# The ISC Newsletter

International Society of Cryptozoology

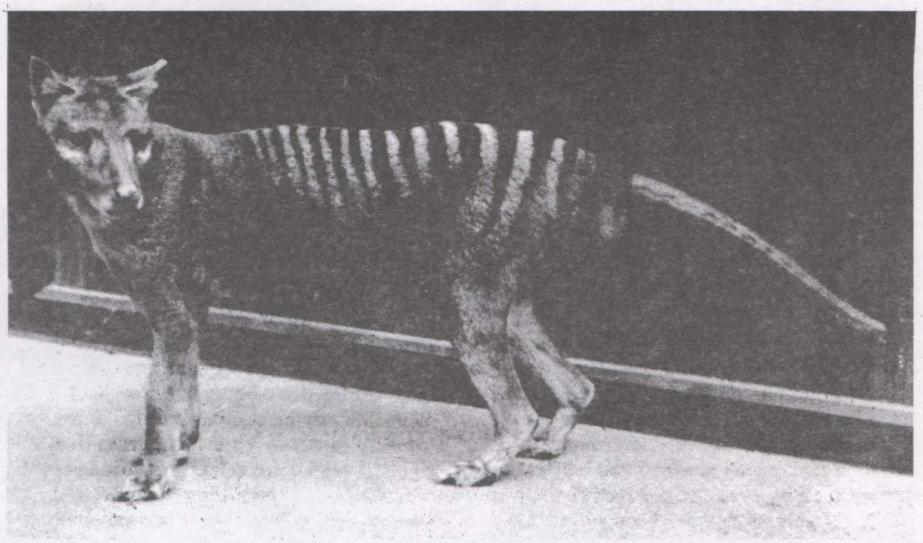
Winter 1985
Vol. 4, No. 4





ISSN 0741-5362


# THYLACINE REPORTS PERSIST AFTER 50 YEARS



*Rare photograph of a thylacine, an Australasian carnivorous marsupial, commonly known as the Tasmanian Tiger because of its stripes. It was thought to have been hunted to extinction in Tasmania in the 1930's, but continuing reports from eyewitnesses indicate its possible survival. It is also reported on mainland Australia, where it has been thought extinct for thousands of years. (Zoological Society of London.)*

Australasia is often thought of as a "natural laboratory," in which one can study how a group of mammals, isolated geographically from the rest of the world for a long period of time, has evolved in its own particular way. This group's adaptations can then be compared, as part of the study of convergent evolution, to those of other mammal groups in other parts of the world.

This "natural laboratory" of Australasian mammals is characterized by the marsupials (some of which are also found in the Americas, as a result of previous continental connections), which bring to mind the popular image of the bounding kangaroo. One of the most interesting marsupial mammals, however, particularly from the perspective of convergent evolution, is the thylacine (Thylacinus cynocephalus), a carnivorous animal which has a striking superficial resemblance to a placental carnivore, particularly a canid. Thus, when settlers in Tasmania, a 42,128-square-mile island off the southeast coast of Australia, began encountering the animal in the 1800's, it became known as the Tasmanian Wolf, or, because of its prominent stripes, the Tasmanian Tiger.

Bounties were placed on the animal when it developed a reputation as a sheep-killer, and it was eventually driven to extinction--or so it was thought--in the 1930's. The last recorded shooting of a wild animal was in 1930, and the last captive individual died in the Hobart Zoo in 1936. In a belated gesture, the thylacine came under the complete protection of the government that same year.

In the following decades, unconfirmed reports of thylacines came in from time to time, and several expeditions were

*"Mr. Weaver Bags a Tiger" is the title of this 1869 photo. The thylacine received government protection in 1936, the same year as its presumed extinction.*

fielded in attempts to establish its continued presence. All met with inconclusive results. Eric R. Guiler, a University of Tasmania zoologist, became involved in the 1950's, and for 30 years since then has been the principal authority on the subject. After leading 10 expeditions in search of the animal, Dr. Guiler is convinced that it exists, but he has been unable to produce either a specimen, dead or alive, or clear, unambiguous photographs. As with cryptozoological problems in other parts of the world, the thylacine continues to frustrate its pursuers, and elude the definitive verdict of science.

The first published account of a thylacine was in an Australian newspaper in 1805, and even then it was referred to as "destructive." Between 1832 and 1849, the Surrey Hills Station in Tasmania had reportedly lost 147 sheep to thylacines. In 1940, the Van Diemen's Land Company placed a 6-shilling bounty on each thylacine scalp (and 10 shillings per scalp on 10 or more). In 1888, when 2 pounds was a reasonable weekly wage, the government itself placed a bounty of 1 pound for scalps of adults and 10 shillings (half a pound) for those of juveniles.

Thousands of bounties were eventually collected, and by the early 1900's, a rapid decline in thylacines was noticed. Although the government bounty was dropped in 1910, it is believed that distemper helped reduce the population even further. Specimens were still being shipped to zoos in the 1920's, but by the 1930's it was all over. It seemed that John Gould's warning, in his Mammals of Australia (Taylor and Francis, London, 1863), had come to pass: "...extermination will have its full sway, and it will then, like the Wolf in England and Scotland, be recorded as an animal of the past: although this will be a source of much regret, neither the shepherd nor the farmer can be blamed for wishing to rid the island of so troublesome a creature."

No sooner had the last live animal died at the Hobart Zoo in 1936, when thought was given to finding it still alive in the wild again. In 1937, the Animals and Birds Protection Board sent two officers on a search in the mountainous northwest country. They had no sightings, but gathered sufficient evidence for the Board to continue sponsoring searches. Trooper Arthur Fleming was dispatched that same year, and he also came back with inconclusive results. In 1938, a new Fleming expedition was fielded, and footprints were found, but no thylacines were observed.

No thylacine searches were conducted during the war, but the first private expedition took off in late 1945 under David Flea, and included Trooper Fleming. Conditions were extremely difficult, and although one set of tracks was found, the expedition ended inconclusively in early 1946.

Things remained relatively dormant until the late 1950's, when Guiler, then Chairman of the Animals and Birds Protection Board, became involved. In late 1957, some sheep had been killed under mysterious circumstances near Broadmarsh, and Guiler's investigation uncovered good tracks. This was the first of nine official expeditions headed by Guiler between 1957 and 1966. All of these uncovered considerable evidence, but no definite proof.

Another private expedition was conducted in 1968, and it was the biggest effort ever undertaken up to that time. Headed by Jeremy Griffiths and James Malley, it also failed to produce the proof it sought. Part of the project was the establishment of a Tiger Centre, to which the public could report sightings, and many new alleged thylacine events were added to the historical record. Some other private searches were also conducted without results.

A new impetus was injected into the hunt in the late 1970's, when the World Wildlife Fund (Australia) funded a two-pronged project, part of which called for the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to conduct fieldwork, using automatic cameras, and part for Dr. Guiler himself to set up 15 automatic camera units. Dr. Guiler's new approach became one of long-term concentration at a number of likely locations, in contrast to the approach in previous decades, by him and others, which had consisted more of moving from one part of the island to another in the footsteps of eyewitness reports.

Steven J. Smith of NPWS led a very sophisticated project, deploying cameras at 17 sites which had been computer-selected based on eyewitness reports. Nine species were caught on film, most of the photographs showing Tasmanian devils. But no Tasmanian tigers. Smith reluctantly concluded in an official 1980 report that the animal was probably extinct.

Dr. Guiler set up his own

automatic cameras on trails in different habitat types where thylacines had been reported (exact locations have been kept confidential). Only 12 units could be deployed at one time, due to "field problems"—such as Tasmanian devils chewing up the electrical leads. The cameras worked on the principle of an animal crossing a pulsed infrared beam, triggering the camera to expose 20 frames of film. Fifty such triggerings could be made before the film magazine needed to be changed. At night, the triggering also turned on strobe lights.

In this way, Dr. Guiler was able to capture on film every species of large Tasmanian marsupial, except the forester kangaroo--and the supposed thylacine. Much of the data generated, however, is of importance, as little is actually known of "trail utilization," which is what the cameras captured. About one-eighth of all large mammals photographed were found to utilize the trails in daylight, far more than expected. Wallabys, Tasmanian devils, and feral cats were the animals most commonly photographed.

Two years later, another landmark in thylacine research was reached with the publication of Carnivorous Marsupials, edited by zoologist Michael Archer (Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales, Sydney, 1982). The volume contained several important articles, including one by Malcolm Smith, an Australian zoologist--and ISC member--who reviewed the entire literature available up to that time, including discussions of the animal's anatomy and behavior.

Another chapter was by D. E. Rounsevell and Steven Smith, which analyzed the 248 sighting reports made to NPSW during the 50-year period from 1930 to 1980. They found that reports tended to increase as a function of the publicity generated by specific events, such as expeditions. In studying the location of the 104 sightings (involving 178 people) reported between 1970 and 1980, they found that most occurred in the north, corresponding closely to the distribution of government bounty payments between 1888 and 1909, rather than to the distribution of roads or human settlements.


*Locations of thylacine sighting reports received by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in Tasmania between 1970 and 1980. Most sightings were of short duration. (Based on Rounsevell and Smith. 1982.)*

Fifty-six of the witnesses observed the animal when alone, and 48 when in the company of one or more other persons. The majority of sightings were very brief, most lasting 5 to 10 seconds. Only eight sightings lasted up to a minute or more. The significance of these figures is that, despite all the evidence presented in favor of the thylacine's present existence, most sightings involve fleeting glimpses of "something" --often from automobiles--and usually when alone. The fallibility of the human perceptual system during unexpected events has been well-documented, and it is possible that all such "soft" evidence—as in other cryptozoological instances involving eyewitness testimony--could be explained by phenomena related to perceptual psychology.

Their chapter concluded by stating: "It is important that relevant scientific institutions in Tasmania have an appropriately receptive attitude to alleged thylacine sightings, in order to be able to collect and evaluate this source of information. If thylacines still exist in Tasmania, they are few, and the difficult task of rediscovering them may be facilitated by careful analysis of the growing collection of reported sightings."

In late 1983, Ted Turner, the American media millionaire, became interested in the thylacine, and offered $100,000 for proof of its existence, an offer which reportedly raised more

than a few eyebrows. That sort of money could well induce a hunter to attempt to shoot one--although, since 1936, it has been fully protected by the law. The current penalty for killing a thylacine is a $5,000 fine.

Soon afterwards, on January 19, 1984, Rod Pearce of NPWS announced that one of the Service's own park rangers had observed what was believed to be a thylacine in an undisclosed part of northwestern Tasmania. The sighting had been made in March, 1982, but had not been announced in order to prevent people from disturbing the area. The ranger, whose name also has not been revealed, was parked in his car "long enough to have a good look at the animal."

The ranger had apparently been sleeping in the rear of his car, which was parked in a forested area. Upon waking, he scanned the immediate area with a spotlight, and saw the animal about 20 feet away. "It was an adult male in excellent condition, with 12 black stripes on a sandy coat," he reported. "...It moved only once, opening its jaw and showing its teeth." Heavy rain obliterated any tracks it might have left.

Presumably, the sighting by one of its own rangers does not constitute "proof" to NPWS--nor should it. Definitive proof would necessarily result in the agency taking steps to protect the species, and this could be a problem if it is found to be established on private lands, particularly lands used for mining or timber. Not only would these industries suffer, but the government itself might be reluctant to reduce its income from mineral and timber rights. NPWS Director Peter Murrell believes such problems could be resolved in instituting a management plan for the thylacine.

He also thinks that "the tiger will be found by accident, maybe by a fast-thinking tourist with a camera. The planned efforts are too hit-and-miss. This animal is very shy, very scarce, and the few that may exist probably have a large hunting territory." This statement typifies the situation with cryptozoology in general: most evidence is produced by chance encounters, and planned fieldwork usually lacks that one indispensable element for success: a statistical anomaly (also known in some circles as "luck").

A new private expedition was announced in early 1984, headed by Peter Wright, who intended to work for 9 months in a rugged 144-square-mile area in the island's northwest highlands. This team also planned to use automatic cameras. Reportedly, $250,000 was being invested in the project, which included a television documentary production. A helicopter would be used to reach inaccessible spots. Fieldwork would begin in May, and one base camp and two satellite camps would be established, all with airlifted materials. "I just want to get a photo and finish the argument once and for all," Wright was quoted as saying. This project turned into the largest and most expensive thylacine hunt of all time. It included 10 self-triggering cameras--with computerized monitoring of "events" and remaining battery power--and sound-sensing instruments.

On September 16, the Sydney Morning Herald reported on the progress of the Wright expedition, based on information provided at a news conference. The expedition, conducted during the Australian winter (June-September), was beset by weather problems, and a lot of sleet and snow was encountered. Feces of unknown origin had been collected for analysis, and evidence was reportedly obtained of a predator chasing prey through over 600 feet of snow in one valley.

But the best evidence Wright claimed to have obtained were photographs of animal tracks, supposedly made by a thylacine hunting a wallaby in the snow. In early August, he was surveying in the helicopter when he observed a trail in the snow, which he decided to investigate further. The helicopter landed, and he followed the tracks on foot for about 500 meters. Bad weather was setting in, and the helicopter started up; he was forced to return, but he took a series of color slides of the tracks first.

One series of smaller tracks in the photos are interpreted as being made by a small wallaby. To each side of these are larger dog-like prints. The Morning Herald stated that they were "not clearly defined." Mr. Wright was quoted as saying: "The animal we found was in a trot. It was hunting at the time. It was a small animal, a bit smaller than a border collie." Mr. Wright was convinced that the tracks had been made by a thylacine, but his evidence was not the definite proof he had sought. The expedition's automatic cameras also failed to capture a thylacine on film.

In June, 1985, reports indicated that the expedition, although continuing into its second winter of operation, was running out of funds, and unable to produce any further evidence of thylacines.

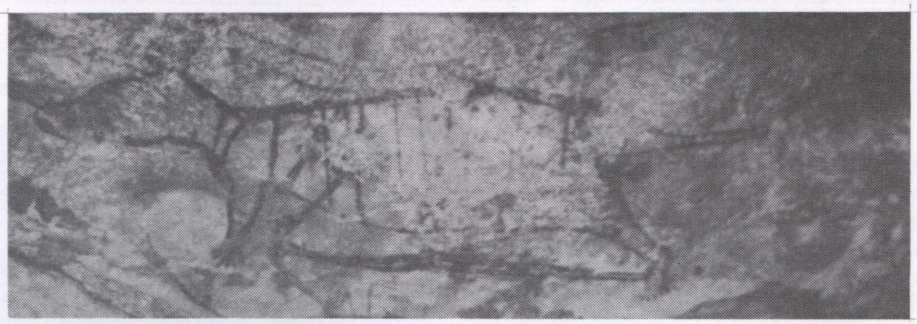
About the same time, the finding of thylacine remains in a remote cave in southern Tasmania was announced. Mike Stoddard, head of the University of Hobart's Zoology Department, identified the bones, and thought that they "could be very old." The bones were found by some explorers together with remains of other marsupial species, including what appears to be a large, extinct wombat. Remains of three different individual thylacines were recovered, including at least one

complete skeleton. The finding is significant because Tasmanian scientists did not have access to a complete skeleton, and have been unable to acquire specimens held in London and Glasgow.

After 50 years, however, the question of the living thylacine remains as enigmatic and unresolved as ever. Public awareness has increased significantly over the past decade, and, as a consequence, more reports are made to the National Parks and Wildlife Service. This has resulted in opinion in favor of the thylacine's existence increasing--but that could change in the future if proof, such as clear, conclusive photos or a live or dead specimen, is not eventually produced.

Even today there are still many skeptics, scientists and laymen alike, who think that the problem is a social phenomenon that feeds upon itself, and has no actual basis in fact. Some talk of it as the local version of the Loch Ness Monster, always there but never proven, as if Nessie is the prototype of "things" that don't really exist.

The thylacine problem also becomes more complicated by sighting reports made from time to time on mainland Australia. Unlike the 50-year "gap" on the Australian provincial island of Tasmania, the thylacine is believed to have become extinct on the mainland thousands of years ago, due, it is thought, to intense ecological competition from the introduced dingo dog, a placental mammal. Here, the "gap" between known living animal and eyewitness reports is thousands of years, and that is much more difficult for Australian zoologists to accept. The idea of thylacines in Tasmania tends to generate a skeptical but "let's wait and see" attitude, while the idea of living thylacines on the mainland tends to produce a different reaction altogether.



*Australian Aboriginal cave depiction of a thylacine from the Kimberleys. It is thought to be several thousand years old. (Western Australian Museum.)*

Eric Guiler, who has spent over half of his adult life in pursuit of the thylacine, is continuing his more low-key efforts to prove its existence. "Some of my colleagues think I'm crazy," he recently told a writer for Smithsonian magazine, "but the eyewitness accounts keep me going." His book, Thylacine: The Tragedy of the Tasmanian Tiger, has just been published (Oxford University Press, 1985), and in it he summarizes the 50 years of history, of reports, and of frustration he and many others have experienced. The book gives an early history of the thylacine, its biology, behavior, and reproduction--or what is known of them--accounts from "old-timers" who knew and even hunted the animal before its supposed demise, and the expeditions, at least up to the early 1980's.

In his book, Dr. Guiler also allocates several pages to mainland reports. Although he remains skeptical, he concedes that "sufficient information has been presented to show that there may be an animal...which does not fit the general description of animals known in the vicinity.... I think that if they [thylacines] were still living today on mainland Australia, we would have more definitive descriptions of sightings and that the tribal aborigines would surely know of their existence."

As for the thylacine on Tasmania, he has fewer doubts, and concludes: "It never ceases to surprise me that since 1936 it has been lamely accepted that the thylacine was extinct or nearly so, even in the face of persistent sighting reports, some of which still stand considerable critical examination. This is a Tasmanian tragedy.... I assume that the thylacine still exists. I believe that it may still increase in members, but that its best chance of recovery is to be left to itself in the bush...."

Whether or not Eric Guiler ever gets his tiger remains to be seen. But whether he does or not, one thing is certain. Hated in life, the thylacine assumed a new role upon death, first symbolized by his immediate Crown protection and his ascension to the coat of arms of Tasmania, granted by George V. It has lurked in the background of the human psyche ever since, showing itself on occasion as a sort of reminder to the human race of what it is capable of. Thus, in a strange sort of way, it--or its psychic representation in our minds--has fed upon itself. It has assumed a noble distinction during its "extinction" that it never enjoyed in life.

If it ever rises again from the ashes, it could lose some of that distinction, and that could be a dangerous thing. But that is the price it would have to pay to be reborn in a modern world. □

# TWO NEW ONZA SKULLS FOUND

The Onza, a supposed puma-like felid of Northwest Mexico, has been receiving renewed attention. It was noted as distinct from the puma in Spanish colonial and missionary chronicles, as well as in reports by modern-day Mexicans.

The stimulus for the renewed interest was a memorandum sent to various official American and Mexican agencies by West German mammalogist Helmut Hemmer proposing that the Onza may, in fact, represent the persistence of a North American Pleistocene cheetah into modern times. The fossil cat, Acinonyx (Miracinonyx) trumani, was originally thought to be a puma, but was reinterpreted in the late 1970's by paleontologist Dan Adams as an archaic cheetah. Some of the morphological characteristics described by Adams for the fossil cheetah were similar to those in modern Onza reports, particularly as described by Robert Marshall in his 1961 book The Onza, leading Dr. Hemmer to suspect that they might be one and the same animal. He presented his hypothesis at the Society-sponsored symposium "The Search for Unknown or Supposedly Extinct Animals," held as part of the III International Congress of Systematic and Evolutionary Biology (ICSEB III), at the University of Sussex, Brighton, England, on July 7, 1985 (see "ICSEB III Cryptozoology Symposium," Newsletter, Autumn, 1985).

Working in Tucson, Richard Greenwell and Wade Sherbrooke were able to track down Robert Marshall, who still possesses the Los Frailes Onza skull, which he recovered in Sinaloa, Mexico, in the 1950's, and which has no mandible. Mr. Greenwell took a cast of an upper tooth row of the skull to Dr. Hemmer, which he inspected the night prior to the Symposium. Dr. Hemmer felt that the dental characteristics supported his hypothesis, but he needed to do further comparative work back at his laboratory at the Johannes Guttenberg University of Mainz.

*Longtime Onza investigator Robert Marshall (left), inspecting the Vega skull with Mexican rancher Ricardo Urquijo in October of 1985. (I.S.C.)*

Meanwhile, a search began for the long-lost Shirk skull, from a cat killed in Sinaloa in 1938 by Dale Lee, a well-known hunter who also lives in Tucson. It was the Shirk kill that first brought the Onza to public attention. Despite Mr. Lee's assertion that the cat was distinct from the puma, American zoologists dismissed the claim, and the subject was quickly forgotten with the advent of World War II.

Generally, Mexican peasants and ranchers describe the Onza as skinnier and longer-legged than the puma. It reportedly also leaves narrower and more elongated paw prints. Although it is said to be much more aggressive, it has a similar body coloration as the puma--in which there is already much regional and seasonal color variability--allowing the possibility that, as a consequence, the animal has remained unrecognized by zoology as a different species.

Working with Mr. Greenwell, Troy Best, a biologist at the University of New Mexico, in Albuquerque, attempted to track down the Shirk skull, as it was believed to have been eventually deposited in a museum in the 1960's. This was relatively easy for him, as he had just completed measuring every puma skull in American collections (over 1,700) as part of a comprehensive new study of puma cranial morphology, and all his data was computerized.

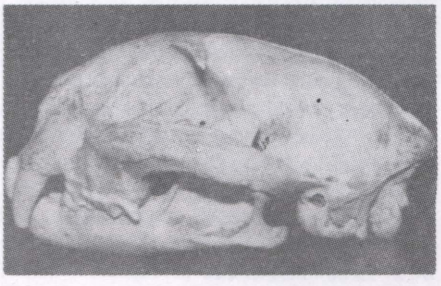
Meanwhile, based on information provided by University of Arizona mammalogist E. Lendell Cockrum--who had examined the Shirk skull in the 1950's--Greenwell and Marshall established contact with Ricardo Urquijo, a Mexican rancher from Sinaloa, who had visited Dr. Cockrum some years before and who had a supposed new Onza skull. The area in question turned out to be the same one where the partial Los Frailes skull and lost Shirk skull were from, the foothills of the vast

Sierra Madre Occidental mountain range, between the towns of Culiacan and Mazatlan.

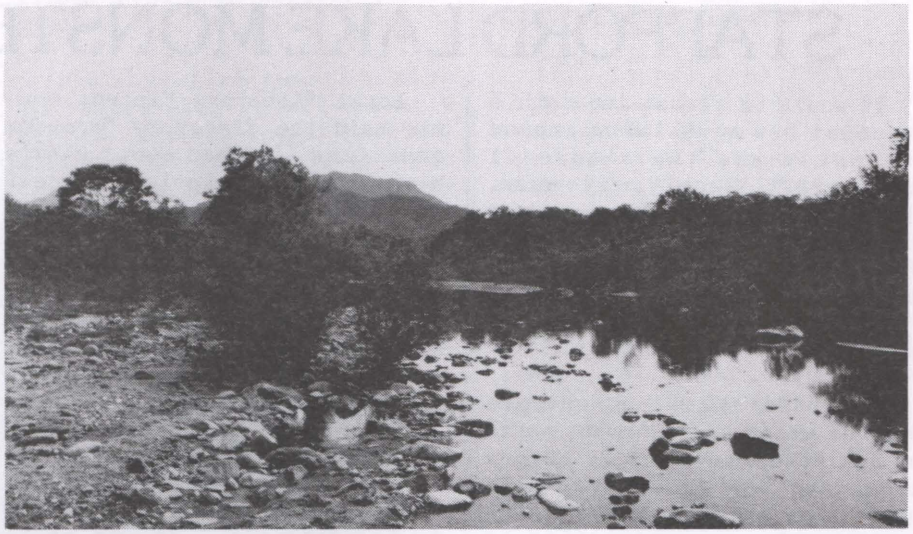
Greenwell and Marshall visited Sinaloa in October, 1985, and Mr. Urquijo produced the new Onza skull, which has a mandible and is in perfect condition. The skull, from a cat shot about 10 years ago by Mr Jesus Vega, was brought back to Tucson on a long-term loan.

Dr. Best, meanwhile, believed he had tracked down the Shirk skull at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. The location, La Silla Mountain, Sinaloa, and the year, 1938, were the same. Furthermore, Dr. Best found that, never having heard of the Onza at the time of the measurement, he had eliminated the skull from his study because of its peculiarities. However, when the skull arrived on loan to the University of Arizona, it was found to be a different skull (clear comparative photos of the Shirk skull still exist).

It had been donated to the Academy by R. R. M. Carpenter, and Mr. Lee confirmed that he and his brothers had taken Mr. Carpenter on "tiger hunts" to Sinaloa before the war. ("Tigre" is the common Mexican name for jaguar.) Nevertheless, the Carpenter skull is now considered to be from yet another Onza, as it possesses the same characteristics found in the other skulls: short nasals, high dome, wide post-orbital constriction, large braincase, rounded foramen magnum, narrow carnassials, and small post-canine gap. In addition, the second upper premolar ($P^2$) is absent in the Vega and Carpenter skulls--a Lynx trait--but, curiously, is present in the Los Frailes and Shirk skulls.



*The Vega skull, from a supposed Onza killed about 10 years ago. (I.S.C.)*



*Onza country. Onzas, reported to be different from pumas, sometimes descend to this sub-tropical lowland from the foothills of the vast Sierra Madre Occidental mountain range. (I.S.C.)*

Collaboration continues among Messrs. Best, Cockrum, Greenwell, Hemmer, Marshall, and Sherbrooke to determine exactly what the Onza is, now that new evidence has come to light. One priority is to visit Berkeley and compare the new skulls to the Pleistocene cheetah fossil material. The search for the missing Shirk skull will also continue, although its importance is now somewhat diminished by the acquisition of the Vega and Carpenter skulls.

Mr. Marshall, his enthusiasm restored after his book was ridiculed in the 1960's, is also planning an expedition into the Sierra Madre in an attempt to acquire a complete specimen. There would be many hazards, as the country is extremely rough--even horses cannot make it--and the expedition would require several months. Meanwhile, ranchers in Sinaloa have been alerted to the potential importance of a complete skeleton whenever another Onza is shot—which apparently happens every 10 years or so, at least in the area in question. Further findings will be published in the Newsletter when available. □

"We have three principal means: observation of nature, reflection, and experiment. Observation gathers the facts, reflection combines them, experiment verifies the result of the combination. It is essential that the observation of nature be assiduous, that reflection be profound, and that experimentation be exact. Rarely does one see these abilities in combination. And so, creative geniuses are not common."

Denis Diderot
Pensees sur l'Interpretation de la Nature, XV, 1753.

"It is perfectly rational to play a risky game; what is irrational is to deceive oneself about the risk."

Imre Lakatos
"History of Science and Its Rational Reconstructions," in Scientific Revolutions (Ian Hacking, ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1981

# STAFFORD LAKE MONSTER CAUGHT

It would be almost impossible to count how many lakes around the world are the abodes of "monsters." Rarely, if ever, can an explanation for a given "lake monster" be conclusively proven, whether it be a real monster--whatever that is--or a normal animal seen under unusual conditions.

Stafford Lake, an obscure body of water near Novato, north of San Francisco, was no exception, and for decades a "monster" was said to lurk in its waters, at least according to local fishermen who told of "something" snatching away their tackle and even their poles. The "something" had to have been there for at least 30 years, as the lake was dammed in the early 1950's.

However, this particular mystery was solved in 1984, when the small lake was drained for dam repairs by the Marin County Municipal Water District. Whatever "monster" was there would surely be exposed and caught, as has been suggested--impractically--for Loch Ness. The draining began in April and, sure enough, on August 22, a 6.5-foot white sturgeon (Acipencer transmontanus) was found flopping in a shallow area. It took a dozen men to wrestle the large fish out of the lake and into a tank for shipment to the California Academy of Sciences' Steinhart Aquarium, in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park.

Local fisherman Vincent Harris said the discovery "answers questions I've had about what's been lurking in the lake since I was a child. I've been waiting 20 years to see this. My Dad came home once and said he lost his pole to this giant fish. He was sure it was some kind of monster. I said, 'Dad, stop telling lies.' Wait till I tell him about this!"

California State Department of Fish and Game officials believe the sturgeon is about 50 to 60 years old. It was probably placed in the lake soon after it was dammed, and must have reigned as "king of the lake" since then.

John Hewitt, assistant curator of the Steinhart Aquarium, was happy to receive the fish, which reportedly was the largest sturgeon every exhibited there. He stated that it had undoubtedly lived a "charmed life" for 30 years, and that "every good fishing lake needs to generate a good monster fish story. Now Stafford Lake will have to come up with another one."

The tale of the Stafford Lake Monster has a sad ending, however, as the sturgeon died within a week of its arrival at the Aquarium, apparently from shock. Pam Wing, the public information officer, explained that, by the time the lake was drained, and the fish transferred to a tank, "it was not in great shape." Besides bruising and traumatization, the attempted gradual transfer from freshwater to the Aquarium's salt water "was just too much."

The official size record for a white sturgeon dates from 1912, when a 12-foot, 6-inch specimen was taken in the Columbia River, near Vancouver, Washington. It weighed 1,285 pounds. There are two unofficially accepted claims of white sturgeon weighing 1,500 pounds, and one caught in the Columbia River, at Astoria, Oregon, in 1892 reportedly weighed over 2,000 pounds. It was exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, but its real weight is in doubt.

Although the size of the Stafford Lake sturgeon was modest when compared to some of these giants, and even larger ones reported from the Soviet Union, it points to a logical solution to the many "monsters" reported in numerous North American lakes, and perhaps in lakes in other parts of the world as well. Giant sturgeon measuring 24 feet and weighing 3,241 pounds--as was one caught in the Volga River, in Russia--are monsters by any definition of the word.

Perhaps such giants do not adequately explain the reported morphology and behavior of Nessie or Champ, but they may help solve part of the worldwide "lake monster" phenomenon. □

# MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

When the Society was first founded, about 4 years ago, I was concerned that there might not be sufficient information coming in every few months to fill a newsletter. I was wrong. Now, my concern is more with what information to include--or exclude--in a particular issue. Much information has to be condensed and greatly abbreviated, and some never makes it at all, being continually displaced by items of more timely relevance.

It's hard to keep everybody happy all of the time, particularly in a Society composed of persons with such diverse interests. However, I believe that the combination of feature articles, some long and some short, the News and Notes column, and the letters section, provide an adequate balance.

This issue features the

intriguing story of the thylacine, a striped marsupial mammal --known as the Tasmanian Tiger or Wolf--which supposedly became extinct about 50 years ago. Thylacine reports continue to be made and sometimes publicized in Tasmania, although we receive little detailed information here at the Secretariat. Thylacine reports contain all the necessary ingredients for cryptozoological investigation (even when some of the researchers involved may never have heard of the word): sightings by witnesses of varying reliability, rumors, myths or artistic depictions from native groups, a footprint here, a few hairs there. Sometimes, even some unclear photographs.

The thylacine question also has interesting parallels with the U.S. Eastern cougar problem, although the principals in these respective areas of investigation are not known to be in communication. Perhaps comparing notes could shed new light on either or both of these unresolved questions, and perhaps even help solve one or the other. Hopefully, the Society and its publications will stimulate increasing interactions between investigators in different parts of the world, who are interested primarily in their own local zoological and cryptozoological problems.

This is the last 1985 newsletter, and it is now time to renew memberships for 1986. If you have not already renewed, please use the enclosed return-renewal envelope for the purpose. I apologize to all members, particularly new 1985 members, for the tardiness of the newsletters. We really will do better in 1986, and I hope all members will want to continue supporting the Society.

J. Richard Greenwell
Editor

# SUSTAINING MEMBERS

The Society acknowledges the support of 80 Sustaining Members who assisted with contributions above the required $25 fee during the 1985 membership period. This was nine more than in 1984. Such donations help the Society meet its financial obligations, which continued to be higher than its income during 1985.

The 1985 Sustaining Members were:

Ronald Banister, John Becker, Ronald Botterweg, James Brewer, Bruce and Beverly Burgess, Wayne Cermak, Joseph Ciano, James Clark, Loren Coleman, Blair Cooke, Peter Crall, Louise Deadman, Conrad Durst, Richard Ellis, Curtis Fuller, Russell Gebhart, Dan Gettinger, Daniel Gilbert, David Gipson, Eric Gothard, Benoit Grison, Willard Hart, John Heckman, Richard Heiden, Michael Hester, Michael Johnson, Graham Joyner, Christ Kanoles, Mark Keller, Quentin Keynes, Peter Kirkham, Arnold Klein, Mark Kolodny, Stephen Kredel, Glen Kuban, Lawrence Kubacki II, Sterling Lanier, Cory Laughlin, Paul LeBlond, Jan Libourel, Lynard Love, Roy Mackal, John Maliwacki, Dirk Mattheisen, Pat Meaney, James McCleod, Ralph McGeehan, Sharon and Stephen Nevin, Cira Peragine, Maurizio Pettinelli, Lenny Picker, Howie Pine, Michael Playfair, Nicholas Pope, James Powell, Michael Pugliese, Andrew Ragan, Michel Raynal, Bruce and Jannie Rivera, James Robbins, Adam Rowen, Eileen Roy, Gabriel Sanchez, Ennio Scannapieco, Michael Shields, Christopher Smith, David Smith, Ted Straiton, Joe Swatek, Paul Swearingen, Tokuharu Takabayashi, Gavin Troster, Hugh Trotti, Perry Edward Turner, Bert Waterhouse, Thomas Wilkinson, Forrest Wood, Joseph Zarzynski

The Society is particularly indebted to new Benefactors Bette and Joe Wolfskill, and to other Benefactors who continued to support the Society during 1985, particularly Robert Dorion and Ned Winn. □

# RENEWAL INFORMATION

This newsletter is the last one which will be mailed as part of the 1985 membership period. Members are now urged to renew for 1986--if they have not already done so--by using the return/renewal envelope enclosed in this newsletter.

The address label being used for this issue is a special "peel-off" kind which should be affixed to the designated spot on the return envelope.

Membership remains at US$25.00, regardless of the country of residence of the member, and includes the receipt of four newsletters and one journal corresponding to the calendar year in question. For example, all members who joined (or renewed) in 1985 have now received, with this issue, the four newsletters and one journal corresponding to 1985, even when late publication resulted in some of them not appearing until 1986.

Members in Canada may send checks or money orders in Canadian currency, provided that the exchange rate current at the time is used.

It is requested of all members that they renew promptly, to help alleviate cash flow problems, and to reduce the need for expensive and time-consuming mailings of reminder notices. In return, an attempt will be made to publish all the 1986 publications before the end of the year. □

# GROVES JOINS EDITORIAL BOARD

Colin P. Groves, an internationally known mammalogist and primatologist, has replaced Nicholas Hotton III on the Editorial Board of Cryptozoology, the Society's annual journal. Dr. Groves is the author of three books and more than 100 research articles on such diverse topics as the cranial morphology of equids, geographic variation in rhinoceroses, the systematics, phylogeny, and classification of primates, particularly gibbon apes and gorillas, the taxonomy of deer, and the osteology of Old World felids. He is recognized for his work on gorilla variation and taxonomy, is the author of Gorillas (Arthur Baker, London, 1970), and has been involved in the description of several new species and subspecies of mammals.

Following his doctoral work at the University of London, Dr. Groves has served on the faculties of the University of California, Berkeley, Cambridge University, and, since 1974, the Department of Prehistory and Anthropology at the Australian National University in Canberra. He is the author of a Comment (Vol. 3, pp. 111-115) and one Article (Vol. 4, pp. 37-44), in Cryptozoology.

*Colin Groves at the site of a wombat burrow, in lower right of photo. The species involved was thought extinct for 50 years.*

The accompanying photo shows Dr. Groves on a recent field trip near Deniliquin, western New South Wales. A wombat burrow is visible below the tree in the lower right of the photo. The species in question has supposedly been extinct for at least 50 years, but several burrows found by a student of Dr. Groves indicate its possible survival. Recently deposited hairs recovered from the burrows resemble those from "scrappy specimens" collected in the 1890's. The species was never formally described, which may now be done. Dr. Groves will report final conclusions to other Society members when they are available. □

# FINAL CHICAGO PROGRAM

The final program for the 1986 Membership Meeting at the University of Chicago has been set.

The meeting, to be held in the Dora DeLee Room of Billings Hospital, will begin at 9 a.m. on June 14 with a social hour. Host Leigh Van Valen and organizer Roy Mackal will welcome attendees at 10 a.m., which will be followed by several illustrated talks, as follows:

--"Uknowns We Have Known." Charles A. Reed, Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois in Chicago.

--"Possible Survival of Fossil Animals Into Historical Times." Christine Janis, Division of Biology and Medicine, Brown University.

--"A Reconstruction of the Skull of Gigantopithecus, and Its Implications for Sasquatch Research." Grover S. Krantz, Department of Anthropology, Washington State University.

--"Further Investigations Into the Identity of the Onza." J. Richard Greenwell, International Society of Cryptozoology.

--Results of the 1986 American Yeti Expedition." William Cacciolfi, Mark C. Miller, and Thukten Philip Sherpa, New World Expeditions.

This will be the first Membership Meeting in the U.S. Midwest, and all members in the area are encouraged to attend. There is no admittance charge, and relatives and friends are welcome. □

"A first-rate laboratory is one in which mediocre scientists can produce outstanding work."

Patrick Maynard Stuart Blackett
Quoted by M. G. K. Menon,
Commemoration Lecture
The Royal Institution, 1967.

# CRYPTOLETTERS

*The Editor welcomes letters from readers on any topic related to cryptozoology, but reserves the right to shorten them or to make slight changes to improve style and clarity, but not meaning.*

To the Editor:

I study small rodents and shrews (biogeography and biometry), and I would be very interested in receiving owl pellets from Asia and South America. Collaborators may communicate with me at: Chamagnieu, 38460 Cremieu, France.

Patrick Brunet-Lecomte
Cremieu, France

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To the Editor:

I am presently developing a Standard Sighting Data Format for computer analysis of cryptozoogical reports. If any readers currently use a standard form in their investigations, I would appreciate receiving a copy, along with any thoughts they may have on the matter. Also welcome would be communications from anyone interested in adding their input to these efforts. I can be contacted at P.O. Box 60, Brooktondale, NY 14817.

John Becker
Brooktondale, New York, U.S.A.

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To the Editor:

Enclosed is a recent copy of Science Software Quarterly, a new publication which I think may be of interest to the members of your Society.

In order to make the publication more affordable to those scientists who might profit most from it, we have been offering discounted subscriptions to the memberships of selected societies. We would like to offer a discount of 30 percent off the regular subscription price of $45 to ISC members, so that the price would be $31.50.

We would appreciate it if you could announce this offer to your members.

Diana J. Gabaldon
Executive Editor
Science Software Quarterly
Center for Environmental Studies
Arizona State University
Tempe, Arizona, U.S.A.

*The Editor will be pleased to send the journal to any members requesting it.--Editor.*

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To the Editor:

Being an ISC member, I have always enjoyed reading and collecting any reports/literature relating to: a) the apparent existence of large unidentified organisms; and b) the discovery and description of new species—particularly those formerly belonging to a). One such report that I have seen is especially interesting, if not a little bizarre, and I feel that other cryptozoologists may enjoy learning of this.

It is a short report issued on May 14, 1977, by the Antara News Agency, and quoted in the book Living Wonders, by John Michell and M. M. Rickard (Thomas and Hudson, London, 1982), which was reviewed in Vol. 4 of Cryptozoology. It runs as follows:

> Giant skunks, probably survivors from prehistoric times, have been discovered in the jungles of north central Java. The skunks are as big as German shepherd dogs and can climb trees. B. O. Nainggolan of the Central Java Animal Lovers' Association said one of the giant skunks was captured and killed by shepherds recently on the slopes of the Ungaran mountain in Central Java. He deplored the fact that the giant skunks are not included on the list of protected species.

As far as I am aware, the three existing skunk genera (Mephitis, Spilogale, and Conepatus) are all exclusively American, with no known existing Old World representative (although another mustelid, the Old World zorilla, is extremely skunk-like both in appearance and behavior). However, there are two species of badgers from Southeast Asia which are commonly called stink- or skunk-badgers: the Malayan Mydaus javanensis and the Palawan (Calamian) Suillotaxus marchei. Both are fairly large, and though not as morphologically imposing as the American skunks, share the potency of their American relatives' spraying behavior!

It therefore seems more likely that the newly discovered "skunks" featured in the above report may, in fact, be a type of badger or even a hitherto quite unknown type of mustelid occupying, at least in Java, the niche filled in Africa by the zorillas and in the Americas by the true skunks. Naturally, until more information is forthcoming, any hypotheses proposed as to their identity cannot be other than somewhat tentative in nature. Hence, in view of this curious report (which may even be tongue-in-cheek), I would be extremely interested to learn if other cryptozoologists have encountered any information concerning these enigmatic creatures, and would be more than grateful if such information could be sent to me at the following address: 257 Haydes Road, West Bromwich, West Midlands, England 871 2EE, U.K.

Karl P. N. Shuker
West Bromwich, England, U.K.

# WOOD'S ANIMAL FACTS

The largest amphibian in the world is the Chinese salamander (Andrias davidianus), which is found in the cold mountain streams and marshy areas of northeastern, central, and southern China. Adult specimens of both sexes average 3 ft., 9 in. (1.14 m.) in total length, and scale 55-66 lb. (25-30 kg.).

The largest accurately measured giant salamander on record was a huge individual collected in Kweichow (Guizhou) Province, South China, circa 1923 and described by Sawerley (1925), who says it measured 5 ft. (1.52 m.) snout to tail between pegs, and 5 ft. 9 in. (1.75 m.) along the curve of the body. Unfortunately, this animal was not weighed, but it must have scaled nearly 100 lb. (45 kg.).

The much rarer Japanese giant salamander (Andrias japonicus) of west Honshu and Central Kyushu has also been credited with the title of "largest living amphibian," but although it matches its Chinese counterpart in terms of length, it "bulks out" slightly smaller because the tail is proportionately longer.... According to Flower (1936), a very large Japanese giant salamander which died in the Leipzig Zoo on May 31, 1930, measured 4 ft., 8-3/4 in. (1.44 m.) in a straight line, and 5 ft. 4-1/2 in. (1.64 m.) along the curve of the body. This specimen weighed 88 lb. (40 kg.) when alive....

The only other amphibians which approach Andrias in the length stakes are the eel-like three-toed amphiuma (Amphiuma means tridactylum) and the giant siren (Siren lacertina), both of the Southeast United States, which have been measured up to 39.5 in. (100.3 cm.) and 36 in. (91.4 cm.) respectively.

Abstracted from:

The Guinness Book of Animal Facts and Feats, by Gerald L. Wood. Guinness Superlatives, Enfield, U.K.(3rd ed.), 1982.

# STOP PRESS

NEWS WAS RECEIVED IN EARLY 1986 THAT AN ONZA HAD BEEN SHOT BY RANCHERS IN SINALOA. A TEAM IS GOING TO MEXICO TO EXAMINE AND DISSECT THE ANIMAL. DETAILS TO APPEAR IN THE SPRING 1986 ISSUE.



*The ISC Newsletter*
International Society of Cryptozoology
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