



CRYPTIC WILDLIFE

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In the darkness of the forest, a sound is heard that cannot be explained. Somewhere on a backcountry road, an image crosses someone's path. What are these strange sounds and sightings? Some claim to know exactly what they are, while others can only speculate. Cryptic wildlife is a hot topic among believers and non-believers alike. Some people are determined to prove the existence of these creatures through the study of "cryptozoology," the search for animals that are considered legendary or otherwise nonexistent by mainstream biology. These individuals dedicate countless hours to searching for these supposed hidden marvels of our outdoor world.

Cryptozoologists look for two groups of animals that can be referred to as cryptic species. These two groups are comprised of animals that are considered extinct or out of place, or species that are not recorded to have existed except by myth, legend, sightings, or some other evidence that is less than concrete.

Extinct or Just Out of Place?

Cryptic wildlife supposedly in Alabama are those species considered extinct or out of place. The most known and talked about of this group are those of the large cats reportedly sighted across the state. Of these species, the panther, also known as the cougar, puma, or mountain lion, makes up the largest percentage of the reported sightings. The cougar once called this area home, but no official report of the animal has been recorded in decades. Although there is still a small breeding population of cougars located in south Florida, it is unlikely that any of these cats are in Alabama due to the lack of physical evidence such as road-killed individuals.

Other possible mystery cats roaming the woods that seem to acquire the most attention are the jaguar and jaguarundi. Jaguars

are native to South and Central America and have been reported as far north as New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona. Jaguarundis are also found in South America and have been sighted as far north as New Mexico and Texas. Additionally, there have been confirmed sightings of jaguarundis in Florida, believed to be descendants of a small number of cats released in the state in the 1940s.

Myth and Legend?

The second group of species sought out by cryptozoologists is of the mythical variety. These creatures are the ones that are not supposed to exist, despite their popularity or the many people who claim to have seen them. The most popular and legendary of these is Bigfoot. Reported to be a bipedal primate with dark red to black hair, most sightings describe an animal over 6 feet in height with a stocky muscular build. Sightings continue to emerge throughout the country. There are even websites dedicated to the creature. However, as with many cryptic species, there is not enough evidence to support the sightings and other claims of Bigfoot's existence.

A part of all of us would like to believe the unknown is always possible and all evidence is good evidence. However, most sightings of the crypto wildlife we hear about are merely that of misidentification or possibly hoaxes that are known to occur. Dogs, large house cats, or perhaps dark colored bobcats can cause even an experienced eye to cast a second glance under the right conditions. It is part of the wonder of the outdoors that keeps our eyes glued to the nearest woods. If the day comes when someone can go into the forest knowing the exact species of bird they will see that given day, or where every track was laid the day before, the world will be a less intriguing place. 🐾