

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #094

Cryptozoology | The Hunt for Mystery Animals

2 Oct, 2020

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about Cryptozoology, the search for and study of animals that most people believe don't exist.

[00:00:35] Before we get right into that though, let me quickly remind you that you can get all of the bonus episodes, plus the subtitles, the transcript, and the key vocabulary for this episode and all of our other almost 100 other episodes over on the website, which is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:00:55] This is where you can also check out becoming a member of Leonardo English, and join a community of curious minds from all over the world, doing meetups, exchanging ideas, and generally, improving their English in a more interesting way.

[00:01:10] So if that's of interest, and I certainly hope it is, then the place to go to is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:01:19] OK then, let's get started.

[00:01:22] You've probably heard of zoology. It's the scientific study of the behaviour, structure, [physiology¹](#), classification, and distribution of animals.

[00:01:33] But you may not have heard of cryptozoology. Essentially, it's zoology, but for animals that humans haven't yet officially discovered.

[00:01:45] It's not technically a real science, it's more of a hobby, but it does have [passionate²](#) followers all over the world.

[00:01:55] The origins of cryptozoology can be [traced back³](#) to the 1960s, after a book was published called “Sur la Piste des Bêtes Ignorées”, or “On the Track of Unknown Animals“ in English.

¹ the study of the way in which the bodies of living things work

² feeling strongly about something

³ find the origins of

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[00:02:09] It was published in 1958 by a Belgian-French zoologist, a man named Bernard Heuvelmans, who was really the father of modern cryptozoology.

[00:02:22] Now, the 1960s was almost the [golden era](#)⁴ for conspiracy theories, and for questioning the [status quo](#). If you've listened to the episodes on the Bermuda Triangle or The Illuminati, you'll be familiar with this.

[00:02:40] In the post-war years, it wasn't just the current social order that was being questioned, with the publication of "On the Track of Unknown Animals" Heuvelmans was also questioning the existence of certain animals, or rather he was suggesting that they did exist, while most people said they didn't.

[00:03:02] From a zoological point of view though, you can see why questioning the [status quo](#)⁵ might make sense.

[00:03:10] Several animals that you or I will recognise today had only relatively recently been discovered.

[00:03:18] The giant panda, for example, was only discovered by [zoologists](#)⁶ in 1869, and the [komodo dragon](#)⁷ was discovered in 1910. In both of these cases, the existence

⁴ the best time (to be doing something)

⁵ the present situation

⁶ people who study zoology

⁷ a very large lizard that lives in Indonesia

of these animals was known by locals, but foreign [zoologists](#) had never actually seen them, so they hadn't officially been discovered.

[00:03:42] Was it so mad to think that there would be other animals that hadn't been discovered by humans, Heuvelmans suggested in his book?

[00:03:50] With the giant panda and the [komodo dragon](#), locals had seen these animals and told stories about them, and only then had foreign [zoologists](#) come to see for themselves. If these animals had proved to be real, surely there was a possibility that other stories of sightings of other not-yet-discovered animals could also prove to be true.

[00:04:15] History is, of course, full of stories of sightings of mysterious animals that have never been officially [classified](#)⁸ by zoologists.

[00:04:27] From things like The Loch Ness Monster to The Yeti, The Abominable snowman, Bigfoot, Chupacabra, The Kraken or the giant squid, there are reports of sightings of these kinds of animals all over the world.

[00:04:43] Don't worry, though, this episode isn't going to be about the sightings of these animals and telling you that they must exist.

⁸ given a name and put into a particular group

[00:04:51] What we are going to try to do is to [unpack](#)⁹ some of the problems with cryptozoology, and of course, there are quite a few, and then we'll talk about why it can actually be useful, and why it shouldn't be [dismissed](#)¹⁰ so lightly.

[00:05:08] The easy answer to 'what are some of the problems with cryptozoology ' would be something like 'it's mad and ridiculous - obviously the Loch Ness Monster doesn't exist', and although that might be true, let's try to take a more scientific approach, and give cryptozoology the [benefit of the doubt](#)¹¹ for one minute.

[00:05:30] The first problem with cryptozoology is that, as it isn't a real science, there's no university degree or academic certification, anyone can do it and this means it often lacks a real, [rigorous](#)¹² approach to how cryptozoological studies should actually be [undertaken](#)¹³.

[00:05:51] [In short](#)¹⁴, the field is filled with conspiracy theorists and [amateurs](#)¹⁵, so even if what they were saying did make sense, more pure scientists don't take it seriously because it's not considered a real science.

⁹ to understand an idea by considering all of its parts

¹⁰ considered to be unimportant

¹¹ if you give something the benefit of the doubt, you accept it until you see a reason not to

¹² careful and considerate

¹³ done, conducted

¹⁴ used when you want to express the main point of an argument

¹⁵ people who take part in an activity out of pleasure, not professionally

[00:06:08] Our second problem is with the animals themselves, the cryptids, as they're called.

[00:06:14] These mysterious, yet-to-be discovered animals are in most cases quite problematic.

[00:06:22] The Loch Ness Monster, for example, is pretty [improbable¹⁶](#).

[00:06:27] I imagine you are familiar with the idea of the Loch Ness Monster, but essentially the view is that there is a huge sort of creature with a [humped¹⁷](#) back, that lives in Loch Ness, a long, thin lake in the Highlands of Scotland.

[00:06:45] There have been numerous sightings over the years of Nessie, of the monster, but they have pretty much all been [debunked¹⁸](#), proved to be wrong. There have even been [supposed¹⁹](#) photos of Nessie, but they later turned out to be [swans²⁰](#), or even an upside-down [canoe²¹](#).

[00:07:09] There have been thousands of sightings of Bigfoot across North America, going back hundreds of years.

¹⁶ not likely (to exist)

¹⁷ with large, raised parts

¹⁸ proved to be untrue

¹⁹ claimed to be true

²⁰ large white birds with long necks

²¹ a small, narrow boat, pointed at both ends

[00:07:16] Yet, as you probably know, almost all the sightings have been [debunked](#), and when there have been photos taken of Bigfoot, they have proved to be either faked, or of a bear or something like that.

[00:07:32] This isn't to say, of course, that everyone who thinks that they have seen Bigfoot, or the Loch Ness monster, or a giant squid, or anything like that, this isn't to say that they are a terrible person and a [fraud](#)²².

[00:07:48] The sightings of these creatures normally take place from a long way away, and are very brief and unclear.

[00:07:56] It's completely natural, especially as we have a knowledge of these creatures in popular culture that we jump to conclusions about what we've seen.

[00:08:06] If you're at Loch Ness, you've heard of the Loch Ness monster and [out of the corner of your eye](#)²³ you see something [popping out](#)²⁴ of the water for an [instant](#)²⁵, then going back in, you might remember it as bigger than it actually was and [jump to the conclusion](#)²⁶ that it was something that it wasn't.

²² someone who deceives people

²³ if you see something out of the corner of your eye, you notice it accidentally without seeing it properly

²⁴ if something pops out, only a small part of it is visible

²⁵ a very short period

²⁶ believe something before knowing all the facts

[00:08:26] That memory, with time, gets [embellished](#)²⁷, the thing that you saw gets bigger and bigger, and as our memory is far from perfect, you believe that what you saw was the Loch Ness monster. In fact, it was just an eel or a large fish.

[00:08:46] So, given the fact that a lot of evidence for these cryptids relies on [eye-witnesses](#)²⁸, who can be very [unreliable](#)²⁹, that's one reason to be [sceptical](#)³⁰ of cryptozoology.

[00:09:00] Thirdly, and this is especially problematic with the large cryptids, the large [mythical](#)³¹ creatures, if one exists, then there must be more than one.

[00:09:10] Most [cryptozoologists](#)³² don't believe that these are actual monsters that live forever and don't [obey](#)³³ the rules of biology. They just believe that they are species that haven't been discovered yet.

[00:09:24] And we know that for a species to continue to exist, they need to reproduce, and for that to happen, there needs to be more than one of them.

²⁷ if a story is embellished, details are added that aren't true

²⁸ people who saw an event

²⁹ not trusted

³⁰ doubting

³¹ not real, existing only in stories

³² people who are interested in cryptozoology

³³ behave according to a rule or law

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[00:09:34] And although they may not pay taxes, cryptids would also need to **obey** the rule of the only other thing in life that is certain: death.

[00:09:44] They would need to die, and their remains would need to go somewhere.

[00:09:49] With normal creatures in the wild, we find bones, or **remains**³⁴ of these creatures, and that's one of the ways in which we know they exist, even if we haven't seen a living version.

[00:10:01] We know dinosaurs existed, even if they died out 65 million years ago.

[00:10:08] And from the Loch Ness Monster to the Yeti, from Bigfoot to Chupacabra, there are no **remains** that have ever been found that **indicate**³⁵ that these animals ever existed.

[00:10:20] Admittedly for the cryptids that live in the sea, it's a bit harder to find **remains**, but the fact that **zoologists** have never managed to find any evidence of the **remains** of these animals makes it pretty **implausible**³⁶ that they exist.

³⁴ the body of someone or something who has died

³⁵ show, suggest

³⁶ not believable

[00:10:36] Finally, from a [geological](#)³⁷ point of view, the existence of something like the Loch Ness monster is hard to [rationalise](#)³⁸.

[00:10:45] If the Loch Ness monster is a sort of modern-day dinosaur, how did it get into the loch in the first place?

[00:10:54] The loch, the lake it supposedly lives in, would have been completely frozen over in the Ice Age, and the dinosaurs died out about 65 million years before the last Ice Age, so if all of that is true, where did this huge dinosaur-type animal come from? How did it get into the loch?

[00:11:18] There are evidently a lot of problems with lots of these cryptids, these monsters, which make their existence pretty hard to believe.

[00:11:28] However, this doesn't mean that we should [denounce](#)³⁹ anyone who is interested in cryptozoology as a complete [nutcase](#)⁴⁰, a complete crazy person and [fraud](#).

[00:11:40] Indeed, being interested in cryptozoology doesn't automatically mean that you believe the Loch Ness monster is real and that the deep ocean is full of giant squids and sea monsters.

³⁷ relating to geology, the study of the rocks and soil that make up the Earth

³⁸ believe can be true

³⁹ criticised publicly

⁴⁰ crazy person

[00:11:53] There are plenty of [cryptozoologists](#) who take a more scientific approach, [discounting](#)⁴¹ the more [improbable](#) cryptids, so things like Nessie and Bigfoot, but being interested in the ones where the evidence for their existence is greater.

[00:12:11] And indeed, we haven't 'finished' discovering new species; new species are still being discovered every year, and the [rate](#)⁴² of discovery hasn't slowed, [contrary](#)⁴³ to what many people think.

[00:12:25] In 2019, seventy one new animal and plant species were discovered, and it's estimated that 90% of the animal and plant species that exist in the world are still unknown, we haven't discovered them yet.

[00:12:41] The majority of these are insects and plants, but not all of them.

[00:12:47] A paper from the Royal Society, so very much a serious scientific [institution](#)⁴⁴, this paper predicted that there are at least 160 land mammals that are yet to be discovered, and over 3,000 [amphibian](#)⁴⁵ species that are yet to be discovered.

⁴¹ not believing

⁴² speed

⁴³ opposite

⁴⁴ large and important institution

⁴⁵ an animal that lives both on land and in water

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[00:13:07] Will these contain the Yeti, The Loch Ness Monster and giant squids?

Probably not, but there's evidently still a lot of the natural world that we don't fully understand.

[00:13:21] And one positive thing about cryptozoology is that it is an [admittal](#)⁴⁶ that there is still a lot of the world that we are yet to discover.

[00:13:31] Of course, this may not be the [golden era](#) of Charles Darwin, or the time where an [intrepid](#)⁴⁷ young zoologist could [head off](#)⁴⁸ on a mission into the jungles of the Congo, the Amazon rainforest, or Borneo and come back with a [journal](#)⁴⁹ full of exciting new discoveries.

[00:13:50] The new animals and plants that are being discovered now are mainly insects, and there is a lot of 'discovery' that is essentially realising that two animals that we had thought were the same were actually two different species.

[00:14:07] It's not exactly heading into the Himalayas and coming back with evidence of the Yeti, but it's still a [valid](#)⁵⁰ zoological discovery that helps us better understand the planet we live on.

⁴⁶ confession

⁴⁷ brave and adventurous

⁴⁸ leave

⁴⁹ diary

⁵⁰ true, acceptable

[00:14:20] Sadly enough though, there are [models](#)⁵¹ that predict that a proportion of these yet-undiscovered but real animals will be [extinct](#)⁵² before we can ever discover them, that we will have driven them to [extinction](#)⁵³ before they can be discovered and [catalogued](#)⁵⁴ by [zoologists](#).

[00:14:38] That certainly is a sad thought, but if an interest in mystery animals and cryptozoology can inspire a new generation of [budding](#)⁵⁵ young [zoologists](#) to explore the natural world and help [conserve](#)⁵⁶ these rare species that we might never even discover, then that surely has to be a good thing.

[00:15:02] OK then, that is it for today's episode on Cryptozoology, the hunt for mysterious animals.

[00:15:11] I hope it's been an interesting one, and that you've learnt something new.

[00:15:16] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode. You can head right in to our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and start chatting away to other curious minds and of course to me.

⁵¹ mathematical predictions

⁵² no longer existing

⁵³ the state of no longer existing

⁵⁴ added to a list

⁵⁵ keen, beginning to show signs of interest in a subject

⁵⁶ keep and protect

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[00:15:29] I can't wait to see what you have to say.

[00:15:32] And as a final reminder, if you are looking to improve your English in a more interesting way, to join a community of curious minds from all over the world, and to unlock the transcripts, the subtitles, and key vocabulary, then the place to go is leonardoenglish.com

[00:15:52] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English

[00:15:57] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Physiology	the study of the way in which the bodies of living things work
Passionate	feeling strongly about something
Traced back	find the origins of
Golden era	the best time (to be doing something)
Status quo	the present situation
Zoologists	people who study zoology
Komodo dragon	a very large lizard that lives in Indonesia
Classified	given a name and put into a particular group
Unpack	to understand an idea by considering all of its parts
Dismissed	considered to be unimportant
Benefit of the doubt	if you give something the benefit of the doubt, you accept it until you see a reason not to
Rigorous	careful and considerate
Undertaken	done, conducted

In short	used when you want to express the main point of an argument
Amateurs	people who take part in an activity out of pleasure, not professionally
Improbable	not likely (to exist)
Humped	with large, raised parts
Debunked	proved to be untrue
Supposed	claimed to be true
Swans	large white birds with long necks
Canoe	a small, narrow boat, pointed at both ends
Fraud	someone who deceives people
Out of the corner of your eye	if you see something out of the corner of your eye, you notice it accidentally without seeing it properly
Popping out	if something pops out, only a small part of it is visible
Instant	a very short period
Jump to the conclusion	believe something before knowing all the facts
Embellished	if a story is embellished, details are added that aren't true

Eye-witnesses	people who saw an event
Unreliable	not trusted
Sceptical	doubting
Mythical	not real, existing only in stories
Cryptozoologists	people who are interested in cryptozoology
Obey	behave according to a rule or law
Remains	the body of someone or something who has died
Indicate	show, suggest
Implausible	not believable
Geological	relating to geology, the study of the rocks and soil that make up the Earth
Rationalise	believe can be true
Denounce	criticised publicly
Nutcase	crazy person
Discounting	not believing
Rate	speed

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Contrary	opposite
Institution	large and important institution
Amphibian	an animal that lives both on land and in water
Admittal	confession
Intrepid	brave and adventurous
Head off	leave
Journal	diary
Valid	true, acceptable
Models	mathematical predictions
Extinct	no longer existing
Extinction	the state of no longer existing
Catalogued	added to a list
Budding	keen, beginning to show signs of interest in a subject
Conserve	keep and protect

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

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What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com