

This work explores the legends of “the Mothman.” The story of Mothman captured my imagination at an early age and has continued to fascinate me to this day. In West Virginia folklore, the Mothman is a 7-foot large winged creature, with bright red eyes. It was allegedly first seen in the small town of Point Pleasant on November 12, 1966 and quickly became known to the entire town. Sightings continued through the year until abruptly coming to a halt on December 15, 1967. On that night, a massive bridge collapsed, killing dozens of people; this tragedy gave rise to the Mothman legend.

The Mothman painting underscores the fairytale quality of the myths that surround it. The illustrative style showcases this entity as a subjective reality. We tend to view legends or myths as mere stories; I wanted to create an illustrative representation of Mothman to resemble something one might see in a book. This visual representation matches the manner in which Mothman is received by the public—a fantasy.

The Mothman sightings touch upon our version of reality and what we allow ourselves to accept as “real.” Who is the arbitrator of reality? Is it our culture, our religious structures, or our social constraints? What do you believe? What do we know about the reality we find ourselves in?

Maya B

This paper explores folklore, urban legends, and the impact they can have on people. It examines the belief systems that people hold that often prevent them from opening up to possibilities outside the realm of what they are familiar with. And it explores technological and scientific advances and the collective toll they have taken on our imagination and our capacity for believing in the unknown.

I have been deeply interested by myths, folklore, and urban legends for a long time. I first stumbled across these topics in a somewhat prohibited book on a shelf in my home entitled *The Unexplained*.¹ I was riveted by this book and all of its tales of mysteries and legends from around the world. I instantly became engrossed in these fascinating stories of paranormal phenomena. I grew up in the woods where it was very easy to let my mind go off wandering and come up with the worst possible things that might be hiding in the depths of the forest. I imagined ghosts and demons were in and around my house and that they were just waiting for me to leave my bed so that they could get to me.

These monsters that I conjured up in my mind are now faded but I still remember the fear I felt all those late nights years ago. Although I found these stories very intriguing, I was also terrified by them and I loved and hated them in equal parts. I would stay up late into the night reading stories of these disturbing encounters and strange occurrences, then go to bed wishing I hadn't once the lights were out and I was left alone with my thoughts. I was very young and the thought of any unknown entity, even if it was supposedly benevolent, was a little exciting but for the most part very unsettling.

As I got older a lot of that visceral fear ebbed away and was replaced with an even more intense passion and curiosity for these inexplicable creatures and occurrences. I began looking at stories of strange encounters with these supernatural creatures through a more skeptical lens.

I looked into the accounts, eye-witness stories, and blurry photographs throughout history and from all over the globe. From classic urban legends like La Llorona² to sinister creatures such as the Jersey Devil³ and the Chupacabra⁴. I looked around at different people's opinions, theories, and viewpoints and tried to decide for myself how genuine they were.

In the end, my opinion on their validity doesn't matter all that much, but only adds to the endless voices proclaiming truths or falsehoods when it comes to the unknown and unknowable. I asked myself questions like, "How is it possible for a creature to exist but leave behind no physical evidence? Has science really discovered every known species or are unusual, strange species still a possibility? How are our belief systems formed?" These questions led me to look more closely at the field that is known as cryptozoology.

Cryptozoology is a pseudoscience that works to prove the existence of entities from folklore and legends. It is considered an illegitimate field of study by most scientists and academics. A pseudoscience generally doesn't progress due to the lack of physical evidence. While there are hundreds of eyewitness accounts for a lot of these cryptids⁵, verifiable physical evidence has yet to be collected, casting serious doubts on their legitimacy.

Written off as the ramblings of a crazy person or someone who just misinterpreted what they saw, the witness accounts are generally disregarded by scientists and do little to forward the

¹ *The Unexplained: An Illustrated Guide to the World's Natural and Paranormal Mysteries*, Karl P.N. Shuker, October 1996

² La Llorona, or "The Weeping Woman," is a legendary ghost from Spanish folklore. According to the legend, La Llorona is the ghost of a woman who drowned her own children in a river, and is now damned to forever search for them while causing great misfortune to fall upon any who see or hear her.

³ The Jersey Devil is a creature from New Jersey folklore that is said to inhabit the Pine Barrens area. There are many variations of it but it is most commonly described as a flying biped with hooves, the head of a goat, and bat-like wings.

⁴ The Chupacabra (whose name translates to "goat sucker") is a creature from the folklore of parts of America, with its first sightings reported in Puerto Rico. Its name comes from its reported habit of killing and drinking the blood of livestock, primarily goats. Descriptions of what it looks like tend to vary but it supposedly the size of a small bear, with a row of spines reaching from the neck to the base of its tail.

⁵ A cryptid is a creature that cannot be entirely proved or disproved by science.

field of research, leaving investigators with more questions than answers. From an article from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Knowledge, a professor writes "Scientific objectivity is a characteristic of scientific claims, methods and results. It expresses the idea that the claims, methods and results of science are not, or should not be influenced by particular perspectives, value commitments, community bias or personal interests, to name a few relevant factors."

Within the field of cryptozoology there are three different categories that sightings fall into. There are: 1. species previously thought to be extinct but are still in existence; 2. species thought to exist but yet to be discovered; and 3. things people have allegedly seen, heard, and interacted with that defy any known category. The final category contains stories that really grab my interest. One story in particular has become my primary focus in the field of cryptozoology - the story of "Mothman." I find the legend of Mothman highly compelling. It first drew me in when I was younger and too afraid to even look at the illustrations, but also too curious to push it aside - leading me to research further as I grew older.

In West Virginia folklore, the Mothman - sometimes considered to be a multi dimensional entity and possibly a harbinger of doom - was seen primarily in the small town of Point Pleasant. The events connected to the Mothman were very odd and began on November 12, 1966 near Clendenin, West Virginia. Five men were in a cemetery that day, preparing a grave for a burial, when something lifted off from some nearby trees. It was described as a winged, man-sized creature with large bright red eyes and massive wings. A few days later, many more sightings would take place, electrifying the entire region.

EDITORIAL VIEW
Paperwork jungle still strangles government offices according to James Kilpatrick.

The Athens Messenger

THE WEATHER
Cloudy and colder tonight. Low in mid 30s. Saturday partly cloudy and colder. High in the upper 40s.

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ATHENS, OHIO, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1966

Ohio River Valley

TEN CENTS



Monster No Joke For Those Who Saw It

By ROGER BENNETT
Assistant News Editor

"They think it's a big joke. They think we can go out there and it'll come out for us."

"It" is the red-eyed, winged-back, six-foot manlike thing which has turned a remote section of Mason County, W. Va., into a dusty, car-packed thrill show.

"They" are the hundreds of curious sightseers, who have jammed a 10,000-acre east of Point Pleasant each night since the creature was sighted by two young married couples last Tuesday.

The sightseers know there isn't such a thing, but they aren't about to miss a chance to see it.

The people who've seen it so far—especially Mr. and Mrs. Roger Scarberry and Mr. and Mrs. Steve Mallett, are afraid they'll see it again. But they keep looking.

"I hope others do see it. I hope it scares them as much as it did us. Maybe then they'll believe the thing exists and we're not dreaming," Mrs. Mallett said.

The two couples first spotted the creature Tuesday in the sprawling, marshy area which contains the McClintic Wildlife Sanctuary and a huge abandoned TNT plant. Most of the property is government owned.

Thursday night the area was ablaze from the lights of cars and flashlights as the curious traveled up and down the maze of dirt roads. Police officials estimate more than 1,000 persons were searching the area prior to midnight.

Every intersection was jammed with parked cars and small clumps of laughing, jostling young adults. Huge abandoned powder plant buildings rang with the shrieks of youngsters, scaring themselves more in the pitch-black plants than the people standing in the narrow roadways.

Volunteer police officers and firemen—creeping through the crowds—have one major fear. They estimated that each car in the area had at least one gun. One officer heard an automatic rifle bark several times Thursday night behind one of the many buildings.

Early sightings—besides that of the two couples—have several things in common. The description includes two red eyes about six inches apart, wings with 18-foot span and always manlike, with stocky legs. These sightings came from Cheshire, Rolland, several persons at an isolated home near the TNT plant and one in Doddridge County, W. Va., east of Parkersburg.

The Scarberrys and the Malletts said they believe the thing "didn't mean to harm us," even though Mrs. Scarberry had to be treated for shock, only to chase them away. At one time the creature came within 100 feet of their car.

In all they spotted it five times the first night. They've seen it twice since. The first night it chased their car at speeds up to 100, gliding above and behind the vehicle. It emitted a sound similar to a "record played at a high speed or squeak of a mouse."

What is it? They don't know but they're sure it's not a pigeon.

One thing that Mallett is the pigeon disappeared from the ed power plant but where the creature spotted.

Pigeons can be seen in other buildings throughout the area. The huge double power plant.

FRIGHTENED OBSERVERS—Four young Point Pleasant residents return to the spot where an unusual creature was spotted earlier this week. The married couples, Mr. and Mrs. Steve Mallett, left, and Mr. and Mrs. Roger Scarberry contend they found a "hoof-like" print in soft sand the next day. Staff Photo by George Lovell.

The next sighting would come one night on November 15. A young couple, Roger and Linda Scarberry, had a harrowing encounter as they drove past the abandoned TNT plant in Point Pleasant. They saw two red eyes that were connected to something that was "shaped like a man,

but bigger, maybe six or seven feet tall and it had big wings folded against its back⁶." Allegedly, the creature moved towards the couple and they panicked and sped away. Just moments later, they saw the same creature, trailing beside their car, which by now was traveling at over 100 miles per hour. They told local Deputy Sheriff Millard Halstead that it followed them down Highway 62 and right to the Point Pleasant city limits.

Another sighting had even more bizarre results. On that same evening at around 10:00 pm, Newell Partridge, a local building contractor who lived in Salem (about 90 miles from Point Pleasant), was watching television when the screen suddenly went dark. He stated that a weird pattern filled the screen and then he heard a loud, whining sounds from outside that raised in pitch and then ceased. Partridge's dog, Bandit, began to howl out on the front porch and Newell went out to see what was going on. When he walked outside, he saw Bandit facing the hay barn, about 150 yards from the house. Partridge turned a flashlight in that direction and spotted two red circles that looked like eyes or "bicycle reflectors." The moving red orbs were certainly not animal's eyes, he believed, and the sight of them frightened him. Bandit, an experienced hunting dog, shot off across the yard in pursuit of the creature. Partridge turned and went back into the house for his gun, but then was too frightened to go back outside again. He slept that night with his gun propped up next to the bed. The next morning, he realized that Bandit had never come home.

The dog had still not shown up two days later when Partridge read in the newspaper about the sightings in Point Pleasant that night.

Later when Partridge was reading the newspaper he came upon a very chilling story. Roger Scarberry, one member of the group who spotted the strange "bird" at the TNT plant, said that as they entered the city limits of Point Pleasant, they saw the body of a large dog lying on the side of the road. On their way back out of town they noticed that the dog was gone. Having just drove past the body, they got out of the car to look for it, but found nothing. Newell Partridge immediately thought of Bandit, who was never seen again.

On November 16, a press conference was held in the county courthouse and the couples from the TNT plant sighting recounted their story. Deputy Halstead, who had known the couples for a very long time, took them very seriously. Many of the reporters who were present for the weird recounting felt the same way. The news of the strange sightings spread around the world. The press dubbed the odd flying creature "Mothman", after a character from the popular Batman television series of the day.

The remote and abandoned TNT plant became the lair of the Mothman in the months ahead and it could not have picked a better place to hide in. The area was made up of several hundred acres of woods and large concrete domes where high explosives were stored during World War II. Much of the property was almost inaccessible and something could easily have hid in it for weeks or months and remained completely unseen.

Many came to believe that the sightings of Mothman, as well as UFO sightings and encounters with "men in black"⁷ in the area, were all related. For nearly a year, strange happenings continued in the area. Researchers, investigators and "monster hunters" descended on the area but none so famous as author John Keel, who has written extensively about Mothman and other unexplained anomalies.

⁶ Linda Scarberry, eyewitness, taken from the book *Mothman and Other Curious Encounters* by Loren Coleman

⁷ The "Men in Black" were mysterious individuals that frequented the town of Point Pleasant, WV. They are known for attempting to threaten witnesses of strange occurrences into silence. They were especially prolific at the time of the Mothman sightings.

Keel has written for many years about UFO's, but dismisses the standard "extraterrestrial" theories of the mainstream UFO movement. Keel states, "The UFO's do not seem to exist as tangible, manufactured objects...they seem to be nothing more than transmogrifications tailoring themselves to our ability to understand." For this reason, he has been a controversial figure for decades. According to Keel, mankind has had a long history of interaction with the supernatural. He believes that the intervention of mysterious strangers in the lives of historic personages like Thomas Jefferson and Malcolm X provides evidence of the continuing presence of the "gods of old." The manifestation of these elder gods comes in the form of UFO's, aliens, monsters, demons, angels and even ghosts. Again Keel states, "The thousands of contacts with these entities indicates that they are liars and put-on artists, the UFO manifestations seem to be, by and large, merely minor variations of the age-old demonological variation." He is seen as a colorful colorful character to many, yet remains respected in the field for his research and interesting and comprehensive writings.

Keel became the main reporter of the Mothman case and wrote that at least 100 people personally witnessed the creature between November 1966 and November 1967. According to their reports, the creature stood between five and seven feet tall, was wider than a man and shuffled on human-like legs. Its eyes were set near the top of the shoulders and had bat-like wings that glided, rather than flapped, when it flew.



John Keel arrived in Point Pleasant in December 1966 and immediately began collecting reports of Mothman sightings and even UFO reports from before the creature was even seen. He also compiled evidence that suggested a problem with televisions and phones that began in the fall of 1966. Lights had been seen in the skies, particularly around the TNT plant, and cars that passed along the nearby road sometimes stalled without explanation. He and his fellow researchers also uncovered a number of short-lived poltergeist cases in the Ohio Valley area. Locked doors

opened and closed by themselves, strange thumps were heard inside and outside of homes, and often, inexplicable voices were heard.

Keel was convinced that this intense period of activity was all connected. In the face of multiple manifestations of unexplained events, phone calls, sightings, etc.

By the end of 1967, most of the sightings had come to an end and Mothman had faded from people's minds... but the story of Point Pleasant had not yet ended. One night on December 15, 1967, around 5:00 pm, the 700-foot bridge linking Point Pleasant to Ohio collapsed while filled with rush hour traffic. Dozens of vehicles plunged into the dark waters of the Ohio River and 46 people were killed. Investigators blamed the poor design of the bridge for its collapse. At the time of it coming down there were more cars on the bridge than it was really intended to hold for an extended period of time and it was all chalked up to the failure of one link. The Mothman sightings came to sudden halt after the collapse of the Silver Bridge, which leads to the theory that Mothman and the bridge tragedy were directly connected to each other. After the bridge went down some people came forward and claimed to have spotted the Mothman near the bridge just before it fell into the river.

What would it mean if Mothman and the Silver Bridge collapse were connected? If the creature came as a way to warn the residents of Point Pleasant of the disaster, it picked an odd way to do so. Or maybe the coming tragedy lured the creature to the town. Maybe it brought the destruction with it.

There has been a lot of controversy over the validity of the alleged Mothman sightings. A number of hypotheses have been presented to explain eyewitness accounts and attempt to explain what it was that people saw. It has been referred to everything from a large, rare type of crane to an example of mass hallucination potentially caused by chemical spills. Eyewitnesses came from all walks of life within the small community and the community itself staunchly stood by the eyewitnesses as upstanding and credible members of their close-knit town. With so many people reporting first hand eyewitness accounts, serious questions were raised about the validity of those sightings.

At first glance the average person will accept what they have seen with their own eyes without hesitation." Visual perception is an important brain activity that most of us don't even realize we perform. We trust our eyes to capture images of the world we live in, and we rely on these images to be the correct representation of our environment. "Seeing" appears to be instant and effortless. Our brains, however, are constantly processing those images, recognizing and charting them against previously acquired knowledge. The brain unconsciously analyses each image's position, movement, size, color and shape, and finally reconstructs those pieces into our own view of the world. Basically, what we see is what our brains make of the visual images our eyes capture. This is visual perception, and it is a unique experience to each of us"⁸.

Individuals who suffer from dementia and Alzheimer's routinely "see" people, places, and items that are not there. Additionally, sufferers of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, Parkinson's disease and other nervous disorders also report audio and visual hallucinations. This is an example of brain function altering our perceived reality and making "what we see with our own eyes" potentially suspect⁹. Of course, back in Point Pleasant the likelihood of dozens of eyewitnesses all suffering from brain disorders and manifesting the same vision is very unlikely. What else could be the underlying cause?

⁸ Alzheimer's Association California Central Coast Chapter,

⁹ Luciana Cramer, Care Specialist, Alzheimer's Association

Some people may have faked their accounts in order to gain attention, sympathy, or even to offer support and credibility to early eyewitnesses - many of whom would have been neighbors and friends. Another explanation would be mass hysteria. Mass hysteria is a phenomenon that transmits collective illusions of threats, whether real or imaginary, through a population in society as a result of rumors and fear¹⁰.

One of the most notorious cases of mass hysteria occurred in Salem Massachusetts from 1692 to 1693. Three adolescent girls began to suffer from epileptic like fits apparently without any known cause. The local minister became involved and declared the fits to be "unnatural" and the product of evil influences.

The girls began to accuse local townspeople of luring them into Satanic rites and ultimately the events resulted in the Salem witch trials, a series of hearings leading to the executions of 25 citizens of Salem Village, Massachusetts and other nearby towns after being accused of witchcraft¹¹. The Mothman sightings fit the profile for mass hysteria. As more and more townspeople reported these sightings - many of which were terrifying in nature - the entire region became gripped with fear. The likelihood of people's imaginations running wild coupled with stress, anxiety, fear, and a willingness to believe one's neighbors accounts, could potentially be an underlying source for the sheer amount of sightings. Even the strange burned skin and red eyes reported by some eyewitnesses could be a by-product of epidemic hysteria. Epidemic hysteria is a common type of mass hysteria that occurs when a group of people believe they are suffering from a similar disease or ailment. Did the people of Point Pleasant suffer from mass hallucination or did they encounter something real and potent albeit outside the realm of known science? Where is the breaking point between belief in what you have witnessed firsthand and the logical and scientific explanations that force you to reconsider your direct experience?

Faith is the antithesis to science yet many things we accept to be real largely depend on a faith in science. Science tells us to believe in atoms, black holes, quantum mechanics, supernovas and other phenomenon that cannot be seen with the human eye. Many of sciences discoveries rely exclusively on mathematic equations (such as Einstein's famous $E=mc^2$) to prove the existence of these wonders, but the vast majority of people will never comprehend in the slightest how these formulas and equations prove or disprove anything. At some point, it is our *faith* in science and our *belief* in the scientists and their ability to use the scientific method that allows us to accept a black hole and other discoveries as real. How can faith in cryptozoology be placed in the realm of the insane or naive, but faith in science and its unseen discoveries and applications be sensible and logical?

Our belief systems are formed by the culture we are reared in. Frequently we are unaware of how complete these systems of thought are until they are challenged. This driving force for creating and sustaining belief systems is largely invisible and not obvious to the individual. We are not born with our belief system intact - we are enculturated into them as they are passed down from generation to generation. As a child we are taught by our closet caregivers what constitutes "acceptable norms" for our belief systems. A belief in God and angels is greatly supported by millions of individuals even in the face of no tangible evidence. "People have a bias for believing in the supernatural", says Justin Barrett, PhD. In his work, he finds that children as young as age three naturally attribute supernatural abilities and immortality to "God," even if they've never been taught about God, and they tell elaborate stories about their lives before they were born, what Barrett calls "pre-life."

¹⁰ Mass, Weir E. "Mass Sociogenic- illness." CMAJ 172 (2005)

¹¹ Wolf, M. (1976). *Witchcraft and Mass Hysteria in Terms of Current Psychological Theories*

“What we’re showing is that our basic cognitive equipment biases us toward certain kinds of thinking and leads to thinking about a pre-life, an afterlife, gods, invisible beings that are doing things — themes common to most of the world’s religions,” says Barrett.

However a belief in the supernatural outside the confines of religion is generally frowned upon and discouraged at an early age. Children fear of monsters and bogeymen are written off as childhood fantasies and are not taken seriously.

It is no surprise that when adults claim to have experienced something paranormal that does not fit into accepted belief systems that they are subjected to scorn, ridicule, and accusations.¹²

Science has shunned cryptozoology because it goes against what the human psyche accepts as real. Labeled a pseudoscience, cryptozoology has a reputation for being a grab bag of unreliable and unrealistic accounts of imaginary creatures. A lack of physical evidence, wildly varying accounts by unreliable eyewitnesses, lack of coherent explanations, and an overall sense of improbability have led to this categorization by the scientific community. To definitively prove the existence of cryptids, fossil and DNA evidence needs to be collected, verified, studied, and held up to peer review to be formally accepted by the scientific community. Even though there are numerous examples of hair that cannot be explained via DNA, as well as atypical footprints, unidentified scat, and other physical evidence that doesn’t fit within a known species, scientists still balk at a formal inquiry.

Our modern world and the accompanying belief systems does not allow for the legitimacy of supernatural or paranormal encounters (outside of organized religion - and even these encounters are increasingly viewed with skepticism). The belief systems that supported and sustained these previous realities like the Northern European tradition of the Fey (fairy) Folk, the Japanese belief in dragons and demons, and the Native American belief in Bigfoot, Thunderbirds, and shape-shifters have eroded in the face of population explosion, scientific advancement, the Industrial Age, and the rise of the Internet and virtual world. These ancient cultures with their strong beliefs in what we now consider to be merely myths seem quaint and naive by our modern standards. To wholeheartedly believe in these cryptids, legends, and myths today is to step outside your culturally enforced belief system, putting you at risk of being ostracized, ridiculed, or marginalized; and yet, hundreds of individuals from all walks of life continue to report strange encounters with cryptids and beasts of legend.

Witnessing something that goes against what is considered normal and doesn’t line up with what an individual grew up thinking and believing can be especially traumatic for many. The mind reels as it tries desperately to quantify and label what it is experiencing. Various theories have been put forward to explain the occurrence of hallucinations. When psychodynamic (Freudian) theories were popular in psychology, hallucinations were seen as a projection of unconscious wishes, thoughts, and wants. As biological theories have become more dominant, hallucinations are more often thought of (by psychologists at least) as being caused by problems or issues in the brain itself. “However the Freudian interpretation may have an aspect of truth, as the biological hypothesis explains the physical interactions in the brain, while the Freudian interpretation addresses the psychological complexes related to the content of the hallucination, such as hallucinating persecutory voices due to guilt. Psychological research has argued that hallucinations may result from biases in what are known as metacognitive abilities.”

¹² Justin Barrett, PhD, Director of the Cognition, religion and theology project in the Centre for Anthropology and Mind at Oxford University.

(Bentall, RP Jan 1990 - *Psycho Bull*; *The Illusion of Reality - A Review and Integration of Psychological Research on Hallucinations*)

Barring interaction with a psychologist and a mental health profile people will try to fit an experience that is unexplainable into various categories that will fit their belief systems. UFO encounters are frequently described as rogue weather balloons or swamp gas.

Cryptid sightings are tricks of the eye based on lighting, reflection, or personal issues like fatigue, mental health, or substance abuse. The brain itself is so complex that the possibility of misinterpreting data can be vast. There appear to be more reasons *not* to believe in a paranormal sighting than there are to believe in one. To accept a paranormal personal encounter, or alternately the eyewitness account of another's, could potentially require the rewriting of your belief system and the truths that shape your world.

Then of course there is the other side of the spectrum...the people who wholeheartedly believe in the existence of cryptids, whether from a long held personal belief system or an encounter that shifted their worldview. These individuals show resistance to being moved from their narrative and are frequently seen as crazy or confused. Hallucinations based on sleep deprivation, substance abuse, mental disorders, and brain dysfunction are generally thought to be the driving force behind these individuals' stubborn accounts. Public backlash and ridicule faced by first person eyewitnesses serve as a serious deterrent to making your experience or beliefs known. I think that with a lot of these stories the more wild and sometimes questionable accounts give people the impression that anyone who says to have experienced a strange encounter is an unreliable witness and their story is not to be trusted.

Personally I do not think it is at all possible for science to have discovered everything of biological origin. Beyond undiscovered insects, deep-sea creatures, and unknown quadrupeds, I am talking about creatures that don't really fit in anywhere in the animal kingdom and are outside the realm of reasonable explanation. There is too much of the earth that hasn't been touched. There are new species being discovered every year and occasionally some of these specimens may have been thought to be rumor or myth at one time, but now are known and accepted as genuine animal species. For example, some species -- such as the mountain gorilla, giant pandas, giant squids, and giraffes -- were once considered pure fantasy recorded by the local cultures that spoke of them until they were "discovered" and formally recognized by zoologists and the scientific community.

So much of the earth's surface has *not* been visited yet. The possibility of there being creatures in and around the earth that are completely foreign to humankind is very likely. The lack of physical evidence doesn't make the theory false, simply theoretical. There is a misconception that cryptozoology is an arcane or occult "science," that it is in the business of "hunting monsters", which it is not. It is this misconception that paints a negative portrait of cryptozoology and is what the many naysayers use to discredit it. The first zoologist to fully devote his professional life exclusively to this field was Bernard Heuvelmans. In the late 1950s, Heuvelmans - who had a Ph. D. in "zoological sciences" coined the term "cryptozoology" using the Greek roots *kryptos* (hidden), *zoon* (animal), and *logos* (discourse), which means, "the science of hidden animals."

From the 15th century up till the late 18th century, there was no need for cryptozoology. "Naturalists" of the time were curious and eager to discover anything new. They paid close attention to even the vaguest of animal-rumors, practicing an early form of cryptozoology. These naturalists were consumed with the "cryptozoological spirit," eager to explore and discover all that was new and wonderful about the world around them. Our modern zoologists and scientists

have turned away from cryptozoology partly due to this early enthusiasm and willingness to believe in fantastical accounts. However in the field of paleontology there is a more open minded approach to as yet undiscovered species (Danny B Stewart, *An Introduction to Cryptozoology*).

Paleontology and its study of bones and fossils allows that we might suddenly come across unknown fossil evidence, in a tiny part of the world, that no one has ever visited. Dinosaurs - an outrageous and completely unbelievable myth - were vindicated in this way less than 200 years ago. Russian Paleontologist L.S. Davitashvili has this to say on the topic:

It is always necessary to remember the incompleteness of the geological record.

The first appearance of a given species in the geological record and its disappearance from the latter can in no way be taken for the dates of its origin and final extinction. The real lifespan of species (or a group of species) is usually much longer than the period determined from the geological record.

Consequently, the dating of the extinction of a form or a group is not as simple a matter as may appear from the frequent citing in the paleontological literature of extinction dates from various organisms.

Some of the more enduring cryptid sightings include creatures that could conceivably exist. Bigfoot and the Yeti are under the umbrella of giant, ape like proto humans that hide away in remote areas and are experts at evading capture.

The “Loch Ness monster” is one of many alleged lake monsters around the world that are theorized to be plesiosaurs lingering from the age of dinosaurs in deep lakes. Outrageous, until you consider that science recently “discovered” the coelacanth – a fish from the age of the dinosaurs thought to be extinct for 66 million years.

In the not so distant past sightings and stories about cryptids were seen as uncommon, but not outlandish. However, if similar events were to happen today - within our cynical, media saturated culture - they’d be seen as impossible. With today’s technology almost anything can be faked and hundreds of hoaxes and fake accounts muddy the waters and drown out any stories that might have had a grain of truth to them. This ease with which hoaxes can be fabricated, coupled with dampened curiosity and lack of imagination, seems to have closed a window of perception for humanity at this time.

Science tells us cryptozoology is fake and the hundreds of first person encounters spanning more than a century are false. Every single eyewitness account - according to science - is rooted in madness, wishful thinking, misunderstanding, or a cynical hoax. The scientific community doesn’t leave any room for creatures outside our realm of knowledge or personal understanding and the majority of the world’s population agrees. These creatures of myth - these cryptids - exist in flights of fancy only, and instead we anchor our faith in our media, our advertisers, our virtual selves that exist in a virtual cloud, and the notion that we alone exist in an age of pure knowledge and facts - discarding centuries of rich oral traditions, belief systems, and the human capacity for reaching beyond what is *known* to what is *believed*. We gain facts and proofs and we leave behind our sense of mystery and wonder.

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