

A weekly newsletter on cryptozoology past and present, from Bigfoot to black panthers

# The Cryptid Chronicles

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## On the Trail of the Whistling Snakes

If you were asked to name some of the most interesting American cryptozoological specimens of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, chances are whistling snakes wouldn't be at the top of your list – or at the bottom of it either, for that matter. These strange creatures have slithered by unnoticed for over a century, but if you delve into the musty archives, you'll find tantalizing evidence of a reptile after Charles Fort's own heart.

There are only a handful of journalistic references to whistling snakes, also called singing snakes, in the United States. Luckily, these articles, while few in number, provide a great deal of detail about the snakes' habits and appearance. The sightings are clustered in the Northeast – New York state, Connecticut and Maryland – but they may have existed (or continue to exist) in other parts of the country as well; there just isn't a lot of data to go on. The descriptions of the snakes vary widely, too, indicating at least three distinct species, one of which is aquatic or, at the very least, semi-aquatic.

The first mention of the whistling snake is found in the *Sunday Herald* of Syracuse, New York on March 20, 1898. The article contains a wealth of information and is worth reprinting in full:

### WHISTLING SNAKE APPEARS

#### *Strange Reptile That Inhabits Redwood Lake Is Reported Early This Spring.*

Watertown, March 10 – The “whistling snake” of Redwood has again been heard, piping its siren tune from the shores of the lovely lakes that all but surround the quaint little village, and the good citizens of that famous fishing resort are listening to its notes with delight, for they are considered by the boatmen and boarding-house keepers of the town as an invariable forerunner to a prolific fishing season.

Whether the “whistling snake” is a distinct species, confined to the islands and shores of the Redwood cluster of lakes, no one

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**Editor:** David Acord  
[davidacord@msn.com](mailto:davidacord@msn.com)

in that town of truthful fishermen pretends to be able to state; but that a snake inhabits that lake country, which is different in appearance and musical abilities from any viper seen elsewhere around these parts, scores of Redwood's best citizens will testify.

The tuneful reptile first made its appearance around the Redwood lake country about ten years ago, and was first seen by veteran fisherman, "Charlie" Higgins of Theresa, who was fishing near the foot of Butterfield lake, though its particularly shrill and musical whistling had been heard many times before that season. Since then it has been heard by hundreds of people, if the citizens of Redwood may be believed, and seen by many basking on the rocky shores or swimming in the waters of the lakes. It is claimed that it never emits its ... whistle ... [indistinct] luring its prey within reach of its fangs.

According to the statement of the Redwood folk, the snake usually makes its annual appearance in the middle of April, but this year it boldly and saucily came out and turned up on that day abhorred by all snakes – the 17<sup>th</sup> of March. George Vroman, a well-known resident of Redwood, who went out to Pats island near the foot of Butterfield lake on that day, claims that while wandering around the place he heard a curiously sharp and penetrating yet sweet and magical whistle near the corner of the island, where the cottage of Attorney Anson Harder is situated.

He had heard of the "whistling snake," but had never listened to its notes before, so he cautiously approached the cottage. Coiled upon its porch was a large snake whose brilliant black and yellow-checked scales glinted in the warm spring sunshine. With its head raised and gently swaying in time to its musical notes, it whistled softly and sweetly to a little bevy of ground birds, hopping as if fascinated nearer and ever nearer.

There was a sudden flash of glittering scales, and the snake had leaped two-thirds its length and regained its coil with a bird in its fangs. Dropping the dead bird, it began once more its tune, now whistling shrill and loud, as when Vroman first heard its note. The frightened birds fluttered nearer and nearer, and the charming process was repeated and another bird added to the half dozen dead ones that lay around.

With a club Vroman crept up to dispatch the reptile, but it dropped through a hole in the porch floor and escaped.

A New York man who visits Redwood each season has prevailed upon a scientific friend to accompany him on his next visit, and they will make an effort to capture one of the whistling reptiles and give it a place in a zoological collection.

Like many 19<sup>th</sup>-century accounts of anomalous creatures, this one gives skeptics plenty of ammunition. The florid writing style of the time period is easy to ridicule, and certain details – such as Vroman finding the snake on St. Patrick's day (the saint who was famously said to have driven the snakes out of Ireland) – strain credulity. Also, the closing paragraph assuring readers that a scientific expert will soon travel to the lake and "sort things out" is also something of a cliché. Was it an early April Fool's joke, or just a

newspaper editor deciding to have a little fun? Perhaps. And yet the details about the snake's appearance – not to mention the willingness of several citizens to go “on the record” and have their names printed – are intriguing. Note also that Vroman pointed out variations in the snake's singing pattern – melodic and sweet one moment, shrill and loud the next. It would take a great deal of imagination and thought to fabricate such a detail.

Twenty-five years later, in the same paper, another account of a whistling snake is found – this one from neighboring Sterling, Connecticut, across the Adirondacks. Here's the brief snippet from the May 6, 1923 edition:

#### **“WHISTLING SNAKE” CAPTURES QUAIL**

Sterling, May 5 – A “whistling snake” has been seen and heard near Wagner's farm. It's a new species of a striped reptile never before seen in Connecticut. It winds itself about the small limbs of an apple tree and its whistle is almost as distinct as comes from human lips. A half a dozen have been spied at one time.

The call of the quail, “more wet,” is so correctly made by the whistler that the innocent quail is drawn within his reach, when a sudden spring of the serpent ends the whistle and provides the “charmer” with a breakfast.

The similarity between the two accounts, spread 25 years apart, is fascinating. Although the physical descriptions are different, the behavior of the snakes is almost identical.

So what's going on here? If we take the articles at face value, the snakes appear to be employing what scientists call “aggressive mimicry,” defined by Wikipedia as “a form of mimicry where predators, parasites or parasitoids share similar signals with a harmless model, allowing them to avoid being correctly identified by their prey or host. In its broadest sense, it involves any type of exploitation, such as an orchid exploiting a male insect by mimicking a sexually receptive female...”

Aggressive mimicry is used throughout the animal kingdom. The alligator snapping turtle, for example, rests on the bottom of rivers and lakes with its mouth open; its pink tongue resembles a worm and lures in hungry, unsuspecting fish.

The whistling snake apparently has the ability to mimic birdsong. Is this possible? Of course, we know that snakes have the ability to hiss and even spit their venom. But hissing is a long way from singing. Perhaps the whistling snake evolved differently and has special chambers or airways in its skull (or unique soft-tissue air ducts in its mouth) that allow it to make a variety of different noises. Over time, it developed the ability to mimic local bird species that represented a substantial portion of its diet.

There are references to “whistling snakes” in other parts of the world. For instance, here's a portion of a newswire report from 1894:

...Sir William Macgregor, the administrator of British New Guinea, is now in the field with another extraordinary discovery – a whistling snake. In his latest report Sir William says that a large number of deaths occurred early this year in the Rigo district of New Guinea from snake bite. The

administrator points out that the island is infested by a small species of black snake, which is very fierce. The natives declare that whenever a man goes near one it rushes at him, uttering sounds which they describe as resembling a whistle...A little while before a boy of fourteen years was in the bush near the station, when one of these snakes made a rush at him with the usual peculiar whistling sound. The boy thought the noise emanated from some cockatoos in a tree and began to look for them. He did not discover his mistake until he received a bite from the reptile, from which he died in a little while in great agony.

Again we see the comparison between the snake's whistle and a bird's cry, although it's unclear if the snake was intentionally trying to lure in the boy or was simply emitting a "warning whistle" because he came too close.

We return to America for our final example of a whistling snake, this one from Maryland. The dispatch from Washington, D.C. is dated July 13, 1885:

### **An Extraordinary Reptile.**

WASHINGTON, July 13. – A snake of a very rare kind is now at the Smithsonian Institution. It came here on Friday, having been captured near the famous Buck Horn wall, on the line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, near Deer Park, Md. The peculiarity of the snake is that it can and does whistle and sing like a young mocking bird. In general appearance it is like the ordinary snake, except its head is shaped somewhat like a pug dog. In length it is four feet long, and the largest part of its body is four and a quarter inches in circumference. When it whistles or sings it jumps like a frog.

The head snake professor at the Smithsonian Institute is now at Wood's Hool [sic], Mass., and it will probably be sent there for his examination and classification. It is in shape and color altogether different from any of the African singing snakes, and besides issues a louder and more harmonic sound or whistle than is recorded of any of the classes of snakes that are found in the East Indies. A similar character of a snake is said in the books to be frequently seen on the Island of Sumatra. So far this is the first singing or whistling snake that has been found in this country. The man who caught it supposed he was chasing a young mocking bird.

For the first time, our clever snake is said to jump "like a frog" when it sings or whistles, and its sounds are once again compared to a bird. The article also references singing snakes in Africa and the East Indies, but aside from the previous New Guinea dispatch, I could find no other mention of singing or whistling snakes on other continents, and herpetology reference works likewise provided no clues.

But more importantly, if the article is to be believed, the snake was taken into custody by the Smithsonian Institution. What happened to it? Was it dropped into a jar of formaldehyde and forgotten? Does it sit in a long-abandoned warehouse along with the

Ark of the Covenant? Alas, there aren't any easy answers, but the whistling snake deserves a place among the more interesting crypto-creatures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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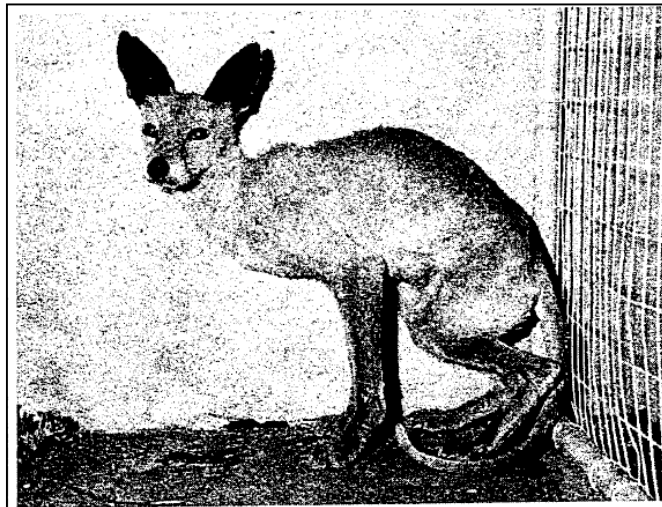
## The Whatsit That Wasn't (Or Was It?)

As we've seen repeatedly over the years, properly identifying strange mammals can be tricky. Mange or other skin diseases can turn otherwise normal-looking foxes, coyotes and dogs into weird beasts that are often hastily labeled as cryptids or, worse, bonafide chupacabras (as happened in Texas in 2006 and 2007). Usually the disease is diagnosed within a few days or weeks and the story goes away.

But in 1971, a strange case popped up in North Dakota that fooled biologists and zoologists alike. But maybe "fooled" isn't the right word. Maybe they were right to be confused in the first place.

It all started in the late fall of 1971, when Morris Baker found the animal on his farm in Rollette County during a snowstorm. Baffled by its strange appearance – it appeared to possess the qualities of several animals all rolled into one – it was sent first to the North Dakota State University branch at Bottineau and then transferred to the Roosevelt Park Zoo in Minot. Scientists at both locations were stumped, and gave it the nickname "Whatsit." Others simply called it "The Thing."

A year later, Whatsit was still at the zoo – it had become a popular tourist attraction – and biologists were still scratching their heads. "A number of people



maintain it is a rat tail opossum," zoo superintendent Michael Nilson told a reporter in October 1972. "But we don't agree. It continues to look like a combination of several animals even after giving it vitamin shots and feeding it regularly. The face still resembles that of a dog more than a fox. The ears look much like those of a deer. The front legs and paws are like a wolf's but the rear legs resemble those of a jackrabbit or even a kangaroo and he walks something like the latter." (*See photos taken from newspaper articles of the time*)

The zoo also had a Wallaby on display, but in comparison, the Whatsit was "more delicate," the reporter noted. However, its long, hairless tail did resemble that of a rat tail opossum.

It also had a voracious appetite. “He’ll eat most anything,” Nilson said. “Meat and vegetables, in fact, that little fellow eats as much at a meal as we give a lion. Even lettuce seems like a delicacy. But he refuses to eat if anybody is watching.”

After the 1972 article, reporters seemed to lose interest, and the Whatsit fell off the radar screen. No mention of it is found in newspapers until June 1973 in a syndicated column by writer Cleveland Amory. A reader had written in asking what had become of the Whatsit. Amory replied that “guesses as to his parentage ranged from a coyote in love with a large prairie dog to a large jackrabbit in love with a small kangaroo. After a trip to the veterinarian’s, however, and a series of antiseptic baths, whatsit’s fur grew back and he turned out to be nothing more or less than the common but uncommonly intelligent red fox. (Not the comedian.)”



Amory’s pat explanation – reading between the lines, he appears to be saying that the fox suffered from mange or a similar ailment – is puzzling for several reasons. If true, why didn’t any local North Dakota newspaper report on it at the time? It had all the makings of a great story – the zoo (and the smart guys at the university) had been fooled by a red fox. But there is no trace of the whatsit to be found in archives after 1972.

The timeline also doesn’t work out. The whatsit was in captivity for at least a year, first at the university and later at the zoo. If it really was a fox, why did it take so long for its hair to grow back? Did no one think to give it an antiseptic bath or run tests to see if it had the mange? It seems highly doubtful that trained professionals would overlook such basic steps. The scientists seemed to have had very good reasons for being confused about whatsit’s true identity – its physical characteristics didn’t match up to any known species.

I’ve been unable to find out what eventually happened to the whatsit. Did it live out its days in the zoo, or was it released back into the wild? If anyone has any information, please drop me a line at [davidacord@msn.com](mailto:davidacord@msn.com).

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## Anomalous Reptiles in North America

Americas have been seeing – and, in some cases, capturing – strange reptiles for well over a century. Many of these weird creatures later turned out to be giant salamanders (hellbenders) or other native species that the local folk weren’t familiar with, but there are plenty of specimens that defy description and have never been explained. In this article, we’ll take a look at this relatively unexplored corner of the American cryptozoological museum.

We begin with a rather strange account from the *Dubuque Herald* on April 7, 1900, about a large amphibious creature that had been lurking in the area of Fort Madison for at least ten years. At first blush, it may seem that an out-of-place alligator is the culprit, but the lack of specifics leaves open the possibility that it was something else:

### **MYSTERIOUS ANIMAL**

#### ***Believed to be a Monster Amphibious Animal.***

People living in the vicinity of Newby slough, opposite Lead island, three miles above Fort Madison, have a mystery on their hands that has so far baffled all their attempts for identification and is causing considerable excitement. The mystery is a return visit of a monster amphibious animal. The Ft. Madison Democrat thus tells the tale:

"About ten years ago," said Mr. Alley, a neighbor had a large Newfoundland dog. One evening while in the locality in question he heard his dog barking near the river bank. Going near him he urged the dog forward and as he did so some huge animal pounced upon the dog, dragged it into the river and drowned it, almost before his eyes, darkness being the only obstruction that prevented him from seeing the beast. The mysterious animal then disappeared. Glimpses of the animal were had afterward, but no one could give a description and later it disappeared and has not been seen since until Sunday morning.

On Sunday morning Mr. Alley's son, Claude, and a younger brother had some farm duties to perform in the locality mentioned and asked their father if they could take a shot gun along, to which he assented. They had not been gone long when they returned home in a high state of excitement and reported that they had seen a huge animal lying on the bank where the neighbor's dog had previously met his fate. Mr. Alley took down his Winchester rifle and immediately went to the locality, though thinking, possibly, the boys might have seen a log through the brush and being timid from former reports of the animal became so frightened that their imagination might have caused the excitement, but upon reaching the scene there was nothing in sight, not even a log to deceive them.

Mr. Alley is not a man who is inclined to exaggeration or mysterious stories, and is confident of the existence of a huge amphibious animal in that locality. His daughter saw a large animal swimming across the slough when they were out skiff riding one day and called his attention, but before he could turn to see it had disappeared beneath the surface of the water. The young lady said that there was about six feet of its body exposed but could give no other description. Whatever the animal may be it has so far eluded all attempts of searchers for a peep at its mysterious self.



Next we jump to 1933 and the tiny town of Luray in north-central Kansas. In June of that year, resident Chris Gebhart reported seeing a reptile 20-25 feet in length attacking a chicken near his home. He described its body as bluish-tan in color and said its eyes “glow like a cat’s at night.” Gebhart went for help, but when he returned the lizard had disappeared in bushes along a nearby creek. According to an Associated Press report, it wasn’t the first time the lizard had visited Luray; it had been seen three times the prior year as well.

In 1935, in Ft. Myers, Florida, local resident Louis B. Reynolds claimed to have photographed a “strange lizard-like monster” six feet in length before it disappeared into a nearby swamp. The photo was published on Sept. 23 in the *Daily Independent* of Monessen, Pa. Is it real or a fake? We’ll let you make your own decision (see photo, this page).

Jumping ahead to 1948, a strange “lizard-like worm” was found near Titusville, Pennsylvania. It was orange in color with a large head and its body tapered to a point. “Its black bead-like eyes were very alert,” a newspaper article noted. “With a line down its back the worm was spotted with small dots.”

But an even stranger lizard was captured near Blodgett, Missouri in 1954 by Eddie McMullen. “The strange reptile...is 19 inches long, has two short front legs and two long rear ones, looking more like a dinosaur of by-gone days than anything else,” a news report stated. “It is gray and has stripes down the back. The animal was caught climbing a tree.”

Several “out of place” lizards have also been discovered in the U.S. over the years. In 1897, a strange creature identified as a proteus, or European lizard, was discovered on a farm near Middletown, Ohio after floodwaters receded. An article described it this way: *(continued next page)*

## Photographic Proof of Monster’s Existence



Louis B. Reynolds of Fort Myers, Fla., was strolling at a nearby beach following the recent hurricane when he caught sight of and photographed this strange lizard-like monster. He went for aid to capture it but the animal disappeared into a swamp and has not been since seen. Reynolds described it as being about six feet long and of the appearance of museum reproductions of prehistoric monsters.



It is about one foot long, with an elongated and cylindrical body. The tail is short, broad and compressed laterally. The strangest feature of the reptile is its lungs, which are on the outside of its body, and so transparent that the blood can be seen coursing through them.

It has three sets of lungs, or rather, three bronchial tubes, all of which are persistent during life. Its skin is slimy. To the body are attached four weak legs. On each of the anterior are three toes, while the posterior have four toes. The body is about half an inch in diameter, and of a pale flesh color, while the bronchial tufts, or lungs, are of a bright crimson. The teeth in both jaws and on the palate are small and sharp. The head is triangular and the snout obtuse. The eyes are very small and without lids.

The breathing of this reptile is essentially aquatic, so far as the outside lungs are concerned, though it has internal lungs, and rises to the top of the water when these are filled with air. It can live but a short time out of the water.

Whenever the water in which it lives gets low it buries itself in the mud, and lives on aquatic worms and insects and soft-shelled mollusks.

I was unable to find a description perfectly matching the one in the news article, although *Proteus anguinus* comes close: also known as the white salamander, it is a blind, aquatic, cave-dwelling creature, and its external gills are reddish in color. However, it is found only in caves in certain areas of southern Europe, particularly Slovenia and Croatia. Because it is almost completely aquatic, it's difficult to figure out how such a creature made it to Middletown, Ohio alive and in one piece.

In 1913 in Cumberland, Maryland, workers blasting old cement kilns from a hillside killed a four-foot long iguana that was hiding in a crevice. Two employees of the Smithsonian, Raymond Armbruster and Edward Harris Sr., were called to the scene and identified it as a tree lizard found in the West Indies and other tropical climes. A news article noted that "how it came to be in the crevice is problematical. Some of the cement kilns were erected as far back as 1838. Nothing like the lizard has ever been seen in this vicinity, and it must have been in the hole from which it was blasted for many years."

In 1918 a bizarre giant snake-related incident occurred in Ohio:

### **SERPENT TAKEN FROM LAKE ERIE**

#### ***Strange Reptile of Immense Length Captured in Waters of Sandusky Bay***

Sandusky, July 22. (INS) — Lake Erie residents who chuckled over the gossip of the past week that a huge sea serpent was haunting the waters of Sandusky Bay, showed evidences of belated alarm to-day with the capture of the reported monster, an 18-foot snake. The reptile, believed an Indian python, or *python moluius*, was taken from the lake by Clifford Wilson and Francis Bagenstose, cement company salesmen of Cincinnati. The snake was expected to be taken to Cincinnati to-day for presentation to the Cincinnati zoo.

Discovery of the serpent, the reports of which were regarded as unreliable until the snake was displayed, brought Harold L. Madison, curator of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, to the scene. Madison termed the reptile an Indian python, overriding an early theory that the snake was a boa constrictor.

"The markings are definite. There is a lance-shaped spot about two inches long on the Indian python's head and this appears clearly on this snake," he stated.

Speculation was rife to-day as to how the snake had gotten into the lake and from whence it came.

"The reptile is not a native of Lake Erie," Madison said, "and you can't find another within a thousand miles of it."

The curator's theory blasted an earlier belief that the serpent was one of two boa constrictors which had been stolen from the Toledo zoo several months ago.

Wilson and Bagenstose related "that the snake rose up beside their boat as they were fishing in Sandusky Bay late yesterday. Wilson stated that he saw the reptile first and struck it with an oar.

The snake, he said, rolled over on its back and he hit it again before dragging it into the boat. It was believed dead until the two men took it to shore when it became active and was placed into a box.

In 1927 in Childress, Texas, at the far edge of the Panhandle, another out-of-place iguana popped up, this one identified as an *Iguana tuberculata* of Central and South America – also a tree dweller. It measured nearly four foot long and was found while crossing a road. It was sent to biologists at the Texas Agricultural & Mechanical College. Dr. O.M. Ball, head of the biology department, commented that the "finding of such an animal so far removed from its native home and in an almost treeless region, an event very much out of the ordinary."

The news writer added, "Authorities agree that the reptile is hatched from an egg, which gives its presence in Texas an added element of mystery. The theory that a migratory bird might have brought the egg out of the jungle and dropped it in the Texas Panhandle was dissipated when it was pointed out that such an egg measures almost two inches in length. Other theories are that it might have escaped from an explorer's pack or slipped away from a shipment of tropical animals, but none of these are satisfactory to the scientists here who regard its presence as a phenomena."

Another tropical lizard made it all the way north to Flint, Michigan in 1930. Carmen Pearson was busy sawing boards in his garage one fall day when he heard a noise that sounded like a hen clucking. He turned around to see something rapidly moving toward him. It was a large reptile some two feet in length. He grabbed a rake and swung at the creature, breaking off its tail. The lizard scurried into a corner. Pearson ran back inside to get a rifle, and when he returned, the lizard was scaling the garage wall. He shot it in the head. A biology professor at the local high school identified it as a common lizard species from South America, but once again, no one could explain how it found its way to Michigan.

Finally, we jump forward several decades to 1989 in Smackover, Arkansas. Maurice Faulkner, a well-known area prankster, had a hard time convincing his friends that he'd just encountered a six-foot lizard lying in the road. He first thought it was a log, but then it sat up and hissed at him before departing to a nearby creek bank. Faulkner finally convinced his wife Kay to follow him back to the location of the sighting, and she identified it as a monitor lizard. Faulker and several other men captured it with a net; it had burrowed its way into a creek bank and only its tail was visible, but they managed to pull it out. The lizard was likely an escapee from a local collector.

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## Cryptid Notes

### Idaho Lake Monster

We don't often associate Idaho with lake monsters, but the Western state has its fair share of aquatic cryptids. In *The Field Guide to Lake Monsters, Sea Serpents and Other Denizens of the Deep*, Loren Coleman and Patrick Huyghe catalogue several, including the wonderfully named Slimy Slim of Payette Lake.

However, we recently came across an account of an Idaho lake monster that isn't in the Coleman-Huyghe book or any other cryptozoological reference work that we could lay our hands on. Appearing in the evening edition of the Oct. 24, 1933 *Ogden Standard-Examiner* (Utah) is a detailed Associated Press article entitled "Idahoan Tells of Lake Beast." In it, Pocatello resident Fred Rouse reported seeing a giant creature in American Falls Lake, a 25-mile long reservoir formed by a dam. He was standing on the southeast bank of the lake at around 4 p.m. one afternoon when he saw a large animal moving in the turbulent water. "I had surprised the beast feeding in shallow water," he said. "The creature was too stupid to know fear. It appeared to me to be a strange looking lizard. Up it rose to a height of seven or eight feet while I stood gazing upon its utter frightfulness."

Rouse went on to describe a "cavernous mouth fully two feet from snout to the angle of the jaw" and "gleaming needle-sharp teeth." It swam away toward the lake's western end "with a swishing, sucking sound, like that made by an oar pulled forcibly through the water," he said.

### MonsterQuest DVDs

Season two of the History Channel's *MonsterQuest* will be released on DVD on January 20. The 5-disc set contains all 20 episodes plus some unspecified bonus features. It retails for \$44.95. Amazon has it for \$40.49, a 10% discount. That seems a little low, given how deeply Amazon usually discounts TV boxed sets.

Incidentally, the History Channel will be repeating the "Ohio Grassman" episode on January 14 and 15. As of press time, it's the only *MonsterQuest* show slated for January.

## **Cryptozoology Bookshelf**

A couple of new crypto book releases you might be interested in...

*A Cryptozoological Study of the Shunka Warak'in*, by Mystical Mikal, is now available on Amazon. It's a self-published book about the Shunka Warak'in, an "unusual cryptid [that] resembles a wolf/hyena hybrid and is known to steal dogs and slaughter livestock. The most recent sighting of this creature occurred in Montana in 2006 and became known as 'The Creature of McCone County.' This work reveals the history, initial findings, and possible origins of the Shunka Warak'in." To be honest, I had never heard of this creature before, but it sure sounds interesting. And before you ask, I have no idea why the author calls himself Mystical Mikal. The 68-page book retails for \$12.99.

*Images of the Wildman in Southeast Asia: An Anthropological Perspective*, by Gregory Forth. If you've got a couple hundred dollars burning a hole in your pocket, this hefty 360-page tome from academic publisher Routledge should be right up your alley. The Amazon description follows: "The book examines 'wildmen', images of hairy humanlike creatures known to rural villagers and other local people in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Sometimes described in considerable detail, the creatures are reported as still living or as having survived until recent times. The aim of the book is to discover the source of these representations and their status in local systems of knowledge, partly in relation to distinct categories of spiritual beings, known animals, and other human groups. It explores images of the wildman from throughout Southeast Asia, focusing in particular on the Indonesian islands, and beyond, including the Asian mainland, Africa, North America, Africa, Australia, and Oceania.

"The book reveals how, in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, 'wildmen' cannot readily be explained as imaginary constructs rooted in cultural values and social institutions, nor as simply another kind of 'spirit'. Also critically examined is a view of such figures as fundamentally similar expressions of a pan-human mental 'archetype'. Forth concludes that many Asian and African figures are grounded in experience or memories of anthropoid apes supplemented by encounters with ethnic others.

"Representations developed among European immigrants (including the North American 'sasquatch') are, in part, similarly traceable to an indirect knowledge of primates, informed by long-standing European representations of hairy humans that have coloured western views of non-western peoples and which may themselves originate in ancient experience of apes. At the same time, the book demonstrates how Indonesian and other Malayo-Polynesian images cannot be explained in the same way, and explores the possibility of these reflecting an ancient experience of non-sapiens hominins."

The book retails for \$190; Amazon has it for around \$177. Its listed release date was Dec. 8 but as of press time, Amazon was listing it as not yet released.

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**Questions? Comments? E-mail me, David Acord, at [davidacord@msn.com](mailto:davidacord@msn.com)**

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