

Book Reviews

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Les Derniers Dragons d'Afrique [The Last Dragons of Africa]. By Bernard Heuvelmans. Plon, Paris, 1978. 507 pp. 80fr.

This large work of more than 500 pages is the first in a series entitled "Unknown Animals of the World." What Bernard Heuvelmans hopes to do is to present as complete a picture as possible of the current status of cryptozoological studies and research. In this way, the essence of the vast documentation accumulated over 30 years by the "Father of Cryptozoology" will be accessible to a broad public.

This first book is devoted exclusively to the "dragons" of Africa. It begins with the giant serpents of North Africa, the snakes which emit strange sounds in Central Africa, and *Groot Slang* in South Africa.

The second and larger part of the volume is devoted to "amphibious dragons." It begins with a geographic overview, with statements by witnesses, and documents grouped by regions. The author then attempts to exclude the most obvious hoaxes, and to sort out the most significant points in each report. Then, in a chronological analysis, he attempts to establish the influences which affected both the description and the interpretation of the facts, and the manner of relating native traditions, including the deliberate invention of tall stories. The author then presents his own conclusions. For the "amphibious dragons," he identifies four different forms in Africa: a manatee, or related unknown species, a catfish, a machairodont species, and a sauropod.

Lastly, the final portion is devoted to the records on "flying dragons," giant unknown bats and pterodactyls.

This book, which contains much previously unpublished information, and which bears the strong imprint of the personality of its author, will not leave the reader indifferent.

One could challenge many of the analyses and conclusions reached by Heuvelmans. There is hardly any doubt that much mystification (such as, for example, the matter of the viper with giant horns in South Africa) has escaped his notice. Although the greater part of the data presented do not fall in this category, it nonetheless is always rather risky to draw excessively definitive conclusions from simple statements by witnesses, the limits of which are well-known, even when the author speaks in perfect good faith. The problem becomes still more delicate when it comes to second-hand

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reports, even if obtained directly from witnesses. The differences to be found among the five reports of Sir Clement Hill's observations of the Lake Victoria *Lokwata* are very revealing in this regard.

In his conclusion on "amphibious dragons," Heuvelmans wonders, not without malice, about the reactions provoked by this book in "so-called authoritative circles." "Without a doubt," he states, "there will be those who find it hard to accept the possible existence of still unknown species of Sirenia or the Siluridae. The survival of Machairodont species would seem, of course, more subject to doubt, but nonetheless conceivable in view of the fact that man did, in the past, encounter felines in the Pleistocene Epoch But what will for a certainty cause these people to choke with indignation, as it always has done in the past, is the hypothesis of the vestigial dinosaur. What I would like to stress is that it is by no means scientific dictates which provoke such a reaction. It is of a strictly emotional nature."

Less than a century has passed since the beginning of the exploration of the heart of Africa, and it still remains extremely compartmentalized in many regions difficult of access. However, these several decades without concrete proof of the survival of such animals is beginning to have a weight much heavier than the 70 million years without fossil evidence. While no hypothesis should be excluded *a priori*—and that is indeed the very essence of cryptozoology—one must admit that time is not working in favor of the "last dragons of Africa."

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Searching for Hidden Animals: An Inquiry Into Zoological Mysteries. By Roy P. Mackal. Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1980. 294 pp. \$12.95.

This volume is about those strange and wondrous sightings in which more is left to the imagination than is actually seen.

Readers are whisked along on an expedition from the frigid waters of the Arctic Pacific to a Florida beach, whence to a steaming swamp in Central Africa, to the upland valleys of the Himalayas, to small islands in the Indian Ocean, to oceanic deeps, to the jungles and pampas of South America, and finally returning home to explore the large lakes of North America. In our travels, we meet a variety of beasts, real and hypothesized: Steller's sea cows,

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