

EXOTIC ZOOLOGY

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MYSTERY ANIMALS: CRYPTIDS THAT NEVER WERE

In a publication devoted to cryptozoology, it's important to report on the negative outcomes of cryptozoological investigations as well as the positive ones. Reported "cryptids" that turned out to have mundane explanations provide important cautions for cryptozoologists, who are sometimes too eager to accept new animals on the basis of slender evidence. These situations can also illustrate how the search for new animals should and should not be conducted.

Sometimes cryptozoologists have been taken in by hoaxes. The case of "Old Three-toes" was one example. In 1948, a very clever jokester named Tony Signorini fashioned three-clawed iron feet and left tracks on the Florida beaches which fooled even veteran zoologist Ivan Sanderson. Interestingly, Signorini set out to make fake dinosaur feet, but what he created was very close in appearance to a penguin's tracks, and Sanderson thought he was on the trail of the granddaddy of all seabirds. Signorini's friends helped out by instigating some fake sighting reports of the supposed monster, with rather ambiguous descriptions. The mystery was not definitively cleared up until the hoaxer confessed in 1988.

Rivaling Three-toes for the "most famous hoax" title must be Francois de Loys' South American ape. The 1917 photograph produced in support of de Loys' claim shows an animal that, while it has no visible

DISPROVEN CRYPTIDS (Continued):

tail, is far too much like a spider monkey (*Ateles belzebuth*) to be acceptable as a new species to most zoologists (the widely separated nostrils, the tiny, curved thumb, and the triangular white patch on the forehead are only some of the telltale characteristics). Cryptozoologist Loren Coleman believes George Montandon, the French anthropologist who publicized de Loys' find, did so to support his own racist belief that a New World line of apes led to the evolution of "lesser" peoples, like Native Americans. As has been noted before in *EZ*, de Loys' primate does look like an unusually large and robust spider monkey. It may have been an actual discovery, like a new subspecies, physically altered and then hyped as something sensational.

Wherever there is a mystery, there will be jokers. Loch Ness has attracted more than its share. Tracks have been made with a stuffed hippopotamus foot. Many photographs of the "monster" have been fakes. The most famous of Nessie's portraits, the 1934 Surgeon's Photograph, is allegedly a hoax as well, although the hoaxer's claim has been disputed. All this does not mean that the creature itself is a hoax, but it does make proper investigation very difficult.

The *ri* is another kind of case. Here a reported unknown animal was eventually unmasked as a known animal (the Indopacific dugong, *Dugong dugon*) displaying previously unknown behavior (unusually pronounced vertical flexure and relatively long periods of submergence). To some skeptics, this was an illustration of a failure of the cryptozoological method, and even of its absurdity. When the first accounts of this alleged sea creature were related to anthropologist Roy Wagner by the Barok people of Papua New Guinea, theories abounded. Various experts put forth candidates including the dugong and assorted cetaceans. Marine biologist Kevin Britton suggested a beluga, an animal only known to live in the Arctic. Britton's theory was based on the existence of a single beluga skull which was allegedly collected off Australia. (See following article by Darren Naish.)

What actually happened in the *ri* affair was that the most proper type of investigation was pursued. It began with local reports of an animal which interested scientists could not immediately place. Some cryptozoologists, on expeditions led by Roy Wagner and later by Thomas Williams, went out and looked at the animal for themselves. They also studied the local folklore and languages, trying to identify the origin of the terms *ri* and *ilkai* (the name given the same animal by another tribe, the Susurunga). It is worth noting that this was a case in which the knowledge of native peoples was incorrect. According to both of the tribes involved, the *ri* and the dugong were different animals.

The result of all this was that, while the animal was not a new species, some knowledge was added to science. The same is true of the latest sensation from the same region, the *migo* of New Guinea's Lake Dakataua. While reports of a lake monster turned out to be in error, the episode did result in new knowledge of the mating behavior of the saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*).

DISPROVEN CRYPTIDS (Continued):

The moral of these stories is that proper scientific investigation is never a waste of time, whether it results in a spectacular new animal or not. Speculation on the basis of insufficient or unexamined evidence, on the other hand, usually is fruitless. A science as controversial as cryptozoology requires a careful balance between open-mindedness and skepticism, with the most promising cases being subject to a careful and thorough examination.

Comment: I wonder if Sanderson's acceptance of the Florida monster was due to his lack of familiarity with the area. I grew up in Florida, which has types of beach sand changing in consistency from quicksand-like to concrete-hard depending on the tide and the amount of sea water seeping through them. Signorini left his footprints at night, and Sanderson saw them during the day. If the tide had turned and the sand was much harder, this might have led to Sanderson's belief that the prints were too deep to be left by hoaxers. Concerning de Loys' ape, there is anecdotal evidence for a large monkeylike primate from several areas of South America - including, according to naturalist Peter Hocking, many recent reports from Peru. Whether or not these tales prove true, I am convinced that the de Loys photo itself is a hoax.

Sources: Ashley-Montague, Francis M., 1929. "The Discovery of a New Anthropoid Ape in South America?" *The Scientific Monthly*, p.275 // Cousins, Don. "Ape Mystery," *BBC Wildlife*, April 1982, p.148 // Greenwell, J. Richard, 1988. "Florida 'Giant Penguin' Hoax Revealed," *ISC Newsletter*, 7:4, p.1 // Greenwell, 1983. "New Guinea Expedition Observes Ri," *ISC Newsletter*, 2:2, p.1 // *Cryptozoology*, Correspondence by Roy Wagner, Tom Williams, J. Richard Greenwell, and Gunter Sehm, Volumes 2, 5, and 6 // "One Hump or Two?" *OMNI*, March 1997 (<http://www.omnimag.com/antimatter>) // Smith, Gordon, 1985. "The Case of the Reclusive Ri," *Science* 85, p.85.

MYSTERY ANIMALS: THE SOUTHERN WHITE WHALE

by Darren Naish

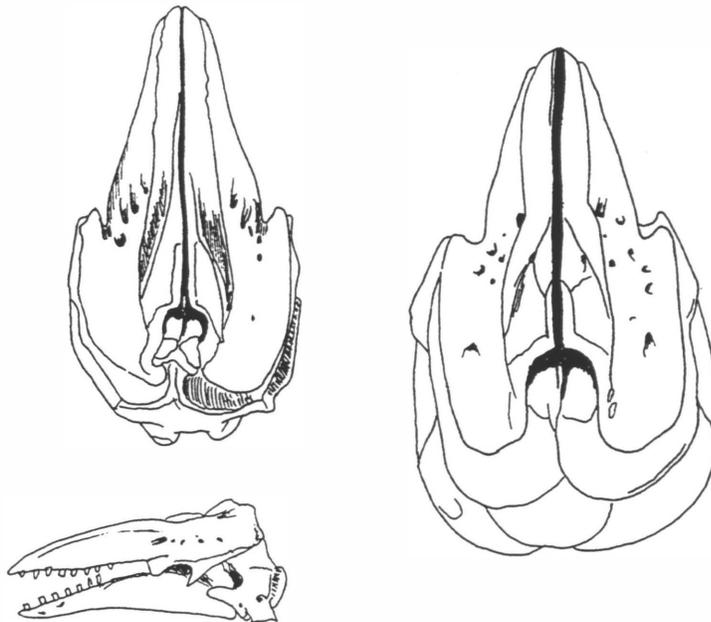
In my last article, I related an account of something like a narwhal (*Monodon monoceros*) living in Antarctic waters. If there is any truth to this, it would be cetological heresy: monodonts are strictly Northern hemisphere denizens. However, there is at least one other report concerning a Southern hemisphere monodont. This one concerns an animal more like a beluga, or white whale (*Delphinapterus leucas*).

In 1822, Captain P. P. King presented the British Museum with a skull of a young beluga collected on a survey voyage. This would not be at all remarkable except that Captain King had been surveying New Holland, on the western coast of Australia! John Edward Gray, the greatest and most prolific cetologist of his day, created a new species for this skull, *Delphinus kingii*, in 1827. By 1846, however, Gray had realized that *D. kingii* belonged with white whales, and so the name became *Delphinapterus kingii* (Gray 1827).

SOUTHERN WHITE WHALE (Continued):

But was Gray ever right to name a species based on this skull? Almost certainly not: Gray was notorious for basing new species on skulls and even drawings, making him a classic example of a zoological "splitter." As shown by diagrams of the 1822 skull, "*D. kingii*" falls well within the variation displayed by *D. leucas*. King's specimen in a white whale of exactly the same type found in the Arctic.

So, what was a beluga doing off Australia? Although (to my knowledge) this has never been verified, the most obvious answer is that the specimen was simply mislabeled. Presumably, it did not come back with King at all. Indeed, there is no mention of a white whale skull in the 1826 narrative that was written concerning this voyage. Nor is any



Top Left: The skull, in dorsal view, of a normal beluga. Skull is illustrated in lateral view below.

Right: The skull of *Delphinapterus kingii* in dorsal view (after True, 1889). Illustration by Darren Naish.

such specimen included in the appendix Gray himself compiled for his work. According to this appendix, King brought only one cetacean specimen, and this was a spotted dolphin (genus *Stenella*). The blame for this misidentification presumably rests with the staff at the British Museum. Maybe, just maybe, information on the true origin of the "*D. kingii*" skull lies in the archives of that august institute.

In a sense, I have been deliberately misleading in this article. First, this tale is not, strictly speaking, cryptozoological, as it is not based in any reported eyewitness testimony or definite physical evidence. Secondly, and most importantly, it is eminently sensible to conclude that a beluga skull allegedly collected from Australia was mislabeled in the first place. That's far more likely than the alternative - that there is or was a cryptic population of Australian

SOUTHERN WHITE WHALE (Continued):

belugas. So this is a nice cautionary tale for cryptozoological investigators: go for the most likely possibility before postulating the ridiculous.

Of course, Nature does a very nice job sometimes of coming up with the ridiculous. Guess what? Turns out there was a Southern hemisphere monodont after all. Well, sort of. For details, though, you'll have to wait for a future article in this series...

Sources: Hershkovitz, P. 1966. "Catalog of Living Whales," *Bulletin of the United States National Museum, Smithsonian Institution*, 246: 1-259 // True, F. W. 1889. "A review of the family Delphinidae," *Bulletin of the United States National Museum* 36: 1-191 // Watson, L. 1988. *Whales of the World*. Hutchinson (London).

NEWS AND COMMENT

Two more important mammal discoveries have been made. First, the latest **new monkey species** has been collected from Brazil. A Dutch scientist, Marc Van Roosmalen, is preparing the formal description of the **black-headed sagui dwarf**. The new monkey inhabits a tiny range near the Rio Aripuana. It is the second-smallest known primate, only four inches (10cm) long. Van Roosmalen is pursuing more new monkeys: "I expect to describe **between 10 and 13 new species** in the next few years." Meanwhile, in Vietnam, the remains of a **new muntjac deer** were obtained from a local hunter by a WWF scientific team. The Truong Son muntjac weighs about 30 pounds (under 14kg). It has tiny antlers and a black coat. Dr. Eric Wikramanayake says he "fully expects **other new species**, both large and small, will be discovered in these regions in the coming years." The new animal lives along the Vietnamese-Laotian border south of the famous Vu Quang area. **Sources:** Associated Press, 1997. "Scientist Finds New Monkey Species, August 18 // "New Mammal Species Reported," August 21.

The investigation continues into the **mystery cats** reported from Peru by naturalist Peter Hocking. I recently attended a meeting at the Denver Museum of Natural History where photographs of the two skulls Hocking has collected were shown to a mammalogist, Dr. Cheri Jones. Dr. Jones agreed that further investigation was warranted and referred Mr. Hocking to two other mammalogists, both felid experts. Mr. Hocking refers to these possible felids as the "speckled tiger" (which he thinks may be a previously unknown color morph of the jaguar *Panthera onca*) and the "striped tiger" (which is reportedly rufous in color with white vertical stripes and, if genuine, could become the first new big cat species described since 1858). The hunter who obtained the skull of this latter cat sold the skin, which Hocking is attempting to track down and repurchase. **Sources:** Hocking, Peter 1996. "Further Investigation Into Unknown Peruvian Mammals," *Cryptozoology*, Vol. 12 // Hocking, Peter, 1997. Personal communication, August 25.

NEWS AND COMMENT

A new population of pandas has been discovered in China. About 30 pandas were found in northwestern Gansu province, a good distance north of the known habitat of Gansu pandas. **Comment:** In addition to being a source of comfort for those trying to save the panda, this story reminds us that, if a population of large animals of known species can still be discovered, the same can happen with an unknown species. Other examples of the recent discovery of new populations featured the Javan rhinoceros and the mountain gorilla. **Source:** Associated Press, 1997. Wire service dispatch, August 4.

New species discoveries: A tiny new species of gecko has added to our knowledge of reptilian habits. *Phyllodactylus gemmulus*, a South African lizard only one and a half inches (38mm) long, was discovered living in crevices among rocks. This was believed to be a new type of habitat for geckos. Also in Africa, a British naturalist, Martin Pickersgill, has reminded the scientific world that dedicated amateurs still have a place in zoology. Pickersgill, who discovered a new frog species in 1983, has completed a ten-month solo expedition with four more new species of frogs identified. Meanwhile, a new woodland beetle from the northeastern United States has received an intriguing scientific name. Collected 85 years ago but misidentified as the known species *Platynus decentis*, the new bug was christened *Platynus indecentis*. Entomologist Kip Will explains that the animal's ability to exist without being noticed for so long "seemed positively indecent." **Sources:** Anonymous. 1997. "At Home in the Rocks, a New Gecko Emerges," *National Geographic*, June // Anonymous, 1997. "An Indecent Beetle," *Discover*, May, p.24 // Wilkinson, Paul. 1997. "Amateur Naturalist Discovers New Frog," *The Times*, June 5.

Herpetologist Chris Raxworthy is making an impressive list of discoveries in Madagascar. He and his colleague, Ronald Nussbaum, have already catalogued dozens of new herps and have a backlog of species awaiting description that includes numerous lizards and approximately one hundred frogs. **Source:** Holmes, Hannah. 1997. "The Lizard Wizard," *Wildlife Conservation*, March/April, p.22.

An old puzzle with cryptozoological connotations appears to have been solved. In the 1760's, an unknown creature terrorized the French village of Gevaudan, killing dozens of children. The beast involved was finally shot, but contemporary accounts conflict concerning its description and identification. Now French cryptozoologist Michael Raynal reports that a sample of the animal's fur had been preserved and was located in the Museum of Natural History in Paris. **The Beast of Gevaudan, identified as everything from a wild dog to a werewolf, was in fact a hyena.** (Actually, one old engraving, reproduced in a book by John Grant (see RESOURCES section), does depict a hyena-like animal.) How such a beast got loose in south-central France two centuries ago, and why it developed a predilection for human prey, are questions that may never be answered. **Source:** Raynal, Michael. Personal communication, August 1.

RESOURCES

BOOKS.

The Sourcebook Project, under William R. Corliss, continues to publish valuable collections of cryptozoological material. Two examples are *Biological Anomalies: Mammals I* (1995) and *Mammals II* (1996). A wealth of data on thylacines, Nandi bears, sea serpents, mystery whales, and many other mammal-related subjects is found here, all of it well-referenced. For cryptozoological researchers, Mr. Corliss' collections are indispensable. For a booklist, write to Sourcebook Project, P.O. Box 107, Glen Arm, MD, 21057, U.S.A. **Many thanks** to William Corliss for providing copies of these books.

Grant, John. 1992. *Monster Mysteries*. Chartwell Books, Seacaucus, NJ. 128pp. Large-format book on every imaginable type of "monster," including genuine cryptozoological mysteries as well as aliens and totally fictitious entities like vampires. The tone of Grant's text is inconsistent; while presenting the Minnesota Iceman as a definite hoax (which I think it is), he accepts de Loys' ape (see page 1 of this issue) without even commenting on the anatomical objections presented by this tale. The book is worth perusing for its large collection of illustrations, many of them rarely reproduced.

PERIODICALS.

Fauna. June/July 1997. Clay M. Garrett, Editor. The premiere issue of this new wildlife magazine offers much to enjoy. The magazine is written in a relatively scholarly tone and is sumptuously illustrated. The first issue's stories mainly concern herps. Included are a profile of herpetologist Jonathan Campbell, with a discussion of the 50-odd new species he's discovered, and a photograph of a brilliant green frog of the genus *Centrolene* which has yet to be described. There's also a look at some of the premier Internet zoology and biology sites.

Line, Les. 1997. "Phantom of the Plains," *Wildlife Conservation*, August, p.20. **Update on the black-footed ferret** (*Mustela nigripes*), which was twice rediscovered after presumed extinction.

Robichaud, Richard. "Saola Stamp," *Wildlife Conservation*, May, p.8. Story on the continuing study of the saola (*Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*), the most spectacular land mammal discovery since the 1930s, with pictures of Laotian postage stamps featuring the animal.

ORGANIZATIONS.

We've mentioned the work being done by Mr. Wallace Swett, founder of **Primarily Primates**. This refuge for unwanted chimps is now the home of Oliver, a longtime cryptozoological curiosity. Those wishing to make inquiries or assist this worthy effort may write to Primarily Primates, Inc., P.O. Box 207, San Antonio, TX, 78291-0207, U.S.A.

EDITOR'S PAGE

PURPOSE: Cryptozoology is the zoological subspecialty of finding new or supposedly extinct species of all types and sizes. The term has, unfortunately, become associated largely with sensationalized "monsters" in the public mind. Some writers even use it to refer to "ghost" animals. *Exotic Zoology* is intended to help restore the word's proper usage: the name of a hard science devoted to collecting and studying evidence.

IN CLOSING: Serious researchers should join the revived International Society of Cryptozoology (P.O. Box 43070, Tucson, AZ 85733). The ISC has resumed publication of its *Newsletter*.

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