Tales from the Cryptid #2

TEFLONRABBIT ARTICLE No.177

Unique Identifier:3f2d15ce-9fc8-4605-9b9d-a939f929c29d



Large Black Cats

Monday, May 11, 2020 - 18:14

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Accounts of large feline predators in Britain and across the European continent have frequently found their way onto the front pages of local newspapers. Occasionally one of these reports makes it into national news in print form or even breakfast television.

Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 *Black Cats*

Traditionally, anyone espousing the existence of unacknowledged big cats has not been subject to a particularly sympathetic reception. That was until some footage emerged around the turn of the century which had been captured by an entirely

credible witness with a military / law enforcement background. The veracity of the scale of the specimen is indisputable due to the encounter taking place on a standard gauge railway line. The subject can be seen crossing the rails several times and the dimensions can be instantly assessed by the viewer. Calculations based on the known metrics of the railway establish a scale far beyond that of any domestic or feral cat. In addition, the physical characteristics displayed do not conform to those of any domestic cat. Specifically the nature of the tail is quite markedly different from those of the widely appreciated Felis Catus.

During an interview on breakfast television, an entirely plausible female victim recounted her experience of being attacked by such a creature. According to her recollection of events, the animal appeared to be particularly under nourished and consequently quite desperate to drag her into the undergrowth of the Scottish woodland and eat her. Given that breakfast television is often associated with the crank programming of daytime chat-shows, it would be easy to dismiss the testimony as yet more attention and / or ratings seeking fantasy. However, the plausibility of the victim is further emphasised by their utterly forthright attitude in regards to displaying the extensive scar tissue resulting from the attack. One of the scars on her inner leg clearly displayed the scale of the attackers mandible. The distance between incisor punctures was approximating the breadth of her hand. Were it not for her tenacious Caledonian personality, it's entirely likely that this attack would have resulted in her death and eventual consumption. Fortunately she was wearing stout footwear and managed to kick the highly aggressive animal in the head until it decided to give up on its arguably ill conceived hunt.

There have been many theories presented by researchers and enthusiasts to explain this quite alarming phenomenon. From surviving mega fauna to post exotic breeds act hybridisation. The indigenous mega fauna explanation is not particularly satisfying due to similar theories being presented to explain aquatic dinosaurs surviving in the depths of Scottish Lochs. Conversely, the dangerous and exotic animals act passed in the 1970's in response to several quite horrific incidents in the street, presents a much more feasible basis for a comprehensive explanation.



PAGE 6 DAILY MIRROR, Tuesday, December 14, 1971

Jimmy Tyler . . . "attacked by puma"

A man's pet pumas savaged two boys

PRIVATE ZOO A MENACE, JURY TOLD

By GEORGE GLENTON

THE "ferocious" pets in William Wheeler's private menagerie were a menace to public safety, a jury was told yesterday.

Twice his pet pumas attacked and injured small boys—one at a fisherman's lake and the other on a trading estate—it was alleged.

In the second incident Wheeler's two-year-old puma, Dan, mauled the eight-year-old son of policeman.

Leopards

Wheeler, 34, trading estate manager, of Forest-road, Sutton, Surrey, pleaded not guilty at the Old Bailey to causing a public nuisance by keeping pumas and leopards "of a ferocious and dangerous nature."

He also denied causing a public nuisance by taking the pumas on to a public footpath.

Mr. Michael Worsley, prosecuting, said that at various times since 1961 Wheeler had kept on his estate alligators, boa constrictors, anacondas, monkeys, birds of prey, porcupines, racoons, mongooses, pumas and leopards.

In the most serious incident, said Mr. Worsley, eight-year-old Jimmy Tyler was attacked by a puma which was chained to a van left unattended in the road leading to the estate at Sutton. According to witnesses, the puma, which had been lying under the van, sprang at the boy, seized him by the neck with its claws and teeth, and did not let go until a man hit it.

In the other incident involving a boy, Peter Cliff, nine, of Cock-lane, Petcham, Surrey, was attacked by a puma cub at a lake in Dorking in August 1970, said Mr. Worsley.

The boy had been running past the animal when it jumped at him, gripped his shoulder and knocked him to the ground.

Wheeler was alleged to have said in a statement: "I have a great deal of personal contact with these cats, which I love dearly.

"The male and female pumas will breed soon and the offspring will inherit certain traits I have instilled into them."

The case continues today.

William Wheeler . . . denies charges against pets he "loves dearly."

Prior to the passing of this act, any citizen was free to acquire and own large predatory animals from overseas. While the purchase and maintenance of such animals may have been within the budget of many aspiring fashionistas, the unexpected additional license fee of several thousand pounds proved too much for many to justify. Consequently several researchers have asserted that once the zoos and safari parks filled up with donated big cats, the owners would have been faced with quite a difficult choice. Either have the animal put down or take it out into the countryside and blatantly set it free. Hybridisation between big cats is well known in captive settings. There are even accounts of Ligers existing in the wild in antiquity, including some incredible claims that Alexander of Macedonia had several to pull his chariot. As such, it does not represent a huge imaginative leap to accept the pairing and mating of these recently liberated predators.

There is substantial ambiguity in terms of eye witnesses identifying individual specimens in diverse locations. The British public is accustomed to land based fauna remaining within its given territory. Consequently observations separated by

several hundred miles are generally considered to represent different animals. This is not in line with the behaviour of big cats. Many species have hunting territories which do indeed encompass several hundred miles of range. A sighting on the west coast of the Midlands on a Tuesday afternoon may well have been the same specimen that was reported on the east coast on a Wednesday evening.

Something something .. paws for thought.