

Chapter 9

Unknown Animals & Cryptozoology

Monsters and Mankind

- Humans have told stories about monsters for tens of thousands of years
- Many tell stories today about them under a different name - **cryptids**



Cryptozoology

- The study of “hidden animals” is a field most scientists label as pseudoscience
- Focuses on animals whose current existence is not supported by mainstream science
- Relatively recent field, as megafauna discoveries were common prior to early 1900s

Megafauna in the Past 100 Years



So Why Not Cryptids?

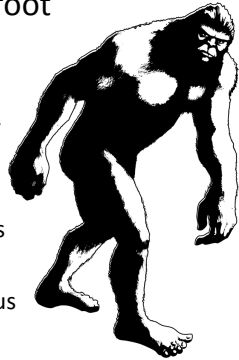
- Cryptozoologists argue that there could very well be other species yet to be discovered, including very big ones like
 - Sasquatch or Bigfoot
 - Loch Ness Monster
 - Mokele-Mbembe
 - Chupacabra

Man-Apes of North America

- Tales of “wild men” date back thousands of years and are seen all across the globe
- In N.A., they tend to be called Bigfoot or Sasquatch and there have been reported sightings in 49 states and 8 Canadian provinces

The Bigfoot

- Typically described as a large, hulking creature covered in dark brown or red-brown hair
- 6-10 feet tall, 500 pounds
- Nocturnal and omnivorous



Major Bigfoot Encounters

- Newspaper articles in 1920s told stories of a race of "hairy giants" living in British Columbia
- Little else until 1957, when a small town in BC decided to have a "Sasquatch Hunt" to drum up tourism
- Publicity stunt was widely publicized and published about all over the globe

Major Bigfoot Encounters

- Shortly after, William Roe came to a newspaper and told about an encounter he had in 1955
- Reported coming upon it in the woods, watching it for a short time, and then it moved away
- Described it as large, hairy biped with long arms, covered in dark brown hair

Sightings Spread

- Soon, reports of a similar creature were being made in Washington state and then California
- In 1958, giant footprints were found at a work site near Bluff Creek, CA
- "Bigfoot" was dubbed by the local newspaper

Sightings Spread

- Ray Wallace and his employees then reported finding more footprints and even seeing a 10 foot tall creature like the one Roe reported
- Huge amount of coverage, and subsequently sightings were made coast to coast in the U.S.
- But the biggest boost to all happened in 1967

The Patterson-Gimlin Film

- Two Bigfoot hunters, Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin, were shooting a documentary about Bigfoot in the Bluff Creek area
- The [16mm film they shot](#) shows a large biped in dark fur walking slowly away from the camera, turning back once to look at them

The Patterson-Gimlin Film

- The whole encounter was eerily similar to what Roe and Wallace had described
- They even took plaster casts of the footprints, showing very large feet
- This was a huge boost to Bigfoot enthusiasm

BF since the P-G

- Huge numbers of plaster casts, footprints, photos, and videos have surfaced
- The Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization lists 5,000 reported sightings in past 60 years
- Movies, television series, documentaries, journal articles, books, and more!



Critical Thinking about Bigfoot

- Several pieces of the Bigfoot story and the typical evidence need CT skills applied to them
- First is the evolution of the stories about the man-apes in North America
 - Went from indigenous legends that are obviously supernatural in nature to long-haired giants to the “Bigfoot” of Roe, Wallace, and the P-G film

Critical Thinking about Bigfoot

- Second is the history of hoaxers in sightings
 - Wallace, a known prankster, later reported capturing a Bigfoot that ate only Frosted Flakes cereal!
 - After his death in 2002, his family revealed a pair of giant carved wooden feet, which they said he had used to make various BF prints over the years
 - Dozens of other cases of hoaxes and recanted claims over the past 20 years

Critical Thinking about Bigfoot

- The biggest problem, though, is the lack of *good, replicable* evidence for Bigfoot
- Relies on eyewitness stories, but famous sightings often turn out to be bears, whose habitat eerily overlaps with Bigfoot's
- Think back to all the problems with memory we learned about in Chapter 7

Critical Thinking about Bigfoot

- Videos and photos tend to suffer from being "blobsquach" – blurry and non-interpretable
- Even the P-T film is so inconclusive that there is little skeptics *or* believers agree on, even with members of the same camp!
- Physical evidence also tends to be problematic

Critical Thinking about Bigfoot

- DNA sequencing of hairs results in them being from known animals (or humans!)
- The “research” showing supposedly novel kinds of hominid DNA is deeply flawed and an example of how *not* to do science

Bigfoot Conclusions

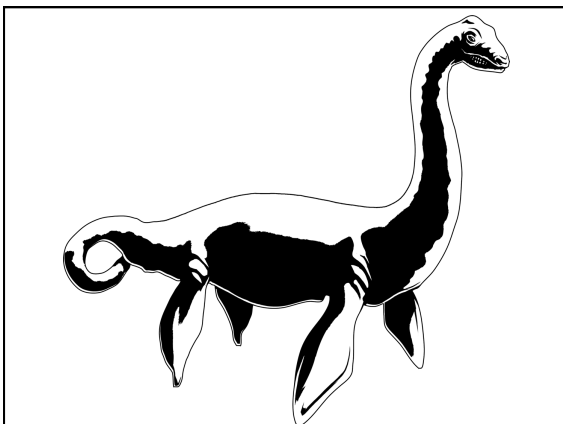
- The best “evidence” is the result of hoaxes
- Eyewitness reports are not reliable
- Physical evidence does not support a new species
- Bigfoot isn’t just dead, he was never alive in the first place

Living “Dinosaurs”

- Around 66 million years ago, 75% of the life on earth was wiped out in an extinction event
- This included non-avian dinosaurs and water-dwelling plesiosaurs
- Some people contend, though, that there are still examples of these creatures alive today!

Loch Ness Monster

- The second most widely known cryptid
- Reportedly lives in Loch Ness, a huge freshwater lake in the Scottish highlands
- Modern accounts date back to the 1930s and describe a plesiosaur-like creature of 25-30 feet long with a 10-12 foot long neck



Famous Nessie Sightings

- First major reported encounter occurred in 1933
- A couple was driving their car near the lake when something crossed the road 20 feet in front of their car
- Led to a number of creature sightings and even photographs and video over the next decade

Famous Nessie Sightings

- Most famous picture was taken in 1934, often called the "Surgeon's photograph"
- Dozens of other photos, hundreds of sightings, and even video have been taken



Nessie Now

- The "monster" of Loch Ness is big business, bringing in millions of dollars of tourist revenue for the region each year



Mokele-Mbembe

- Deep in the heart of Africa we find another story of a creature out of time
- Reportedly some type of sauropod that survived the mass extinction



Mokele-Mbembe Stories

- In the early 20th century, European explorers began sending tales back home of a huge and ferocious beast living in the lakes and rivers
- Tales were initially spread across the continent, from Niger to South Africa
- Initial stories varied wildly in their descriptions

Hunting the Beast

- Since the 1960s, there have been dozens of expeditions mounted to find "the last dinosaur"
- Ranged from professional ones led by biologists to religiously-motivated ones to documentaries
- The subject of at least two movies

Critical Thinking about “Living Dinos”

- The “evidence” is very similar to that presented for Bigfoot
 - Eyewitness accounts
 - Poor quality photos and videos
 - Lack of physical evidence
- Another similarity is the presence of hoaxers in the history of both

Critical Thinking about “Living Dinos”

- The “Surgeon’s photograph” was exposed as a purposeful fake in 1975 from a movie maker and big game hunter
 - Came to light after Wetherall’s death, much like with Wallace’s faked footprints
- Many other photos have been discovered to be hoaxes, fakes, or just not Nessie

Nessie & the Movies

- Genesis of the early eyewitness accounts can be traced to a very popular film released right before the first major sighting...



Nessie & the Movies

- The description from the first sighting mimics *almost exactly* a [scene](#) from the film of a brontosaurus attack:

"I saw the nearest approach to a dragon or prehistoric animal that I have ever seen in my life. It crossed the road about fifty yards ahead and appeared to be carrying a small lamb or animal of some kind. It seemed to have a long neck which moved up and down...and the body was fairly big, with a high back."

The actual animation model used in 1933's *King Kong*



Other Nessie Problems

- If Nessie is an extant prehistoric creature, there would have to have been a breeding population for the past 66 million years
- The "sightings" also rule out a plesiosaur, which would not be able to physically act like Nessie



Other Nessie Problems

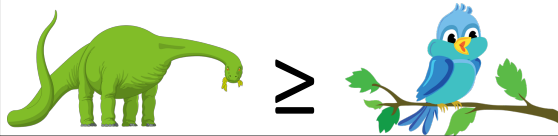
- Loch Ness is not large enough to support one plesiosaur-sized beast, let alone a population
- It's also only about 10,000 years old, which means the creatures would have migrated in there fairly recently

Mokele-Mbembe Problems

- Sauropods (like MM supposedly is) did not even live in swamps, although we thought they did when the stories first started
- No evidence of a breeding population
- The indigenous people of the area have denied such a thing exists for almost 100 years

“Living Dinos” Conclusion

- Stories seem fed by media and public fascination with dinosaurs, rather than evidence
- There are billions of dinosaurs still alive today, but most people aren’t as excited by birds

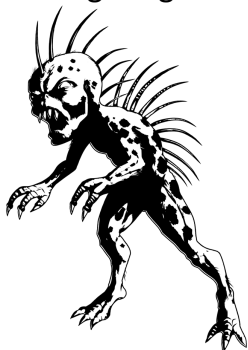


Alien Goat Killers!

- The chupacabra (Spanish for “goat sucker”) is a relatively new cryptid
- Stories in mid-1990s tell of farm animals being killed and drained of blood via small neck holes
- Soon, hundreds of animal deaths across Central and South were blamed on this

Initial Chupacabra Sighting

- A Puerto Rican woman, Madelyne Tolentino, gave the first detailed report
- Two legs, long-limbed, spines, dark eyes, very alien-looking



The Early Chupacabra

- Other early witnesses described a 3-4 foot tall, hopping beast (some said it flew as well)
- Tales of the creature spread to as far away as Russia, all with similar description
- Where could such a bizarre creature have come from?

Chupy & the Movies

- Tolentino's description was repeated and reprinted countless times
- It appears to have been heavily influenced by a movie she admits she had seen not long before her "sighting"
- It was *Species*, which starred an alien and took place partly in Puerto Rico

"It would be a very good idea if you saw it [*Species*]....

[The monster] made my hair stand on end. It was a creature that looked like the chupacabra, with spines on its back and all...

The resemblance to the chupacabra was really impressive."



Chupy & the Movies

- But it wasn't Sil that looked like the chupacabra...because she only "saw" it *after* she saw the film
- Much like with Nessie, her previous media experiences massively influenced what she thought she saw and reported
- This then influenced further "sightings"

A Shifting Look

- In the 2000s, reports of the chupacabra began surfacing in Texas and across the southwest US
- The creatures were reported as looking very different than before



A Body at Last!

- A number of these "chupacabra" were killed, but all turned out to be known animals with severe cases of sarcoptic mange
- This combined with typical coyote and wild dog predatory behavior and media coverage of the "goat killer" led to anything "unknown" being called a chupacabra

Chupacabra Conclusions

- Uncritical, sensationalized reporting led to the stories being spread despite a lack of evidence
- This primes people to see a particular type of “creature” – often at night
- No evidence for chupacabra being anything other than a story

Cryptozoology

- None of these cryptids have anything close to solid evidence for their being real
- Many “cryptozoologists” spend huge amounts of time and money in searching for them, and insist they are doing so scientifically
- So, is cryptozoology a science or pseudoscience?

Cryptozoology vs. Biology

- Reliance on anecdotes (eyewitness testimony) and lack of repeatable, verifiable evidence
- Rejection of criticism from experts in the field
- Lack of respect for methods used by actual biologists to discover and catalog new species

Conclusions

- Cryptozoology has all the hallmarks of a pseudoscience, especially when contrasted with biology
- The cryptids seem to be the product of wishful thinking, over reliance on our fallible memories, and the uncritical media

Media Critique #4