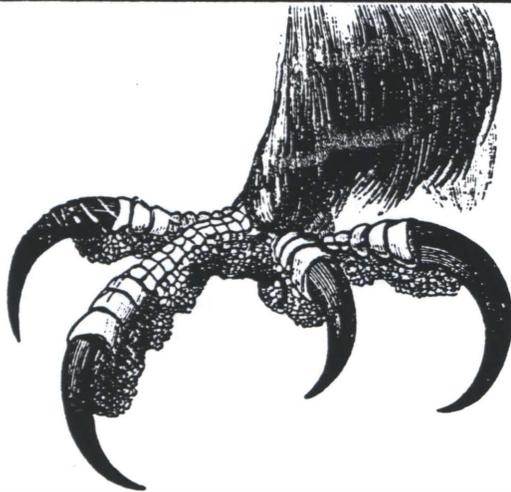


WONDERS

Seeking the Truth in a Universe of Mysteries

Vol.1 No.1

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Thunderbirds!



A REPLY TO THE CRYPTOZOOLOGY REVIEW

The editor of **Cryptozoology**, the journal of the International Society of Cryptozoology, has declined to publish my response to their review of **Thunderbirds!**, citing its length. So I have written a short version for publication in their journal. Here is the original complete reply.

As one who has written about the complacency prevailing among today's scientists I am happy to have on record Angelo Capparella's review of my book **Thunderbirds!** in **Cryptozoology** Volume 9. Your reviewer ably reflects the complacency of an ornithologist when confronted with the evidence for the survival of the largest known teratorn (**Argentavis magnificens**) and for the existence of a giant owl. I would expect similar views to come from many other ornithologists if they could be induced to read the book. But such views from one ornithologist or from a dozen of them would still be erroneous.

First of all let me reply to some specific points made in the review. I am sorry to learn that your reviewer found my organization haphazard, and I trust that others will not find it so. The absence of the original out-takes from the Huffer film was due to copyright laws. I was unable to obtain permission for their use. As noted in my book (p.63), they show only a dark shape, so the drawings serve to illustrate them fairly well. Had I been able to use the photographs, any reviewer is likely to have described them as disappointing for lack of detail, which they are.

Here is the complete sentence from Campbell and Tonni (**Auk**, Vol.100: 399) from which your reviewer gives a partial quotation:

The toes of **Teratornis merriami** were rather long, as in condors and their terminal phalanges were long, moderately curved, and blunt at the ends, indicating the feet were not used for catching or holding prey as in hawks, eagles, and owls.

This quotation is not about **Argentavis magnificens** as your reviewer implies. Also, I made this very point about **T. merriami** in my book (p.79) when I wrote: "If the current view of its stalking habits is correct, this bird was indeed unlikely to have carried off people and larger prey." Campbell and Tonni do take the view that **A. magnificens** was "a larger version of the La Brea teratorn morphotype." But that is their speculation qualified as hypothesizing from the limited remains of the largest of the teratorns. On the other hand, I think the living descendants of that bird have been reported to carry off prey. Your reviewer is free to favor their speculation over mine, but he should make it clear that that is what he is doing.

Corrections of nomenclature when appropriate are welcome, as are citations of additional scientific literature. Unfortunately these things typically are the only constructive contributions professional scientists are willing to make with topics like **Thunderbirds**. Many members of the ISC naturally are exceptions to this.

Your reviewer tries to explain away **Thunderbirds** by suggesting that California condors can be found beyond their historic range. My discussion of the condor's range was adequate. I dismissed his hypothesis because, after looking for this possibility, there was

nothing to discuss. Condors should not be stretched and their habits arbitrarily changed to suit the reports of Thunderbirds. Likewise the reports should not be altered to match the familiar condors. The resemblance to vultures noted by your reviewer is to be expected because the teratorns combine the characteristics of vultures and eagles.

Your reviewer equates the widespread appearances of the birds with improbability. There is nothing improbable about where and when these birds have been reported in folklore and in history. The birds are migratory and once were found in far greater numbers than their surviving descendants. I made this point in detail in my book *Natural Mysteries* (1991, 2nd ed., pp.79-81).

Your reviewer complains that I did not consider the misidentification of known birds. I did this throughout the book and especially in the first three chapters where I chronicled the failure of bird experts to adequately explain away the Illinois reports with known birds. The reviewer exhibits one of the worst characteristics of conservative scientists with his unreasonable dismissal of the Illinois reports. The Illinois reports are the most compelling evidence to date due to the neglect and lack of investigation of the giant birds. But this is typical. Complacent scientists are seldom interested in evidence when the topic is something new. They are interested in a solution being handed to them on a silver platter with no effort or risk on their part. Scientists are not the sole reason so many mysteries remain untackled, but they are part of the problem. When Roger Patterson obtained his famous film in 1967 it was to be dismissed by a panel of professional scientists as "not kosher." We can expect that the best evidence available will be dismissed in this fashion.

Most scientists are out of the habit of investigating mysteries in the field, interviewing and listening to people, compiling records of what is not easily seen for oneself, delving into the history of such things, and daring to think that these things could be real. They are comfortable with the status quo and willing to wait for someone else to do the work. Your reviewer indicates his agreement with this view when he expects further research will be done by nonprofessionals.

Your reviewer writes that a lack of Thunderbird sightings from amateur birdwatchers is one cause for his lack of interest. This is akin to expecting hobbyists who engage in airplane spotting to be reporting UFOs. Neither group of amateurs is encouraged to expand their studies to include things not previously described in a handbook. And if ever encouraged to do so, who would be the first in line to have their eyesight, sanity, and spotting-competence questioned by their colleagues? My book dealt with the focus of amateur organizations (pp.60-61) but your reviewer chose to ignore this text.

Neither amateur nor professional publications have touched upon the record of reports of giant birds. In publications in the field of natural history for the past one hundred years I have been able to find only one item that came close to looking at them. An editor of *Nature Magazine* (Washington, D.C.) took one instance of a false report of an eagle carrying off a child to make a broader point. In "Fake Eagle Stories" (Vol. 27: 106, 1936) he complained that the effect and sometimes the object of such stories was to denigrate eagles and to support their persecution. While this single item cannot be said

to be responsible for silencing discussion of Thunderbirds, I think it is historical evidence of the mind set that has prevented more consideration of the birds during this century.

Second to the silence of amateurs, your reviewer objects that there is no "extensive food source." What the birds are eating is specified repeatedly throughout the book. And on p.53 the topic is specifically discussed. They are not relying on a single source of food and probably never have. In the past when bison were numerous those animals were a food source. The bison are largely gone from their past habitat and so are the birds from that same habitat. Along the western coast the birds include whales in their diet; in Alaska, caribou; elsewhere, pigs, cattle, lambs, dogs, sheep, horses, moose, elk, and people. The 1977 reports from Illinois indicate the birds are opportunists taking what live prey is available, taking in Illinois a pig and attacking a human being. The presence of a "corn desert" (the reviewer's terms) is the very reason a human being was attacked while the birds were making their annual migration southward.

Ironically, as this review was published a news item appeared reporting that Lapp herders in northern Norway have formally complained to their government that "giant eagles" made off with 1,300 reindeer in 1991. The worldwide appearance of giant birds was examined in chapter 10 of my book, a fact not mentioned in your review. At least the Lapp herders are unlikely to be disturbed as well by curious ornithologists. These professionals are already certain that Lapp herders and Illinois housewives cannot know what they are talking about.

Your reviewer takes a statement out of context to allow himself an uncalled-for blast of rhetoric about inventorying our planet's species. I made the point that North American biologists object that "all the field work has been done." The mammalogist I quoted went unnamed out of courtesy and because the view seems to me to be a common one. We are still left wondering whether your reviewer shares this view that the major species in North America were all catalogued by the end of the last century. Are Thunderbirds and giant owls (which I have dubbed Bighoot) at all possible in his mind, or are stray condors the only permissible find?

To answer lingering questions, to the best of my knowledge the Huffer film remains in the hands of the photographer who still resides in Illinois. When last heard of the feather from eastern Texas was being sent to Steve Wylie, a curator of birds at the St. Louis Zoo, according to a 16 December 1977 newspaper report.

To date the problem of giant birds has sparked only typical behavior by run-of-the-mill scientists. Their ho-hum approach to mysteries, mutually supported within their fields of specialization, abandons the most challenging of major advancements in knowledge to be pursued by curious amateurs. Scientists find this satisfactory and have no reason to change. But let us not pretend that they have reasons other than purely selfish ones for sitting on their hands.

Yours truly,

Mark A. Hall

Memories of Thunderbirds

BY MARK A. HALL

The Thunderbird of American Indian legend has become the "monster bird" of the Twentieth Century.[1] These predatory birds of a size exceeding all other birds have always been with us. If their continued existence is ever formally recognized then their presence in historical record will be readily acknowledged. For now that presence is ignored. But it can be found if we look for it.

We owe an early citation of these birds to John Josselyn, an Englishman who made visits to New England in 1638-1639 and 1663-1671. He authored **New England's Rarities Discovered** (1672) and **An Account of Two Voyages to New England** (1679).[2] Horace Beck, whose name is synonymous with Maine folklore, has called Josselyn Maine's first folklorist.[3] Others have included him in a roster of "historical liars" for recording what he heard about sea serpents and giant birds.[4]

Here is what this traveler had to say about a bird known in seventeenth century New England:

The Pilhannaw or Mechquan, much like the description of the Indian Ruck, a monstrous great Bird, a kind of Hawk, some say an Eagle, four times as big as a Goshawk, white Mail'd, having two or three purple Feathers in her head as long as Geeses Feathers they make Pens of, the Quills of these Feathers are purple, as big as Swans Quills and transparent; her Head is as big a Childs of a year old, a very Princely Bird; when she soars abroad, all sorts of feathered Creatures hide themselves, yet she never preys upon them, but upon **Fawns** and **Jaccals**; She Ayries in the Woods upon the high Hills of Ossapy, and is very rarely or seldome seen.[5]

The Ossipee Mountains are located in east-central New Hampshire between Ossipee Lake and Lake Winnepesaukee.

The size and habits of this bird recall the Thunderbird as we can picture it today from the scattered reports still made in some parts of the northeastern U.S.A. Colorful plumage has been attributed here and in other Indian descriptions of giant birds, in contrast to the modern reports of birds with gray and dark feathers. Possibly the birds that survive in the modern day are necessarily the less spectacularly colored ones. Their adaptation to modern conditions may include the favoring of plumage that makes them less remarkable and the least noticeable.

The birds we see today may be the descendants of the Thunderbirds, but they may not be as colorful. A greater variety of color in plumage was possible when they flourished in greater numbers and were not at hazard from mankind's weapons of recent centuries.

Another indication of the Thunderbird of old has been noted in Massachusetts by A. Hyatt Verrill in **Along New England Shores**. The bird is mentioned when telling the origin of Nantucket fogs which are credited to be the pipe smoke of a giant named Maushope. Verrill writes:

At that time there was a giant bird who raided the Indians' villages and carried off the children, and Maushope, pursuing the great bird,

waded across to Nantucket where he found the bones of the missing children piled in a mound beneath a big tree.[6]

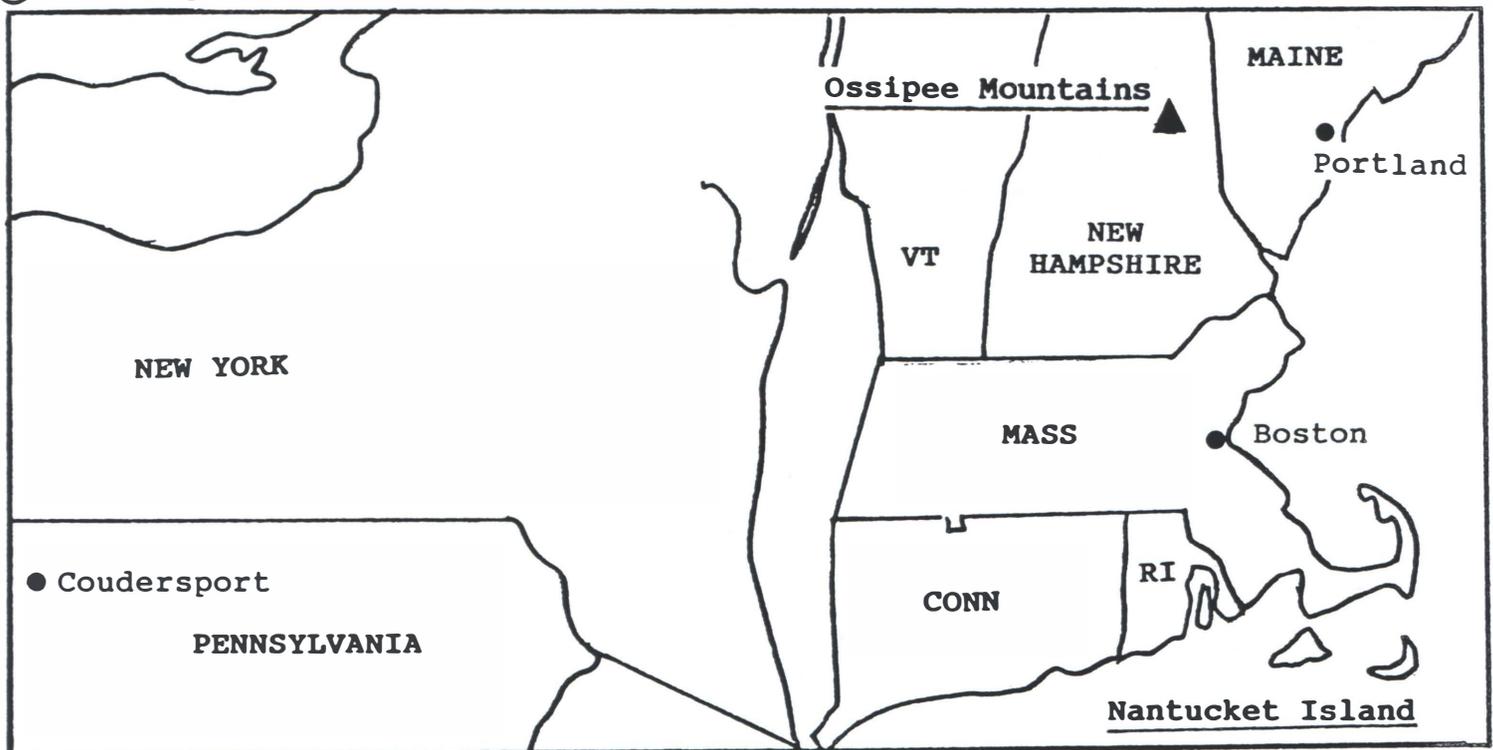
All too frequently people will argue along the lines that a giant such as Maushope appears as equally objectionable as the giant bird mentioned here. How can we give importance to one when the other is not known to exist? This argument is a case of changing the subject. I have found "giants" such as this one not to be objectionable because their existence is vouched for with traditions, tracks, sightings, and fossil support for their evolution, much the same as for the existence of Thunderbirds. However, no one can take on all these subjects at once. Each topic deserves to be considered on its own merits. Lumping many things together without scrutiny has guaranteed our ignorance about them.

Among the many characters found in Indian lore are found their memories of unusual animals that still puzzle us today. Giant birds were known to them and this recognition passed from one generation to another by way of these stories. That is all the Indians wished to do about them. If we wish to know more then the task lies ahead for any who will take it up.

NOTES

1. Mark A. Hall, **Thunderbirds!** (Hall Publications, 1988), and Mark A. Hall, **Natural Mysteries**, 2d ed.(Hall Publications, 1991), 67-82.
2. **Who Was Who in America**, Historical Volume 1607-1896, rev. 1967 (Chicago: Marquis, 1967), 356.
3. Horace P. Beck, **The Folklore of Maine** (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1957), 27. Beck devotes a chapter to discussing Josselyn, pp.25-46.
4. Albert Bushnell Hart, "American Historical Liars," **Harper's Monthly Magazine** 131:730-31 (October 1915).
5. Ibid.
6. Alpheus Hyatt Verrill, **Along New England Shores** (New York: Putnam, 1936), p.138.

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BOOKS OF NOTE

Some books have so much appeal that you rarely see them in book stores new or used. Somehow publishers do not seem to recognize their appeal. One such book has recently been reprinted, but I suspect it will still remain scarce. I have seen only one copy myself. It is AMERICAN INDIAN MYTHS & MYSTERIES by Vincent Gaddis, originally published in 1977. Now it is back in hardcover from Indian Head Books, New York, 1992. Prices vary on these reprints. Look for it for about \$6.00.

Already on the shelves of remaindered books is THE GREAT CYPRESS SWAMPS by John V. Dennis, Louisiana State University Press, 1988. Originally \$29.95, look for it at half price. See pp. 17 and 108 for some cryptozoological material from the Cypress Swamps.

Also on its way out of print is Errol Fuller's EXTINCT BIRDS, New York, Facts on File, 1987. Around \$20.

Alex Shoumatoff went in search of the Amazon legend in South America, a story he tells in IN SOUTHERN LIGHT (London: Hutchinson, 1986). It also contains his travels in Zaire. Remaindered now at \$4.

THE ENIGMA OF LOCH NESS: MAKING SENSE OF A MYSTERY by Henry Bauer is presently available at a cut-rate price of a few dollars in a 1988 softbound edition from University of Illinois Press. Originally published in 1986.

Now remaindered is the hardcover edition of DIMENSIONS: A CASEBOOK OF ALIEN CONTACT by Jacques Vallee (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1988). Was \$17.95, now around \$4.

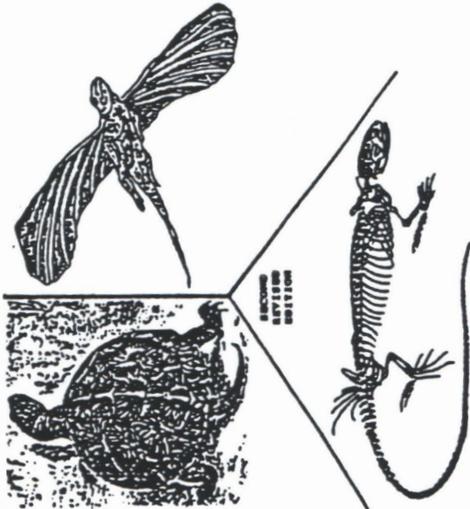
I recommend to all the state atlas & gazetteer series being published by DeLorme Mapping, P.O.Box 298, Freeport, Maine 04032. Phone (207) 865-4171. Their new atlases are outstanding. Using a computer data base, they are converting the USGS topographic maps of individual states into unequaled state atlases. Their earliest work, on the states in New England, is now the least well-done of the series. Other states have been done in colorful and truly useful map books. They are not the equal of the topo maps, but they are close to them in detail. Moreover they are handy and affordable. Currently prices range from \$12.95 to \$14.94 apiece. Completed are New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, Tennessee, Illinois, Washington, Oregon, Northern California, Southern and Central California in one book. Colorado is the latest. If you live in one of these states, ask in any large book store to see the book for your state.

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Annual migration routes of Thunderbirds through the central and eastern parts of the U.S.A. deduced from reports. ☆ = Nesting sites known to the American Indians.

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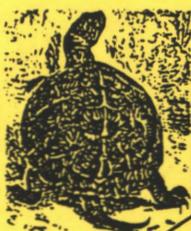
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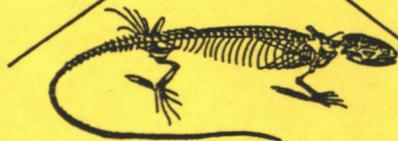
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