

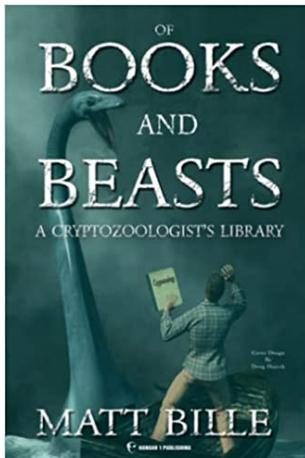
BOOK REVIEW

## *Of Books and Beasts: A Cryptozoologist's Library* by Matt Bille

Reviewed by  
**Bruce A. Champagne**

[Bruce.champagne@lycos.com](mailto:Bruce.champagne@lycos.com)

[www.brucechampagne.com](http://www.brucechampagne.com)



Hangar 1 Publishing, 2021  
ISBN 978-1955471275

<https://doi.org/10.31275/20222643>

PLATINUM OPEN ACCESS



Creative Commons License 4.0.  
CC-BY-NC. Attribution required.  
No commercial use.

Opportunities for the peer-reviewed presentation of specifically cryptozoological subjects are currently limited to the *Relict Hominoid Inquiry* (RHI, 2012–present) and the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* (JSE, 1987–present). As a result, books not only have an important role in providing historical information and current data and theory but can be preferable to other sources as the reader can evaluate the value of a book by the author’s approach and sources. There are many cryptozoological titles but they are not equal in contribution, hence the value of this library.

### DISCLOSURES

Matt Bille and I have been co-contributors (Heinselmann, 2007) and have conversed about cryptozoology and natural history over the years. I was actually reading his book *Of Books and Beasts* when I was asked to review it and had already commented that his book has earned a place on the bookshelf as a great reference and a considered “must have” for those interested in the field. Currently, the book has positive reviews on the Amazon (Amazon Customer Reviews, 2022) and Barnes and Noble sites and elsewhere (Radford, 2022; Shuker, 2022), and won the 2022 General Nonfiction Award from the Colorado Authors League.

### CONTENT OVERVIEW

Bille’s suggested library of more than 400 titles and personal observations has particular relevance because of his extensive background in the field and his reputation. His opinion is valuable. One need only look at the book’s acknowledgments to see that Bille has had contact with many of the major cryptozoological contributors and interested scientists of the last thirty years. Bille is also an author and blogger of science, space, technology, and cryptozoology-themed subjects and recognizes well-conceived and well-crafted writing.

My paperback copy of Bille’s book was published by Doug Hajicek’s publishing company Hangar 1 Publishing. It is my understanding that the first copies did not have a numbered index though my purchased copy does. Bille divided his effort into an Introduction, a 123-page section on general subjects of cryptozoology, a 96-page section dealing with related sciences, a third, crypto fiction section of 33 pages, a 17-page section titled “Marvelous Miscellany,” an Afterword, acknowledgements, and a sectioned index of both titles and authors.

Bille made his selections based on a book’s influence and its useful information. All books were personally read by Bille, less than 100 years old, and printed in English. Bille does not represent this book as an exhaustive list and allows that some titles were overlooked as a result of time constraints, finances, and life.



Bille's Introduction reminds the reader that "While cryptozoology can and should be a science, it is too rarely practiced using robust scientific methods. . . . Serious cryptozoological researchers who want to understand the field must start with reading." Perhaps, like me, you've heard researchers justify their unfamiliarity with subject literature or their lack of proper attribution by implying that their field activity makes up for their poor understanding and lack of testing and examination of previous data and theory. Unfortunately, the result is that cryptozoology can be strongly influenced by poor science.

Bille reviewed definitions of cryptozoology and proposed his own:

A scientific endeavor that takes traditional zoological methods of animal location, collection, and identification (using field work, local reports of animals, chance discovery of trophies, etc.) and widens the aperture to consider animals based on evidence not firm enough or consistent enough to draw interest from most zoologists.

I applaud Bille's much-needed efforts to refocus and realign the field with foundational science.

The book is offered as a guide and basic reading list to current and future "generations" of cryptozoologists and other interested students. As intended, Bille's descriptions and "musings" will probably be valuable to the skeptic, the experienced, and those new to the field, and provide some important obvious and inferred reminders and clarifications for each group.

Though Bille is a self-described skeptic "in the proper sense of the word" in his acceptance of hypothetical species and his review of the literature describing them, Bille seems to understand his approach may also illustrate the differences in intention and utility by self-described skeptics.

Much to the frustration of both academics and citizen scientists studying cryptozoological subjects, the skeptical philosophy, with its acknowledged disciplinary conflict (Hill, 2016), is often encouraged and employed with the passionate default of cognitive bias, as opposed to being an implement of the scientific method. Just as with some of the cryptozoological proposals they scrutinize, skeptical exercises can commonly result in incomplete analysis and implausible proposals or superficial criticism. Perhaps future skeptics could provide more scientifically rigorous examinations of data and meaningful contributions with foundational reviews and more substantive examinations of some of the works Bille included.

However, both new students and researchers within the fields of cryptozoology must also improve in analysis, falsification, and presentation of their efforts and data.

Bille also appropriately laments the scarcity of "robust" scientific methodology practiced by cryptozoologists. Bille is not wrong.

I'm fortunate to be able to participate with a cryptozoology-themed study group of citizen scientist cryptozoologists and objective professionals and academics, most of whom remain anonymous for the time being. The academics suggest that a cryptozoologist's work should always regard previous literature and work and be written and presented in an acceptable scientific format, and, of course, be defensible.

These practicing scientists and academics also encouraged cryptozoologists to discard the connections, Bille describes them as "entanglements," between hypothetical species and the paranormal, cloaking, mindspeak, portals, travel within dimensions, quantum physics, etc. Additionally, the inclusion of biologically implausible subjects (Mothman, Dogman, Jersey Devil, etc.) should have no place in cryptozoology when practiced as a science. Such incredible ideas negatively impact datasets, discourage the participation and support of academics and citizen scientists, compromise credibility, and relegate the study to folklore and popular culture.

The book's first section, "Cryptozoology Books," contains what Bille suggests "should be a basic reading list of the classics in the field." These foundational titles range in time from 1937 to 2021 and cover relict hominoids, aquatic megafauna, felids, birds, persistent dinosaurs and extinct Pleistocene mammals and marsupials, encyclopedias, location-specific overviews, and mothmen and dogmen (Bille is appropriately critical). I did note a few important titles that were not included. Among them was Mark Hall's *Thunderbirds* (2012), T. A. Wilson's *Bigfoot in Evolutionary Perspective* (2015), and William Munns' examination of the Patterson-Gimlin film *When Roger Met Patty* (2014).

The next section, "Related Sciences," is soundly introduced by Bille's opinion that the cryptozoological academic and field researcher, and even parent, "must know" foundational science. This section is a helpful support to the book's introduction of cryptozoology as a science. Included are titles on paleontology, evolution and extinction, dinosaurs, scientific literacy, exploration and field research, and environmental ecology. Bille suggests that familiarity with this material will help researchers "ask the right questions."

Formulating thoughtful and productive questions to evaluate plausibility and experimental design would go a long way to advancing the field generally and datasets specifically. Understanding evolution, selection, and scientific terminology is critical to developing theory and making defensible arguments and addressing the criticisms of the lack of critical thinking and of scientific falsification.

Section three, “Crypto-Fiction,” begins with Bille’s reminder that crypto-fiction probably predates written fiction and provides an opportunity to present ideas to the public. Bille has a significant background as a fiction writer and provides some experienced advice for both the new and established author.

The last section, “A Marvelous Miscellany,” includes those titles Bille’s suggests “are too important, interesting, or enjoyable to skip.” These include field guides, explorations, paranormal compendiums (for their sources), anthologies, speculative evolution, regional reviews, folklore, fiction, conspiracy theory, natural history, and even coloring books. Bille concludes with a listing of his own authored titles.

### PROS, CONS, AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE

Aside from a few more items that could have been included, this book contains many of the major titles, reads easily, and is enjoyable. Bille has made a meaningful contribution to the literature and field by evaluating and consolidating essential material. I would suggest of equal importance is Bille’s effort to encourage a return or adherence to the scaffolding of critical thought, objectivity, and scientific methodology.

### REFERENCES

- Amazon Customer Reviews. (2022). *Of Books and Beasts: A Cryptozoologist’s Library (Beasts of the World)* by Matt Bille. [https://www.amazon.com/Books-Beasts-Cryptozoologists-Library-World/dp/1955471274/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=JL7GVLS0C9DD&keywords=matt+bille&qid=1649530085&srefix=%2Caps%2C786&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Books-Beasts-Cryptozoologists-Library-World/dp/1955471274/ref=sr_1_1?crid=JL7GVLS0C9DD&keywords=matt+bille&qid=1649530085&srefix=%2Caps%2C786&sr=8-1)
- Hall, M. (2012). *Thunderbirds*. Paraview Press.
- Heinselman, C. (2007). *Elementum bestia*. Crypto.
- Hill, S. (2016). Time to upgrade the skeptical operating system. Reboot. *Skeptical Inquirer, Issues in Science and Skepticism; A 40th Anniversary Celebration*, 40(5).
- JSE. (1987–present). *Journal of Scientific Exploration*. Society for Scientific Exploration. <https://www.scientificexploration.org/journal-library>; <https://journalofscientificexploration.org/index.php/jse/login>
- Munns, W. (2014). *When Roger met Patty; 1 minute of film, 47 years of controversy*. Free on Kindle Unlimited.
- Radford, B. (2022, March 28). *A book of books about beasts*. <http://benjaminradford.com/2022/03/28/a-book-of-books-about-beasts/>
- RHI. (2012–present). *Relict Hominoid Inquiry*. Idaho State University. <https://www.isu.edu/rhi/>
- Shuker, K. (2022, March 21). *Of books and beasts by Matt Bille, a Shukernature book review*. *Shukernature*. <https://karlshuker.blogspot.com/2022/03/of-books-and-beasts-by-matt-bille.html>
- Wilson, T. A. (2015). *Bigfoot in evolutionary perspective; The hidden life of a North American hominin*. CreateSpace.