and eventually reached the conclusion that no unknown wild ape existed. He believes most Yeti prints, including Eric Shipton's, were the overprinted and sun-melted prints of bears. Along the way, however, he made important discoveries about bears, conservation, and the unique place the yeti holds in the human mind and spirit.

Hutchison, Robert A. 1989. ***In the Tracks of the Yeti***. London: MacDonald & Co. 285pp. Like Daniel Taylor-Ide, Hutchison is an avid yeti-seeker who understands the people and cultures forming the backdrop to the yeti reports. Unlike Taylor-Ide, Hutchison is positive the creature exists, probably in three species of differing sizes and habits. (A debate between the two authors would be very interesting.) On his expedition, Hutchison found several sets of what he thought were yeti tracks and examined a mummified "yeti foot" which he thought was very strange but which he fails to describe in detail. (The owner would not allow photographs, but was willing to sell it for \$5000.) Taken together, these two books present most of what is currently known about the yeti mystery and introduce the reader to the cultural milieu in which it exists. For instance, everyone has heard of the Sherpas, but these books will explain just who they are and how they perceive the world, providing vital information for evaluating their reports of unknown primates. Those interested in the yeti should definitely read both works.

BOOKS (Continued):

Heuvelmans, Bernard. 1995. *On the Track of Unknown Animals*. London: Kegan Paul International. 677 pp.

This is an update to the founding work of cryptozoology, first published in 1955. The updating unfortunately consists only of a 13-page preface to the original text, plus some new illustrations. Still, the amount of material here is astonishing: the bibliography fills 26 pages. The book includes alleged animals of South America, Africa, Asia, and Australasia, ranging from the famous (like the yeti) to little-known ones like Australia's dinosaur-like *gauarge*.

Heuvelmans does a great service in his examination of matters like the "Nandi bear" of Africa. Time and again, he patiently untangles a welter of contradictory reports, explains most of them, and offers candidates for the ones he feels remain unexplained.

Sometimes, as with Australia's *bunyip*, Heuvelmans is too quick to accept a reported animal's existence as fact. Also, the 1955 text is unavoidably dated: there is, for instance, no mention of Mexico's *onza*.

In the added preface, the most interesting bits include the reported 1978 filming of a huge monitor lizard in New Guinea, an item I had been entirely unaware of, and Heuvelmans' claim to have established the existence of a manlike Asian primate, *Homo pongoides* (dealt with in the yeti article in this issue).

I can't help wishing Heuvelmans had rewritten his original text and updated it throughout. Nevertheless, this is the largest and best-researched volume on land-dwelling cryptids ever published in English.

Ellis, Richard. 1996. *Deep Atlantic: Life, Death, and Exploration in the Abyss*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 395pp.

Few authors could write a good book solely about the environment deep under the Atlantic Ocean, and fewer still could find a publisher for it. Fortunately, Ellis has done both. Meticulously researched as usual (the bibliography covers 47 pages), Ellis' latest work includes many tidbits of interest to the cryptozoologist. Examples are Ellis' favorite creatures, the almost-unknown giant squids; the weird fish reported by pioneer undersea explorer William Beebe and never seen since; the now-famous hydrothermal vent colonies with their bizarre inhabitants; and many other recent discoveries. Also valuable is a discussion of the six-foot larva known as *Leptocephalus giganteus*. As it turns out, this specimen, and others like it, have not been conclusively identified. They could metamorphose into very mundane fish (which Ellis suspects is the case) or grow into something spectacular. Finally, Ellis' explanations of everything from scientific nomenclature to the deep-sea food chain will be most useful to those cryptozoologists not already grounded in these subjects.

Ellis writes that this book project started, stopped, and changed focus as it went along, and there are occasional repetitive passages which probably result from this history (for instance, there's no reason to discuss the finding of the *Titanic* more than once). Still, Ellis has, once again, made a superb contribution. There's not as much cryptozoological material here as in Ellis' 1994 *Monsters of the Sea*, but there's more than enough to make this book well worth your time.

Special thanks to Richard Ellis for the review copy.

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 and studying evidence.

IN CLOSING: We still cannot confirm the status of the International Society of Cryptozoology (P.O. Box 43070, Tucson, AZ 85733).

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EZ is most definitely a family affair. Our 5-year-old daughter, Corey, is now in charge of putting the return address labels on the envelopes. So if yours is a little crooked, it was probably me helping finish up! We hope to announce an addition to the family in the next issue with the planned adoption of our new daughter. The Billes wish you a blessed holiday season. See you in 1997!

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Logo illustration: *Delphinus rhinoceros*, described by naturalists Quoy and Gaimard in 1819. Drawing by Craig Gosling copyright 1994.