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## UFO UpDates Mailing List

### Re: Trent and Rouen Images

From: James Easton <[pulsar@compuserve.com](mailto:pulsar@compuserve.com)>  
Date: Fri, 12 Mar 1999 23:28:17 -0500  
Fwd Date: Sat, 13 Mar 1999 15:55:26 -0500  
Subject: Re: Trent and Rouen Images

Regarding..

>From: David Rudiak <[DRudiak@aol.com](mailto:DRudiak@aol.com)>  
>Date: Thu, 4 Mar 1999 23:57:13 EST  
>To: [updates@globalserve.net](mailto:updates@globalserve.net)  
>Subject: Re: Trent and Rouen Images

David Rudiak wrote:

>I just see a lot more handwaving and arguing around the point  
>here. Sorry to raise this painful topic, but I remember the same  
>sort of vague and slippery Eastonian arguments with regard to  
>his pelican explanation for the Kenneth Arnold sighting.

David,

Keeping this separate..

What may be a conceivable explanation for Kenneth Arnold's sighting, originated as a result of a query I had raised on a knowledgeable 'birdwatchers' discussion list.

Realising it seemed nobody had ever questioned ornithologists about Arnold's descriptions of the object's distinctive flight characteristics, possibly equated with documented observations of birds, I asked for opinions based on his comments.

These were some of the full responses, previously unpublished, which I subsequently mentioned extracts from:

Subject: Re: They Came From Outer Space - Or Did They?

James Easton writes, re UFO's:

>On 24 June, 1947, Kenneth Arnold, a successful salesman and  
>experienced search and rescue pilot, took off in his small plane from  
>Chehalis, Washington en route to Yakima. Close to Mineral, Washington  
>and about 25 miles from Mount Rainier, he noticed a formation of 9  
>unusual objects flying from north to south.

<snip>

>"They didn't fly like any aircraft I had ever seen before...The  
>elevation of the first craft was greater than that of the last. They  
>flew in a definite formation but erratically. ...Or maybe it would be  
best to describe their flight characteristics as very similar to a  
formation of geese,

<snip>

>At the time I did not get the impression that the flashes were emitted  
>by them, but rather that it was the sun's reflection from the extremely  
>highly polished surface of their wings".

<snip>

>Arnold dismissed geese as an explanation due to the reflective nature  
>of the objects and his estimate of their speed and distance.

Arthur C. Clarke recounts in one of his 1960's nonfiction books (Profiles of the Future'?) a similar sighting of 'skipping saucers' off the coast of Sri Lanka that (as he knew they would) turned out to be gulls with sunlight reflecting off the water onto their underwings where it was alternatively visible and invisible in a regular pulsating pattern.

This isn't an uncommon sight, either, though it usually requires a particular set of conditions. First, calm water; second, low sunrise or sunset angle to the light; third, a slightly distorting horizon heat- haze sometimes enhances the illusion but it's not mandatory; fourth, the birds, usually gulls, moving along the horizon need to be flying just off the water and to be sufficiently far off that the observer can't make out any features on them including shape. Seen it a ton of times. and I expect one could see it at virtually every seaside in the world where distant gulls fly over brightly-lit water.

So, on to Mr. Arnold's description that started this whole damn thing about UFOs (part of my misspent youth was spending a few thousand hours as an amateur astronomer and I never got to see even one UFO that really baffled me, he grumbled). Given the location, 25 mi off Mt Rainier's glacial sides, ice would be a great substitute reflector and would easily blast enough sunlight back up onto birds' underwings to make them reflect very brightly. Just look at the excruciating whiteness of the underwings of an adult white-headed gull such as a Herring or Glaucous-winged flying over snow on a sunny winter day.

Given the time of year, and that, if Arnold \*were\* looking at birds whether or not he knew it, what would they likely be? Canada Geese come to mind immediately, most other large waterfowl being in the North, and he mentions geese as a possibility. But what would Canada geese be doing high up over Mt Rainier in late June? Heading for a molting lake, probably. Could they reflect that much light? Certainly, particularly if over ice. How about gulls? Well, which gulls are likely then? It's a little ways inland, so Glaucous-winged Gull isn't likely, but California Gull would be.

The formation's possible: gulls may fly in ragged 'V's, but they don't necessarily maintain uniformity in the vertical as they might in the horizontal, and so gulls might fly in the formation Arnold describes.

There's another possible candidate species in the area at that time of year (sporadically) whose color, size, flight profile and proclivity for formation flight at sometimes quite high altitude would even more produce \*every\* detail of the phenomenon which Arnold observed: a flock of non- or failed-breeder southbound White Pelicans. They'd have been large enough to visible for a good distance, they fly in formation, and if the light were reflecting just right off a large nearby glaciated peak, their comparatively vast white underwing area would reflect a \*ton\* of light in exactly the pattern described by Arnold.

I'd submit that the hypothesis of a small southbound flock of failed- or non-breeder American White Pelicans observed by someone unfamiliar with underwing reflectivity would provide the same phenomena and be at least as good an alternative possibility than seeing artifacts from another planet.

Darn it.

>Appreciating this is perhaps something of an unusual query to the  
>list

And a pleasure to think about. Lots of fun. Thanks, James!

Michael Price  
Vancouver BC Canada  
[End]

Oh no! Another myth debunked. But, you've just gotta believe.

In a message dated 97-11-20 07: Michael Price writes:

<< There's another possible candidate species in the area at that time of year (sporadically) whose color, size, flight profile and proclivity for formation flight at sometimes quite high altitude would even more produce \*every\* detail of the phenomenon which Arnold observed: a flock of non- or failed-breeder southbound White Pelicans. >>

Yikes Michael! Are we of like minds or what?! When I first read the original post from James Easton, White Pelicans was the first thing that came to mind as I was reflecting back on an ultra-high flying southbound formation I saw a few years ago over the Barancas in western Durango, Mexico, east of Mazatlan. It was a fluke that I detected them at all by unaided eye. Even in the bins, I was perplexed about what they were for awhile, at first not even sure they were birds. Strange lighting and angle it was.

I spend more time than just about anyone out exposed and looking at the sky. Much to my dismay, I've yet to see anything that couldn't be explained. I'm taking it personal by now, and am convinced that I've been singled out and left out. :-/

Richard Rowlett Seattle/Bellevue, WA USA [End]

Michael, my first thought when I started reading your analysis was white pelican. Several years ago, when training a good birder in the finer details of splitting migrating hawks into species, age, etc at long distances at the beginning of the fall migration season (i.e. training him to run our count), we saw distant white "blurps" fading in and out of visibility many miles north. This was at the Goshutes, i.e. on the Utah/Nevada border. It was near sunset. It was obvious that the sun was reflecting on their underwings. They'd disappear momentarily and then reappear in sequence. They were flying east-to-west and we first spotted them somewhat to the northeast. I pegged them as white pelicans almost immediately, as the whole cadence of the thing matched the way white pelicans will soar in line (in this case - they'll also "V" up), and rather than flap all at once, often will each begin to flap as each reaches the position where the previous bird began to flap. Same with turning, etc. Of course, they'll also do this in more of a synchronized formation, too, but I'm sure you've all seen white pelicans flap and glide in the kind of pattern I'm describing.

I couldn't think of any bird that would show such a cadence and literally twinkle white while switching from soaring to flapping.

As they continued heading west, of course the northerly component of their distance from us diminished (i.e. they got closer :) and the squat battleship like profile of the pelicans were noticeable.

It was very cool, actually. Among other things, the trainee started believing me when I told him a distant accipiter was a sharpie, not a Coop (or vice-versa).

>I'd submit that the hypothesis of a small southbound flock of failed-  
>or non-breeder American White Pelicans observed by someone unfamiliar  
>with underwing reflectivity would provide the same phenomena and be at  
>least as good an alternative possibility than seeing artefacts from  
>another planet.

Having spent a lot of time watching pelicans, I'm convinced they \*are\* artefacts from another planet :)

Don Baccus, Portland OR [End]

As another contributor commented, "We'll never know, but it's fun to speculate".

Well, that depends.

In truth, on this mailing list it actually isn't fun at all to speculate about anything which even remotely challenges fundamentalist beliefs.

Paraphrasing Billy Connolly, "It's about as welcome as a fart in a spacesuit".

It was, of course, Martin Kottmeyer who first suggested that Kenneth Arnold may have been deceived by, if not geese - "I, at first, thought they were geese because it flew like geese" - then perhaps swans.

Martin has reportedly commented:

"James Easton's thought that pelicans might be a better guess than swans sounds plausible to me at first blush and no objections come to mind. I guessed swans primarily on the points that I knew they flew high enough and were larger, whiter, faster, and rarer than geese. If pelicans match the flight characteristics better as claimed - cool, I like it.

Give Easton my appreciation for offering the alternative".

Arnold, of course, described the objects flight characteristics, not their shape, as being reminiscent of a saucer skipping across water, hence 'flying saucers'.

That so many people then claimed to have seen 'flying saucer' shaped objects, is, or should be, somewhat disconcerting.

One also notes Arnold's apparent later sighting of some twenty-five brass-coloured objects when he stated "I was a little bit shocked and excited when I realized they had the same flight characteristics of the large objects I had observed on June 24.. I know they were not ducks because ducks don't fly that fast."

There were further unpublished opinions I obtained from some of the world's experts on these birds and they agreed that Arnold's flight descriptions were remarkably consistent with the bird's distinctive 'jizz', or signature.

I don't know, they're the experts and I hadn't actually made that much of it at the time, keeping discussions to this list.

Anyhow, whatever the explanation, I'm grateful you have reminded me of the knowledgeable ornithologists' observations and what an interesting news story it is.

I'll now release details to the media and they may find it a newsworthy item.

Regrettably, except for a couple of other contributions, I'm unsubscribing from this mailing list and any further wisdom from Mr Rude-iak will, regrettably, be oblivious.

Spared of perceived 'slippery Eastonian arguments' you can now concentrate endeavours on all the other snake-oil and 'clean up' ufology.

James.  
E-mail: [pulsar@compuserve.com](mailto:pulsar@compuserve.com)

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