



**STUDENT AND
CITIZEN SCIENCE**

The Jersey Devil: Examining a Phenomenon Obscured by Myth

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INTRODUCTION

The “Jersey Devil” is a strange and mysterious creature that is alleged to haunt the deep swamp of the Pine Barrens of New Jersey (USA). It is said to have the head of a horse, the wings of a bat, and the body of a kangaroo, with long talons, a forked tail, and glowing eyes. The appearance is often described as terrifying, and it is reported to emit bloodcurdling screams (Atlantic County Government, 2022). The modern history of the Jersey Devil can be traced back to the mid-1700s, with the first published reference to the Leeds Devil (Regal & Esposito, 2018). The

story goes that a woman named Mother Leeds gave birth to her 13th child on a dark and stormy night, and the child was born with wings, a forked tail, and hooves instead of feet. The creature supposedly flew up the chimney and has haunted the Pine Barrens ever since. However, earlier accounts of strange creatures in the area hint at a longer tradition (Atlantic County Government, 2022).

In 1909, the Jersey Devil achieved celebrity status with a wave of sightings fostered or recounted by newspapers so that the local monster became famous state-wide (and beyond) as the “Jersey” Devil. The newspapers fueled the hysteria by publishing sensational stories and

HIGHLIGHTS

Reports of this legendary creature involve an array of strange events that mirror some “paranormal” hotspots found elsewhere, suggesting there is more than a simple myth or biological mystery at work.

ABSTRACT

This descriptive study delves into the enigmatic nature of the “Jersey Devil,” an enduring legend of a cryptid from New Jersey (USA) while acknowledging its historical and folklore roots. The absence of tangible evidence regarding the alleged creature’s existence has often prompted explorations into metaphysical and supernatural explanations. Accordingly, three sets of theories about the creature’s origin are considered: terrestrial, interdimensional, and extraterrestrial. Events associated with the Jersey Devil compare well to, and might be linked with, documented flurries of accounts involving cryptids, UFOs, and high strangeness at alleged “paranormal” hotspots like Skinwalker Ranch in Utah and Point Pleasant in West Virginia. Caution is needed when considering esoteric theories, but the consistency of sightings over time might argue for the possibility of interdimensional or extraterrestrial entities. Finally, the paper discusses the notion of the Jersey Devil phenomenon serving as a control mechanism or a means of instilling fear of the unknown.

KEYWORDS

Citizen science, cryptid, Jersey Devil, folklore, monster, urban legend.



offering rewards for capturing the creature. The result was a spate of sightings and hoaxes, which helped to perpetuate the legend of the Jersey Devil. Over time, literature and a system of beliefs have grown up around the Jersey Devil, treating it as popular history, state history, scholarly history, folklore, anomaly, and cryptid. This literature highlights the different ways in which the creature is viewed and understood by different people.

This study argues that the Jersey Devil exists or may exist in several formats simultaneously. Firstly, it belongs to folklore, with local legend as a traditional monster and in an alleged event with a basis in religious belief. The legend may persist as a relic no longer believed, but the myth is adaptive and updates the monster with new and currently credible characteristics. The Jersey Devil is an iconic figure in New Jersey folklore and has become part of the state's cultural identity. Secondly, the Jersey Devil has a place in popular culture where hoaxes, newspaper yarns, humor, and local pride create a fictitious life that provides entertainment and sustains interest but does not depend on belief. The Jersey Devil has appeared in films, T.V. shows, comics, and video games and has become a popular Halloween costume. Finally, the Jersey Devil's appearance is an anomalous event that witnesses have experienced for hundreds of years and supports the reality of an objective cryptid for proponents, while for skeptics, the experience results from misidentification of conventional sights, with witnesses misled by expectations of a monster resulting from the influence of the tradition. Sightings of the Jersey Devil date back hundreds of years and make their way into the present; there have been reports of tracks, livestock deaths, and other signs attributed to the creature.

This paper explores these different perspectives within a detailed analysis of the Jersey Devil and its place in folklore, popular culture, and cryptozoology. By examining the history and various interpretations of the Jersey Devil, we can, therefore, address the question of whether or not the Jersey Devil is ontologically "real."

History of the Phenomenon

To understand the reality of all that has come to be known as the "Jersey Devil," it is necessary to separate the *Events* from the *Legend* and then separate the *Legend* from the *Folklore* (or *Myth*). Events are isolated incidents. Events matching the same description form a pattern. The pattern gives rise to Legend. The Legend becomes Myth. However, witness reports of the Jersey Devil are similar to a larger set of winged humanoid cryptid sightings that have no discernible beginning, end, or geographical boundaries. Legends and myths can both obscure and

explain patterns. In addition to being the number one suspect in all manner of high strangeness around the Pine Barrens area in New Jersey (Coleman & Hallenbeck, 2010), the Jersey Devil has become a trope. The creature is a pop culture icon, but it began with terror of the unknown, which has not yet stopped (Gillespie, 1993). To be sure, apparent sightings of "The Jersey Devil" continue to the present, so the question of whether the Jersey Devil is ontologically "real" also persists.

Gillespie (1993) described the definition of a Legend in relation to the Jersey Devil as follows:

By definition, a legend is a story in prose that has been handed down orally from generation after generation. It is generally regarded by its tellers as true. Unlike myth, which usually deals with something far away and long ago, legend is concerned with the immediate historical past. Legend is sometimes referred to as folk history, but, of course, it is history as changed by passing a story orally from person to person (p. 42).

In the case of the Jersey Devil, the exact pattern of events that inspired the legend is unknown. Yet, as Gillespie noted, the tellers of the original tale regarded it as true. It was not a ghost story meant for entertainment. The oral tradition predates printed references to the Jersey Devil by at least 100 years. Folklorists often trace the origin of the present-day myth to the mid-18th Century when it came to be known as "The Leeds Devil" (Atlantic County Government, 2022).

At this point, the creature became a myth. It was no longer a tale in which the teller regarded it as necessarily true. In fact, research points to newspapers and politicians blatantly sharing the tale as a form of anti-British propaganda. Despite this, the description of the creature of myth was solidified in the minds of the public. Thus, the legend and myth grew independently of the events. Sightings of a winged humanoid creature predated the "Leeds Devil" Legend (and therefore the myth). Sightings continued during the creation of the myth; while some witnesses to the Jersey Devil report a creature exactly like the one in the myth, other witnesses encountered a vaguely similar creature. Yet, the sightings continue into the present day, as does the question of the creature's existence.

Before the Legend to 1730

Prior to its appearance as "The Leeds Devil" in the 18th century (The "Jersey Devil" name would not become popularized until the 20th century), the name given to

flying cryptids encountered in the Pine Barrens is unknown. It was most likely referred to simply as “the devil” or “the dragon.” There are numerous references online and in print to this creature appearing in the oral tradition of the local Native American tribe of the Leni Lenape, as well as Swedish Explorers who named the area “Drake Kill.” For instance,

The first people to note the presence of a peculiar animal in the general area were the Native Americans, who said it originally appeared across state lines in what is now Bucks County, Pennsylvania (where alleged sightings of the Devil have been made in recent years), just north of Philadelphia. In fact, the local Indians named the creek Popuessing, meaning “place of the dragon” (Coleman & Hallenbeck, 2010, p. 6).

Local Jersey and Lenape oral traditions mention a strange creature in the Pine Barrens existing prior to the colonists’ appearance. There are similarities between the Jersey Devil and the ritual spirits of the Lenape. Authors James McCloy and Ray Miller draw comparisons between the legends of the Jersey Devil and a Delaware Native American deity known as the Mising (McCloy & Miller, 1998). In particular,

To the Native Americans, the Mising was a protector deity who had to be worshipped to prevent natural calamities such as storms or earthquakes, and its function with children took place throughout the year. If a Delaware child misbehaved or was sick, the family summoned the Mising impersonator for a visit...There are clearly certain parallels between the Mising and the Jersey Devil, who at times appeared as a hairy creature walking on its hind legs, reminiscent of the Mising ritual costume. Virtually the only god that the Delawares attempted to impersonate, the Mising represented the only strange creature fashioned by the Native Americans the early white settlers might have seen in an already alien culture. European settlers observing this creature would have been frightened, and because of the fear, the Mising ceremony was often called the ‘Devil Dance’ by whites” (McCloy & Miller, 1998, p. 26).

Parents passed the stories that they gathered down to their children, which kept them from entering the swamp at night. Gillespie (1993) pointed to this as a socio-psychological function of the Jersey Devil myth. It

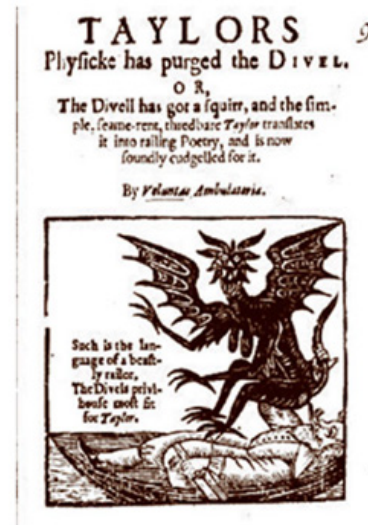


Figure 1. 1640’s Quaker Pamphlet - fair use

thus became an embodiment of terror and was thus ripe for myth. When confronted with a terror they could not identify, early American settlers developed their own set of myths surrounding the terror. Their perception of monsters and myths gravitated toward their cultural embodiment of evil. The Legend of the Jersey Devil calls back to America’s Quaker roots, and images of “The Devil” seen in Quaker pamphlets from the 1600s (see Figure 1) likely informed the description of the mythical creature found in the Leeds tale (Regal, 2013). These early images of the Devil (or Satan) —which themselves are reminiscent of images found in Fae religions and earlier Pagan traditions—are either the reason Quaker settlers imagined the creature as they did in the Leeds Devil or the creature



Figure 2. Basilica of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo (Ravenna, Italy) Showing Early depiction of Satan. [Wikimedia commons.](#)



Figure 3. Image of the Devil from the 13th-century *Codex Gigas* (Wikimedia Commons).

that inspired the images of grotesque humanoid animal deities and faeries in Europe, also occupied the Pine Barrens and was reinterpreted as the Jersey Devil.

This depiction of the Devil does not have its roots in the Christian Bible. It is an invention of the Medieval Christian Church. In the Bible, the Devil is not described as having horns or wings. He is said to take the appearance of an Angel of light. “And no marvel; for even Satan fashions himself into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). The earliest image of Satan is thought to originate in a 6th-century mosaic. It imagines the Devil as a blue-winged angel (Denova, 2021).

Later images of the Devil would re-imagine him as more grotesque and animalistic, adding horns and a tail (see Figure 3). Hobgoblins, imps, and fairies were already established in English folklore during the Medieval period (Grollemond & Keene, 2022), and the Quakers were heavily influenced by Medieval superstition. The Church, therefore, incorporated these elements into its artistic interpretations of the Devil, and the Devil in some Quaker images came to be associated with an image very similar to the image of the Jersey Devil in folklore (Regal, 2013).

Mark (2021) summarized the synthesis of superstition and experience in his article: “Religion and Superstition in Colonial America:”

The Bible made it clear that the Devil and his evil spirits were as much a reality as God and his angels, and either – or both – could be at work in one’s life at any given time. Superstitions, therefore, developed naturally from religious belief and confirmed the colonists’ worldview (what is

known today as confirmation bias) and directed their responses to the events of their lives. As more superstitions were “confirmed” through experience, they became more deeply embedded in the cultural consciousness and periodically found expression through events such as witch trials, banishments, and various persecutions of marginalized segments of the population. Although people in the modern day may find many of the acts of the early colonists incomprehensible, they were a natural development of the superstitions encouraged by the religious beliefs of the time (para 4).

As Mark pointed out, it is not just the Devil but also his evil spirits that were part of Quaker reality. Medieval Christianity was influenced by forms of Paganism, which came before it. Paganism included many depictions of animal-human hybrids (many with wings). These images likely informed the grotesque images of the Devil and, subsequently, the Jersey Devil (see Figure 4). It is also possible the winged humanoids of Paganism were themselves representations of a larger winged humanoid phenomenon. Winged humanoids have been depicted in art and reportedly seen throughout history.

The Leeds Devil Legend Becomes Jersey Devil Myth

Around the end of the 18th century came the beginning of the modern version of the myth. As the most predominant story goes: Around 1735, a woman named Deborah “Mother” Leeds was about to have her 13th child. She was a Quaker woman and extremely poor. So, with 12 mouths to feed, she took her anger out on the child and the Lord. While pregnant, she shouted: “Let this one be the devil.” When the child was born legend says it had a



Figure 4. 1909 *Philadelphia Bulletin* Sketch of the Jersey Devil (Wikimedia Commons)

horse's head. It grew wings, horns, and a tail, killed the attending midwife, then promptly flew up the chimney and into the night (Gillespie, 1993).

There are also alternate versions of the origin of the creature. The most predominant variants are listed on the official New Jersey Government website (N.J. Gov Staff., 2022): "A different story says that a town put a curse on a young girl who fell in love with a British soldier during the Revolutionary War. When she gave birth, it was to the Jersey Devil. Another story says a gypsy cursed a girl because she didn't give the gypsy food. The curse caused her to give birth to the Jersey Devil" (para. 2). They offer the most common description of the Legendary Creature as well:

Locals in the Pine Barrens call it the Leeds Devil. They say it has a horse's head, long legs with hooves, two short front legs, and a bat's wings. No one knows how tall it is. Some people think it's six feet tall, others think it's only three or four feet tall. The Devil has glowing red eyes and makes loud screeching sounds (para. 3)

The Leeds tale is the most popular myth of the origin of the Jersey Devil, and it may indicate where this particular myth originated as well — Leeds Point, New Jersey.

Modern members of the Leeds family do not seem to mind and are even having a little fun with it. Some have joked that the Jersey Devil is their cousin, and therefore, the Leeds family does not need to fear it. However, they are not the only family accused of being related to the Devil. Some locals of Leeds Point assert the name of the mother was Shroud, and the actual house the creature

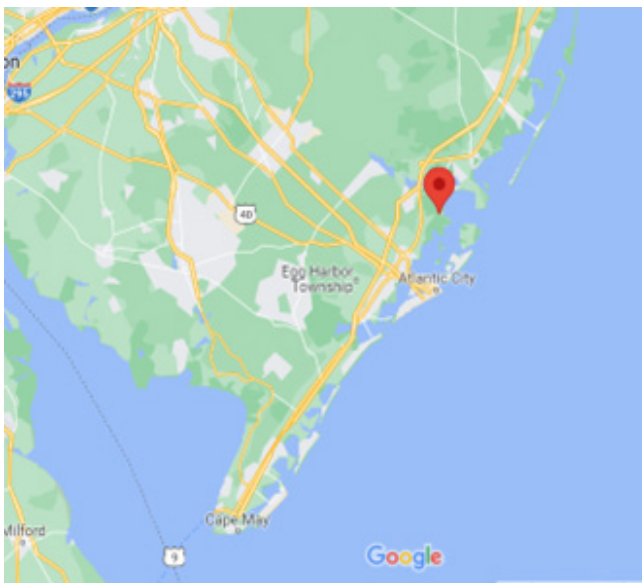


Figure 5. Map Showing Leeds Point, New Jersey



Figure 6. Japhet Leeds House, Moss Mill Road, Leeds Point, Atlantic County, NJ Photos from Survey HABS NJ-399 (Library of Congress).

was born in was the Shroud house. Both Daniel Leeds and Samuel Shroud lived near Leeds Point around 1735. Those who insist Samuel Shroud is the source of the legend claim the "Leeds" in "Leeds Devil" refers to Leeds Point as opposed to Daniel Leeds last name. Based on the work of noted Jersey Devil scholar Brian Regal (cf. Regal & Esposito, 2018), the most likely (and political) origin of the Jersey Devil / Leeds Devil "Legend" is that of Daniel Leeds.

Regardless to whom the "Leeds" in "Leeds Devil" actually refers, newspapers periodically reprinted the "13th child" story prior to 1909 and began to refer to the creature as the "Leeds Devil." The Legend became centered around Leeds Point. The arrival of the Leeds Devil in print during the 1800s, and the fact it was known as the "Leeds Devil" during the period, lends support to historians who consider the "Leeds Devil" portion of the Jersey Devil a creation of political propaganda and anti-British sentiment. The War of 1812 indeed laid fertile ground for a British devil of journalistic creation (McCloy & Miller, 1976, p. 18).

The most famous sighting prior to 1909 occurred when Naval Commodore Stephen Decatur allegedly shot a huge flying creature with a cannonball. Witnesses claimed the cannonball had no effect, which might suggest a supernatural character to the event. However, the creature in this incident was alleged to resemble a flying pterodactyl (Atlantic County Government, 2022). This is not the description of the Jersey Devil of pop culture and folklore, and so provides a notable example of a cryptid with a different description in the Jersey swamps being lumped into Jersey Devil folklore. Joseph Bonaparte, elder brother of the famous French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, is said to have had an encounter with the Jersey Devil in 1820 during his brief residence in Bordentown,

New Jersey. According to legend, Bonaparte was hunting in the woods when he spotted the creature, described as having the body of a kangaroo, the head of a horse, and wings like a bat, among other strange features. Despite being armed, Bonaparte was said to have been too frightened to shoot the creature and fled the area. The historical veracity of the Bonaparte encounter is often debated, yet it continues to be widely circulated in folklore and mentioned in print (Aubrey, 2021).

1909

In early 1909, a wave of sightings of the Jersey Devil occurred, which garnered extensive newspaper attention (Library of Congress, 2023). The sightings included reports of mysterious tracks in the snow, the sound of flapping wings, and stories of the creature attacking a trolley car, seen by multiple witnesses, and law enforcement firing at it. "These sightings were reported in various newspapers in the region, such as the *Asbury Park Press*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Trenton Times* (Editors, 1909a, 1909b, 1909c, 1909d, 1909e, 1909f). Figure 7 shows the January 20th Edition of the *Asbury Park Press*, which published a photograph of cloven footprints with the headline: "What

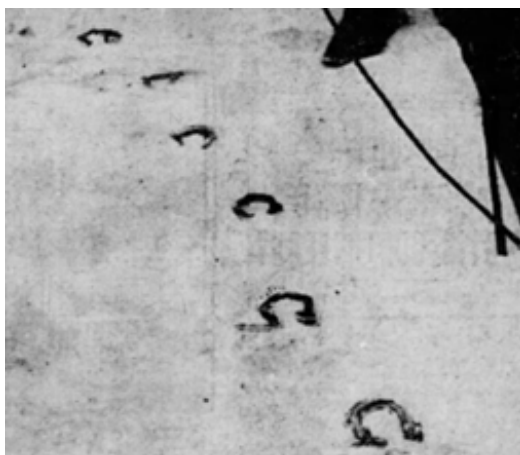
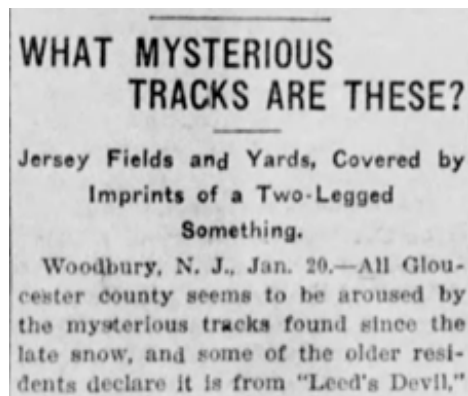


Figure 7. 1909 News Clipping About Mysterious Footprints (*Asbury Park Press*)

Mysterious Tracks are These?" The article went on to state some of the older residents claimed that the tracks came from the Leeds Devil, and the creature was seen everywhere. Newspapers competing for cash were willing to take reports from anyone. A showman went so far as to dress up as a kangaroo and claim he had captured the monster (Atlantic County Government, 2022).

The coverage of the Jersey Devil in the newspapers was significant, with articles printed daily, sometimes even twice a day. The newspapers were eager for a sensation to sell copies, and the Jersey Devil provided just that (Atlantic County Government, 2022). The articles printed included exposed hoaxes and printed jokes, but also printed images of the creature, and claimed that scientists were investigating (Philadelphia Inquirer, 1909). The sightings in 1909 were considered a high point of the Jersey Devil as an experienced anomaly. The wave of sightings was so intense that the scientific community was brought in to investigate. Newspapers reported that science professors from Philadelphia and experts from the Smithsonian Institution thought the Devil could be a prehistoric creature from the Jurassic period. The New York scientists thought it to be a marsupial carnivore, while others believed it to be an extinct fissiped. The Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, however, could not locate any record of a living or dead species resembling the Jersey Devil. According to the County of Atlantic City:

Reportedly, science professors from Philadelphia and experts from the Smithsonian Institution thought the Devil to be a prehistoric creature from the Jurassic period. Had the creature survived in nearby limestone caves? Was it a pterodactyl or a pelesaurus? New York scientists thought it to be a marsupial carnivore. Was it an extinct fissiped? However, the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia could not locate any record of a living or dead species resembling the Jersey Devil (Atlantic County Government, 2022, p.3 para. 3).

The newspaper coverage of the sightings varied in quality and accuracy. Some newspapers were more skeptical than others, and some even tried to debunk the sightings. For example, a 1909 *Trenton Times* article reported that a resident of the town had dressed up in a kangaroo skin and had gone out at night to frighten people. The article claimed that this was the source of the mysterious tracks that had been found. Another article dated 24 June 1909 in *The Columbian* stated that the Jersey Devil had crossed over into Spring Valley, New York, as well as referred to it as the "Jersey Bombat." These re-

ports, however, did not satiate the public's fascination with the Jersey Devil. The wave of sightings in 1909 was significant because it brought the Jersey Devil into the public consciousness. The extensive newspaper coverage of the sightings helped to spread the legend of the creature and fueled public interest in it. The coverage varied in quality and accuracy, with some newspapers trying to debunk the sightings. Nevertheless, the 1909 wave of sightings remains an important event in the history of the Jersey Devil legend, and its significance is still felt today.

1909 to the Present

Following the 1909 wave and the Philadelphia Academy of Sciences' statement that they could find no record of the creature, sightings slowed but did not stop (McCloy & Miller, 1976). A group of boys in Gibbstown, NJ, claimed to have seen the creature, and a hunt followed, though (other than tracks) no material evidence was found or visually confirmed by authorities (Coleman & Hallenbeck, 2010). However, several livestock killings in the 1840s, 1920s, and 1960s were attributed to the Jersey Devil:

An extraordinary mangling of dogs and livestock near the Mullica River in 1966, when Steven Silkotch found his poultry farm ravaged by a ghastly night intruder. To his astonishment, he found strewn about and cruelly mauled the carcasses of thirty-one ducks, three geese, four cats, and two large dogs, one of which was a ninety-pound German Shepard. The unfortunate Shepards thick collar was chewed to pieces, and his body dragged a quarter of a mile from the

scene of the attack. New Jersey State Police from the Tuckerton Barracks were assigned to the case. Trooper Al Potter came upon tracks that were larger than a human hand, but the tracks were not amenable to plaster (McCloy & Miller, 1976, p. 98).

The Jersey Devil was spotted outside of New Jersey numerous times in the 20th century. During the 1930s, a period of marked high strangeness, an incident occurred in Downingtown, Pennsylvania, which caught the attention of newspapers and the use of the Jersey Devil moniker to cover creatures of varying descriptions:

The strange monster was reported shortly after 9 p.m. by Cydney Ladley, who lives near Milford Mills, just north of here. Rushing into town...Ladley, his wife, and Mrs. Chester Smith, a neighbor, told of seeing the creature on a back road near their home just as dusk was settling... 'It leaped across the road in front of my car,' Ladley said. 'It was about the size of a kangaroo. And eyes! What eyes!'" (Clark, 2012, p. 283).

Rewards were offered for its capture in the 20th century, and groups ventured out regularly into the Pine Barrens to search for the creature. Sightings continue into the present day, but the descriptions often provided in the sightings vary wildly. Some accounts that are lumped in with Jersey Devil sightings do not even reference wings (Mullane, 2018). This has led some researchers to believe that many Jersey Devil sightings are misidentified as Sas-

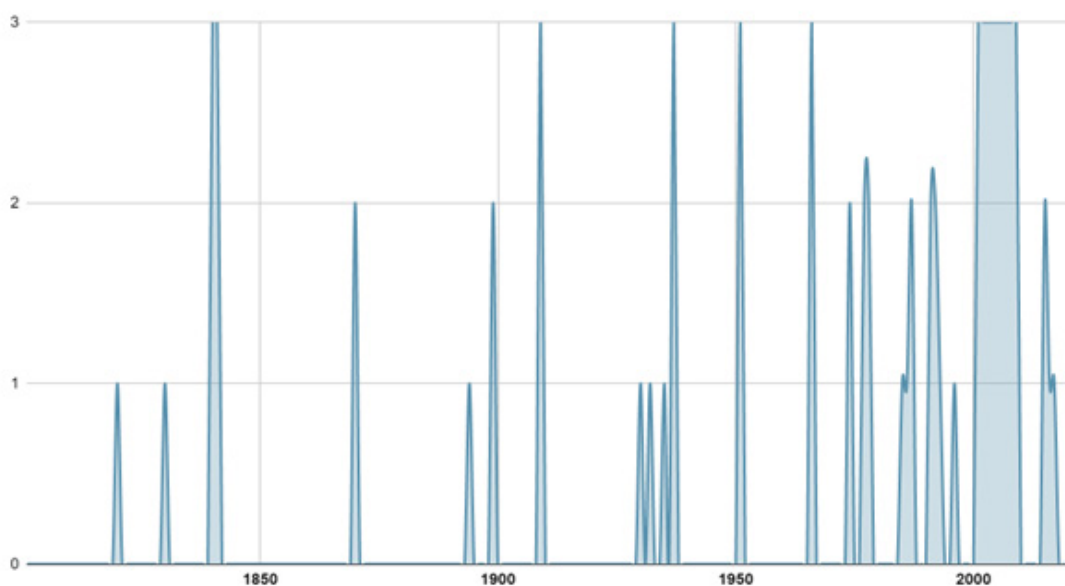


Figure 8. Known "Jersey Devil" Sightings by Year.

quatch or other cryptids.

Trend Analyses and Parallel Cryptid Sightings

The last two decades have seen a rise in reports of “paranormal” events (Kambhampaty, 2021; Lomas & Case, 2023), and the Jersey Devil is no exception. Figures 8 and 9 graph the most well-known Jersey Devil sightings by year since 1800. Furthermore, each year in which a sighting occurred; an activity level was assigned, i.e., “1” indicates a well-known, recorded sighting, “2” denotes either multiple witness encounters OR multiple livestock mutilations, and “3” refers to multiple witness encounters AND livestock mutilations occurring simultaneously, in the same time period. The result is a visual inventory of 120 years of Jersey Devil sightings categorized by their relative intensity.

We can see that the trend is clearly weighted to the modern era, with a marked increase in the frequency of sightings around the year 2000. Part of this is arguably attributable to the rise of the internet and ease of communication. Websites that tracked sightings of the Jersey Devil and other cryptids were launched in the 2000s, and this made it easier for reports to be recorded. As the volume of reports increased, misidentifications would certainly increase as well. Yet, this trend may point to an overall rise in events described as “paranormal” or a period of increased UFO sightings and high strangeness that the UFO research community typically refers to as a “flap.” Joel Hynek noted, “And what of the ‘flaps’? We have already mentioned the Air Force had three of them available for study, those of 1952, 1957 and 1966” (Hynek, 2020, p. 256). The graph prepared for this report revealed

distinct increases in Jersey Devil sightings in 1951 and 1966. Yet, the sample and chart in this report are not a complete record of Jersey Devil sightings, and the winged humanoid/ cryptid phenomenon is not confined to the Garden State (see Table 1).

For example, “Skinwalker Ranch” contains some of the most recent and well-documented, repeatable “paranormal” observations of the last 30 years. It is also the place that perhaps best demonstrates why cryptid sightings should be taken seriously at all. During the initial United States Government research of the Skinwalker Ranch site, the family of a Defense Intelligence Analyst reported seeing an upright canine (dogman, wolfman, etc.) in their backyard (Kelleher & Knapp, 2005). This cryptid experience follows a pattern of witnessing creatures at that particular location, which presumably do not exist in our reality. The activity at Skinwalker Ranch is further accompanied by UFO/UAP sightings that also occur in the Pine Barrens and around the New Jersey/ Pennsylvania areas. The events and descriptions of the creature at Skinwalker Ranch are relevant to the Jersey Devil, as they suggest a consistent trail of evidence pointing to the existence of a physical cryptid. Although the existence of a cryptid in another location and matching another description does not mean all Jersey Devil sightings are part of the same phenomenon, it does imply that a subset of Jersey Devil sightings could be a part of the same phenomenon which occurs at locations like Skinwalker Ranch, and those legitimate cryptid sightings are mistakenly attributed to a myth.

Prior to Skinwalker Ranch, well-documented cryptid sightings of the modern era occurred in 1966, 500 miles

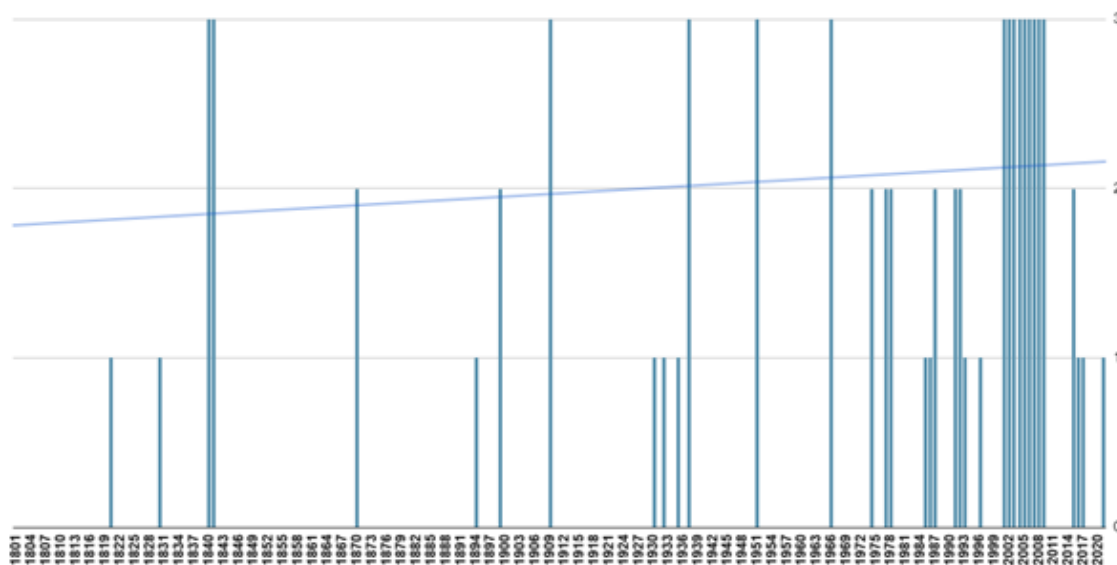


Figure 9. Trend of “Jersey Devil” Sightings Near New Jersey.



Figure 10. Local Names Given to Winged Humanoid Sightings Similar to the Jersey Devil

east of the Pine Barrens in Point Pleasant, West Virginia. At least some Jersey Devil sightings match the description of the so-called “Mothman” reported to the police and journalists. The original witnesses description of the Mothman from the *Point Pleasant Register* Nov 16, 1966, reads as follows:

The young men said they saw the creature’s eyes, which glowed red, only when their lights shined on it. And it seemed to want to get away from the lights. They said it looked like a ‘man with wings,’ but its head was ‘not an outstanding characteristic.’ Both were slightly pale and tired from the lack of sleep during the night following their harrowing experience. They speculated that the thing was living in the vacant power plant, possibly in one of the huge boilers. ‘There are pigeons in all the other buildings,’ Mallette said, ‘but not in that one.’ If I had seen it while by myself I wouldn’t have said anything,’ Scarberry commented, ‘but there were four of us who saw it.’ They said it didn’t resemble a bat in any way, but ‘maybe what you would visualize as an angel...’ (Sergeant, 1966, p. 1).

This period was rife with high strangeness (e.g., Mothman, UFOs, etc.), and here, during the same time period, comes a sighting that gets lumped into the Jersey Devil category with multiple witnesses who went to the police (making it more credible) and described a creature which apparently looked nothing like the 13th child myth. Specifically, toward dusk on May 21, 1966, a creature “at least

seven feet tall” ambled through the Morristown, New Jersey, National Historical Park and left in its wake four hysterical witnesses who had viewed it from a parked car. They said the creature was “faceless,” covered with long black hair, and had scaly skin. It had broad shoulders and walked on two legs with a stiff, rocking movement. The four drove to the park entrance and stopped approaching cars to warn people that a “monster” lurked inside. Raymond Todd, one of the witnesses, caught a ride with a young lady who took him to the Municipal Hall in Morristown, where he blurted out his story to the police. Oddly enough, the girl had seen a similar entity a year before. She told the police that she and several friends were in the park one night when a huge, broad-shouldered something had loomed up in their rear window and thumped on the back of the car. Her mother had asked her not to report the incident, she said (Coleman & Hallenbeck, 2010, p.16).

The “Mothman” has been seen dozens of times since the year 2000 and has seen an increase in sightings in the area around Lake Michigan during the same time period (Wayland & Wayland, 2017). The descriptions of the creature vary in the recent Chicago sightings, but many of the same general characteristics are present, i.e., leathery wings, red eyes, massive height, etc. The description of the so-called “Batsquatch” reported in the Mount Rainier region bears similarities to the Jersey Devil and Mothman experience. Importantly, it also bears hallmark traits of “paranormal” activity, such as the stopping and starting of a vehicle and a feeling of being haunted. The original article reported this as a close encounter. The *News Tribune* gave a good description in their article entitled “Mount

Table 1. Comparison of Features Among Various Flying Cryptid Reports.

	Jersey Devil	Mothman	Batsquatch	Wisconsin Man Bat
Height	4 to 8 feet	7 feet	9 feet	7 Feet
Wings	Leathery bat-like	Leathery bat-like	Leathery bat-like	Leathery bat-like
Facial Features	Animal or Indistinct	Indistinct	Animal or Indistinct	Animal
Eyes	Red or Yellow	Red	Red or Yellow	N/A
Feet	Animal, Cloven	Clawed	Clawed	Long toe-like Claws
Color	Dark	Grey, Black, Dark	Blue, Dark	Dark, Gray-Brown
Location	New Jersey, Tennessee, Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania, Chicago, West Virginia, Ohio, et al.	Washington, California	Wisconsin

Note: The characteristics of these cryptids that are similar to the Jersey Devil were drawn from a sample of prominent sightings and demonstrate that the phenomenon of New Jersey might extend to other geographic regions. Further, all these cryptids have had sightings reported by the news in the last 20 years.

Rainier-area youth has close encounters in the foothills:”

The engine died, and the dashboard lights fell dark. Although he hadn’t applied his brakes, the pick-up truck he was driving stopped suddenly, abruptly, square in the middle of the road there between the edge of the forest and a scrub-by clearcut field...Then he saw the feet descending. Bird feet. Claw feet. Then the legs, the torso, the wings, folded attached to the back of broad shoulders. The head. That face. The Creature nine feet tall... Its eyes were yellow and shaped like a piece of pie with pupils like a half-moon. The mouth was pretty big. White teeth. No fangs. The face was like a wolf...A few minutes later the truck just started” (Roberts, 1994, para 1).

These types of incidents underscore that other cryptid experiences often parallel the reports of Jersey Devil witnesses. The implication is that the Jersey Devil may be less of a 13th child or wild animal and more of a local myth interspersed with occurrences of a wider paranormal phenomenon.

Theories of the Jersey Devil

The events that supported the myth of the Jersey Devil began at least as early as pre-colonial times and continue today. This means that the phenomenon itself has 400 years of witness reports, although no material evidence has been produced in that time, making a biological explanation seem unlikely. The variance in the descriptions of the creature lends further credence to this

conclusion unless the Pine Barrens are filled with a variety of large undiscovered animals. On the other hand, the consistency and credibility of some reports might suggest that a “mass delusion” explanation is overly dismissive. Removing the myth also removes the limitations of the description of the creature placed on it by the myth, and therefore, accepts that descriptions may vary. It allows one to ask a different set of questions. Many of the witness reports bore similarities to reports of other cryptids. For example, if we ask how many of these witnesses perceived a creature with a “dark and formidable shape, over six feet tall, and glowing red eyes,” then the map begins to look very different. Such sightings spread out all over



Figure 11. News Tribune Batsquatch sketch. 1994 - Fair Use

the world to include reports of parallel creatures such as Mothman, Batsquatch, etc.

“Winged humanoid” sightings stretch beyond England and beyond the 1600s. Examining the Jersey Devil as the name given to sightings of “Winged Humanoids in the Pine Barrens” gives us a very different view. It indicates that the core phenomenon responsible for the Jersey Devil may extend elsewhere. That is, we might be dealing with the cultural interpretation of New Jersey residents who encounter winged humanoid creatures or a common set of sociocultural or environmental conditions that cause winged humanoid misidentifications and experiences (Coleman & Hallenbeck, 2010; Keel, 1975b). Amidst an unknown world and awash in superstition, Colonists encountered something unknown. If any of the reports are true, this creature was a winged humanoid. Any encounter with a winged humanoid among colonists would likely be attributed to the Devil of medieval times. Descriptions of encounters vary, but the religious myth does not. This view implies that experiencers may have encountered cryptids of varying physical characteristics, but that were nonetheless described in the cultural terms of the past. Witnesses fill in unseen characteristics and create an origin story for a cryptid based on their religious or cultural beliefs (Regal, 2013). By the way, this same cryptid phenomenon is still reported in the present. Thus, we might be dealing with a long history of people blaming the “Jersey Devil” for all manner of high strangeness in the Pine Barrens (Foster, Sickles, & Camp, 2023).

It would be easy to dismiss the Jersey Devil and similar sightings as a remnant of superstition or mass delusion. Yet again, the consistency of reports over time and the fact they continue into the present make this explanation seem untenable. The Jersey Devil either boils down to (a) psychosocial phenomena (including mass delusion), (b) an animal yet to be discovered, or (c) a genuinely “paranormal-type” event. Based on witness reports, all three explanations may exist simultaneously.

David Hufford’s (1989) work on the study of folk beliefs and supernatural experiences may offer insight into the psychosocial explanation of the Jersey Devil. His theories, particularly the concept of the “experiential basis of belief,” suggest that supernatural experiences are not necessarily rooted in objective reality but rather in the perceptions and interpretations of the experiencer. This perspective may help to explain the persistence of the Jersey Devil legend despite a lack of concrete evidence for the creature’s existence. Hufford’s work emphasizes the importance of subjective experiences in shaping beliefs about the supernatural. He argued that these experiences are not random but rather follow patterns that can be studied and understood. According to Hufford, these

patterns are based on a “cultural code,” which is a set of beliefs, symbols, and practices that shape how individuals perceive and interpret their experiences.

Applying Hufford’s concept of the cultural code to the Jersey Devil legend, it becomes clear that the creature is not simply a physical entity but rather a complex symbol with deep cultural resonance. Its legend has evolved over time, with different versions emphasizing different aspects of the creature’s appearance or behavior. However, despite these variations, the core elements of the legend have endured—the creature is always depicted as a monstrous, supernatural being with the power to terrorize and harm humans and animals alike. Given the fact colonists were unfamiliar with the flora and fauna that they encountered in the new world, it is likely some of the sightings inspiring the legend represented misidentified animals. For example, the sandhill crane is thought by skeptics to be a culprit in “Mothman” and “Batsquatch” sightings (Keel, 1975b). Sandhill cranes and other tall water birds are likewise found in New Jersey. This is one possible cause of Jersey Devil misidentifications. Sandhill Cranes grow to a height of three to four feet and have a wingspan of five feet. Thus, when looking for anomalous Jersey Devil sightings, one factor to weed out potential misidentifications is “height.” Witnesses who are sure they saw a creature over six feet tall are less likely to have seen a water bird if their descriptions are indeed accurate and not overestimations. Also, these cranes often have red around their eyes, and “glowing red eyes” is unquestionably an oft-reported feature of Jersey Devil sightings.

Many witness reports of the Mothman also reported “glowing red eyes.” The same description is often found in Bigfoot and “Batsquatch” reports. Oddly enough, one does not find many Mothman sightings in New Jersey. The Mothman incidents of Point Pleasant, West Virginia, in 1966 were well-publicized. There were numerous witnesses, material damage to a vehicle, and medical effects such as conjunctivitis reported and documented (Keel, 1975b). Dozens of Mothman-like sightings have also been reported in the Chicago area from 1980 to 2022 (Wayland & Wayland, 2017). The description of the creature is strikingly similar to reported sightings of the Jersey Devil. The sightings only vary slightly in that the feet of the Jersey Devil are alleged to be similar to a horse or a goat. Horns and a long tail are also unique features of the cryptid said to inhabit the Pine Barrens. In Mothman cases, witnesses often describe the head as being an indistinct feature. But the glowing red eyes, height taller than a human, and bat-like wings are too similar to ignore. A similar-appearing cryptid known as Batsquatch is reportedly in the area around Mt. Shasta, California, and Washington state. It is supposedly taller than a human and with a bat-like form

(or with leathery wings) and glowing red eyes. There are no Mothman sightings in these places, and yet the descriptions are much the same as both present-day Mothman reports in Chicago and the sightings in West Virginia during the 1960's. It appears that the name of this cryptid experience and its legend are merely localized.

Each characteristic added from the "Jersey Devil" myth to the description reduces the amount of sightings one samples from across the world. For example, if we add wings to the previous list, an interesting combination of sightings emerges that would include such well-known cryptids as Mothman, Batsquatch, and the Jersey Devil. Sightings of dark, red-eyed, winged humanoid creatures are reported worldwide and throughout history. Curiously, the list becomes significantly smaller if we add horns, but it remains global and ancient. This is potentially more relevant to research, whether or not one is studying the cultural similarities to, or the existence of, the "monster." However, we primarily rely on witness reports in the case of the Jersey Devil as material evidence is lacking. Despite numerous attempts over time to uncover it, there has been no definitive DNA or biological evidence of an unknown creature living in the Pine Barrens made publicly known (Regal & Esposito, 2018). Witnesses who were deemed reliable by authorities, as well as police witnesses, do exist in the case of the Jersey Devil. Strange tracks have been recorded. Odd livestock mutilations in the Pine Barrens have been attributed to the Jersey Devil. Images and video have been taken but are unverified. The lack of material evidence combined with consistent witness reports is a common theme in cryptid hunting and paranormal research (de Vos, 2012).

With the prevalence and ease of video effects, images, and video in paranormal cases are understandably scrutinized. Images and videos backed by witness reports who have proven reliable over time are more difficult to explain. A reliable report would constitute a witness of good character and reputation who did not change his/her story over time and did not engage in other hoaxes or erratic behavior in the years following the incident report. Such witnesses exist in the case of the Jersey Devil; police officers and politicians are among those reporting the creature. It is still possible that some of these witnesses were mistaken and attributed a sighting of something mundane to the creature of myth. It is also conceivable that these witnesses encountered an unidentified biological species occupying the Pine Barrens. However, the area is increasingly trafficked by the public and studied by researchers, and the scientific inquiry of the 20th century produced no tangible evidence to date. So, this logically becomes an increasingly less likely option.

This lack of material evidence, combined with the

consistency of reports over time, has led the public and researchers to seek alternative explanations in the realms of the metaphysical or supernatural. A third set of theories has been offered to explain the Jersey Devil's existence, which can be labeled as paranormal, high strangeness, unknown, or "question mark." These theories are provocative and provide opportunities for further research and hypothesis testing. However, they should be approached with caution, as paranormal theories require the same level of validation as the discovery of a new biological species. So, these theories are as of yet unproven even if they might fit the facts.

This third set of possibilities accepts that witnesses saw a cryptid that does not reside in our reality but appears in our reality at finite intervals and for unknown reasons. Within this view, the theories as to who, what, or why this creature would exist for finite amounts of time are less relevant as to whether or not it did exist and was able to affect witnesses and the physical space it occupied. However, the swamps of New Jersey may be representative of a paranormal hotspot similar to the one apparently at Skinwalker Ranch. Skinwalker Ranch has been studied by well-funded private research and government-funded research. Preceded by one major scientific study and followed by another, the U.S. Government spent time and money studying Skinwalker Ranch in Utah. Researchers, analysts, scientists, and soldiers ostensibly witnessed creatures that were unknown or previously ascribed to myth and legend.

A Skinwalker Ranch incident relevant to the Jersey Devil involves the repeated sighting of an upright canine creature. Several witnesses connected to the program studying Skinwalker Ranch saw a wolf-like creature which walked on two legs and stood over six feet tall. The sightings were documented and considered in the research of the ranch, making this a rare instance of a cryptid creature documented during scientific study and considered in the theories surrounding the ranch. The description of the upright canine was very similar to that of a mythical "werewolf" (Lacatski, Kelleher, & Knapp, 2021). Whether or not the phenomenon encountered at the ranch inspired the legend of werewolves or Skinwalkers in the area or the phenomenon at the ranch is playing on the expectations of the observers is unclear. Still, it is unsettling that upright canines are supposedly legendary (i.e., a werewolf, dogman, skinwalker, etc.), yet they were seen and documented by multiple witnesses as part of government-funded research (Kelleher & Knapp, 2005)

Skinwalker Ranch is also involved and continues to involve UFO sightings. Seen by multiple witnesses and filmed on camera. The family who lived at the ranch encountered UFO objects prior to encountering cryptid

creatures and other events typically termed paranormal. However, the evidence at Skinwalker Ranch (similar to the Jersey Devil) is primarily dependent on witness accounts. Numerous Jersey UFO sightings are reported to NUFORC every year (National UFO Reporting Center, 2022). Additionally, the association between the UFO phenomenon and what is commonly termed “high strangeness” (cryptids, poltergeists, humanoids) was identified by J Allen Hynek, the former head of the Air Force’s “Project Blue Book:”

There exists today a worldwide phenomenon... indeed, if it were not worldwide, I should not be addressing you and these representatives from many parts of the world. There exists a global phenomenon, the scope and extent of which is not generally recognized. It is a phenomenon so strange and foreign to our daily terrestrial mode of thought that it is frequently met by ridicule and derision by persons and organizations unacquainted with the facts. Yet, the phenomenon persists; it has not faded away as many of us expected it would when, years ago, we regarded it as a passing fad or whimsy. Instead, it has touched on the lives of an increasing number of people around the world (Knight-Jadczyk, 2006, p. 18).

A subset of credible “Jersey Devil” sightings may be a part of the high strangeness most often associated with the UFO phenomenon and apparently documented by the U.S. Government research into Skinwalker Ranch. While the origin of UFO objects and the energies they emit are undetermined, the effects of proximity to the objects and bizarre phenomena associated with these objects were identified by Dr. Hynek and further established at the Ranch. Additionally, author John Keel chronicled a year of high strangeness related to the UFO phenomenon in Point Pleasant, West Virginia, from 1966 to 1967. The events included cryptid sightings (similar in description to the Jersey Devil), sentient orbs of light, UFOs, and contact with non-human entities. The combined absurdity and strangeness of the events lead Keel (1975a) to question the idea that UFOs were from outer space and inspired his book on the paranormal, *The Eighth Tower*. Keel wondered if these beings were on a different “frequency” or from another “dimension,” rather than the theory that UFOs were extraterrestrial. His speculation was fueled by the consistency of the sightings juxtaposed with the lack of material evidence. The available data suggested to him that some cryptid sightings were materially real (i.e., credible witnesses, tracks, livestock mutilation) but not

a zoological animal, which leaves evidence of habitation. Ultimately, Keel (1975a) proposed an “ultra-terrestrial” hypothesis in which beings interacting with us are from another physical reality or dimension.

Several categories of theories attempt to explain the UFO phenomenon and may extend to the Jersey Devil. These are the interdimensional hypothesis, the extraterrestrial hypothesis, and the cryptoterrestrial hypothesis. In the interdimensional hypothesis or Ultraterrestrial Model (Puthoff, 2022), the Jersey Devil could be seen as a projection created by an intelligence from another dimension, frequency, or physical reality. These beings would live alongside us and be capable of materialization within our reality. The motives of such beings may be foreign to human thought, but the hypothesis fits with some of the evidence used to support the existence of the Jersey Devil. The variance in the witness’s description may indicate an entity which does not have a physical shape. The repeated appearance of the Jersey Devil could be part of a pattern of reinforcement, as posited by Jaque Vallee (1975) in his book *The Invisible College*:

Drastic modification of the behavior of an animal (including man) can be achieved by selectively reinforcing certain actions (for instance by giving food to a pigeon only when he presses a certain lever). However, certain ways of reinforcing behavior lead to better learning than others. If the training is too even and monotonous the subject may stop in its development or even return to an earlier state; the best schedule of reinforcement is one that combines periodicity with unpredictability. Learning is then slow but continuous. I lead to the highest level of adaptation. And it is irreversible” (p. 198).

Vallee wonders here if the phenomenon acts as a control mechanism. That is, a long-term effect on the learning of society might be the intention of the creature making itself known through a specific set of symbols and patterns. Vallee asserted that there was a pattern of reinforcement related to periods of increased UFO sightings and instances of high strangeness. As a control mechanism, the Jersey Devil phenomenon may act as a means of keeping the citizens of New Jersey afraid of the unknown and in awe of mysterious power. Such a belief may reinforce existing cultural superstitions and mythologies. If Jersey Devil sightings are part of the high strangeness related to UFOs, we would expect to see sightings of descriptions matching the creature increase during periods of increased UFO activity. If they are interdimensional in nature, a feature may be witness descriptions of portals

or non-physical entities. However, a portal could indicate wormhole technology used in interstellar travel, and an off-planet species might be invisible to our eyes. The extraterrestrial hypothesis is perhaps the most common theory for UFOs and associated strangeness (Radford, 2010). In this case, the Jersey Devil would be a creature from or created by an off-planet civilization. Possible motives may include a desire to keep UFO activity in the area secret or to study human reaction to an unknown terror. The motive could be the same as those of the interdimensional hypothesis (i.e., long-term social change).

In either the interdimensional or extraterrestrial hypothesis, the creature could be able to take a form based on the reaction it will produce (Knight-Jadczyk, L., 2006). In the case of the Jersey Devil, the preferred form may have been chosen prior to the arrival of European Settlers. The local Native American tribe Lenni Lenape's oral traditions include mention of the creature. The existence of credible anomalous tracks and witness accounts that include the creature interacting with physical reality (for example, seeing grass and shrubs move as it travels through foliage) would indicate the phenomenon is not an entirely visionary creation and is fully material for a period of time. While a conspicuous lack of material evidence may indicate the creature's existence in our reality is only temporary and (perhaps) functional. If material evidence found in or near a sighting was determined to be extraterrestrial in origin (materials and material composition not known to Earth), it may indicate the source of the phenomenon which creates the Jersey Devil (and the UFO phenomenon in general) is of interstellar origin.

Within the UFO phenomenon, a third set of possible origin hypotheses exists when one considers that the phenomenon might originate from Earth or is otherwise tied to humanity. This set of possibilities can be labeled as indigenous or "cryptoterrestrial." From this viewpoint, the phenomenon would be indigenous and controlled by something human or human-like (Tonnie, 2010). For example, an advanced or gifted set of humans could be capable of changing form or able to project whatever form they want. These sorts of abilities might derive from advanced technologies (including future or past humans) or shamanistic-occult practices. If such were the case, we might expect to see evidence of such advanced technology such as familiar energy signatures or ritualistic symbols and artifacts. Furthermore, we may expect to discern patterns in the sightings or behaviors that indicate familiar human motivations.

These all are sweeping and highly speculative (if not fantastical) explanations for a series of events, and evidence that can be interpreted as being consistent with all three categories of explanations exist simultaneous-

ly. Determining the origin of a legend and the myth does not dispel the cause of the legend or myth. It does not erase the events. However, examining the phenomenon in relation to a larger cryptid phenomenon presents a different and more holistic perspective. When the myth is removed, the "Jersey Devil" can be seen as simply one local, cultural interpretation of winged humanoid sightings.

Thus, the study of each sighting and whether or not it should be deemed as a legitimate cryptid or paranormal experience should be determined by the weight and credibility of physical evidence, as well as the witness and police reports. Scientists should take seriously any fully competent and rational adult—with no history of delusional ideations or other biomedical risk factors—who reports an eight-foot-tall, bat-winged creature. The idea that such a sighting is unheard of is simply false. The Pine Barrens have been filled with these stories for centuries, and the winged humanoid phenomenon is ancient, global, and reasonably consistent.

DISCUSSION

The question most often asked in this case is, "Does the 'Jersey Devil' exist as an actual physical entity?" The answer is "yes" if you count as evidence the credible (as described above) witness reports over time and associated livestock mutilations, but "no" if definitive material proof (DNA, biological samples, or unassailable video or photos) is required. And to reiterate, there has been a massive effort for over a century to find that physical proof. If witness sightings are acceptable proof, then we are still left with the issue of descriptions of the creature that vary wildly. Thorough folkloric research demonstrates that the myth of the 1730's "13th child (Leeds Devil)" is an invention of early American superstition and political in-fighting (Regal, 2013). Moreover, no material evidence supports the idea that the Jersey Devil is a single specimen or species of undiscovered animal (Regal & Esposito, 2018). The hoaxes (i.e., tracks) reported during the popularization of the Jersey Devil moniker during the 20th century further supported and created the myth of the 13th child. This makes the existence and description of the creature described in the 13th child (Leeds Devil) tale likely an invention of early American superstition.

However, if we accept that the Lennape witnessed the creature prior to the arrival of Colonial settlers, as well as the premise of credible witness reports into the present, then we are left to ponder how a creature which bears even a passing resemblance to the Jersey Devil (or other eight-foot-tall humanoid) could appear and leave no remains. The Pine Barrens contain a variety of alleged paranormal activity, including the Ghostly Black Dog,

White Stag, and UFOs (Martinelli & Stansfield, 2020). It is possible that the "Jersey Devil" is merely an extension of this broader activity, and the Pine Barrens is a hotspot similar to the one documented at Skinwalker Ranch and Point Pleasant, West Virginia. Comparing the pattern and trends of sightings over the last 200 years to the major categories of paranormal hypotheses may not explain what the Jersey Devil *is*, but it may help eliminate certain theories. For instance, as there are no objects of interstellar origin found near sighting locations, there is little reason to believe that this phenomenon is extraterrestrial in nature. The lack of occult or ritual artifacts and obvious human motivations might also make the phenomenon less likely to be explained by intentional or coordinated human activity. The variance in descriptions, sudden appearances and disappearances, and schedule of terror arguably make the interdimensional category of hypotheses most likely in the case of the Jersey Devil. Alternatively, a terrestrial or extraterrestrial species might accomplish this through the use of technology and science. However, the consistency of sightings over time suggests that the phenomenon is located or connected to the area around New Jersey. The core phenomenon could be interdimensional, extraterrestrial, or crypto-terrestrial, but the features it exhibits are the characteristics most often associated with the interdimensional hypothesis.

If the Jersey Devil phenomenon is indeed an interdimensional (or powerful extraterrestrial or unknown terrestrial) incursion, the question then arises as to what purpose or gain such an entity or intelligence would have in perpetuating this mysterious presence in our reality. While extremely speculative, several potential motivations can be considered. First, these events could serve as a means of observation and study. Just as scientists on Earth might observe and document wildlife in their natural habitats, an interdimensional entity could be conducting a form of research or exploration by observing human reactions, behaviors, and societal dynamics. The prolonged presence and reinforcement of the Jersey Devil phenomenon may offer insights into human psychology, belief systems, and the cultural impact of the unknown.

Furthermore, the interdimensional entity might seek to influence human thought and behavior through fear and uncertainty. By maintaining a state of heightened anxiety and apprehension it could manipulate the collective consciousness and limit societal progress. Fear has a powerful effect on human behavior, often leading to avoidance and a reluctance to explore the unknown. If the entity aims to impede human curiosity and expansion, the Jersey Devil phenomenon acts as a control mechanism to deter individuals from venturing into uncharted territories, both literal and metaphorical. Additionally, the

interdimensional incursion could serve as a means of reinforcing existing cultural superstitions and mythologies. By aligning itself with local legends and folklore, such as the Jersey Devil, the entity taps into deep-rooted beliefs and preconceived notions. This manipulation of cultural narratives strengthens the entity's presence and ensures a continued state of fear and awe among the population.

Gillespie (1993) similarly noted how the terror of the Jersey Devil myth served to reinforce terror of the unknown: "If we focus on the fact that parents passed the legend on to their children, we are pointed toward one possible set of conclusions. As untamed as they are now, the Pinelands of the 18th and 19th centuries were in many ways a truly perilous place. A parent who told a child to be home by nightfall or "the Jersey Devil will get you" was using the legend to serve a legitimate child rearing function - to protect the child from very real dangers of the Pines- getting lost or being attacked by wild animals, for example" (p. 43). This parental psychological protection mechanism strongly parallels the theory of behavioral modification performed by the intelligence behind the "paranormal" as posited by Vallee (1975). Specifically, Vallee proffered that there was an intelligence behind paranormal phenomena that seeks to produce long-term effects on society by employing specific symbols and patterns of reinforcement. Likewise, the parental psychological protection mechanism allows parents to utilize the legend of the Jersey Devil to safeguard children from real dangers in the Pine Barrens.

The correlation between the two proposals rests in the notion that both mechanisms aim to instill fear and caution. Parents warning their children about the Jersey Devil's potential harm creates a sense of anxiety and apprehension surrounding the unknown. Similarly, Vallee suggested that the paranormal phenomenon operates as a control mechanism by generating fear through a carefully orchestrated reinforcement schedule. This control mechanism may be intended to shape societal behavior and limit exploration (Vallee, 1975), much the same way that a parent may use fear to control a child. The parallel becomes more pronounced when considering the witnesses' descriptions of encountering the Jersey Devil and their experience of terror in the face of the unknown. Fear of the unfamiliar has the potential to restrict individuals and societies, hindering progress and fostering anxiety. The parental protection mechanism and the paranormal reinforcement pattern intersect in their ability to produce anxiety-inducing effects. Both theories imply that the Jersey Devil (or larger winged humanoid phenomenon), whether originating from psychosocial, interdimensional, or extraterrestrial sources, has a purpose beyond simple existence. It arguably suggests a deliberate orchestration

of fear and anxiety, with potential implications for societal behavior and cultural superstitions. Both mechanisms aim to shape individual and societal behaviors, either to safeguard against tangible dangers or to control human thought and exploration. This parallel highlights the complex interplay between folklore, psychology, and the influence of the unknown on human consciousness.

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

The Jersey Devil remains a mysterious creature that holds a prominent place in local culture, history, and cryptozoology. While conventional explanations such as folklore, expectations, psychology, and human error may explain some sightings of the creature, it is clear that there are still many questions about its existence and its relationship to other cryptids. The existence of paranormal hotspots such as Skinwalker Ranch and Point Pleasant, West Virginia, suggests that the Jersey Devil may be an extension of such activity in the Pine Barrens. However, this does not mean that all Jersey Devil sightings are part of the same core phenomenon. Rather, it indicates that a fraction of Jersey Devil sightings may be mistakenly attributed to the myth. The fact that the sightings of the Jersey Devil are so varied adds to the difficulty of explaining its existence.

The trend in sightings of the Jersey Devil has shown a significant increase in the modern era, especially around the year 2000. This may be attributed to the rise of the internet and ease of communication, which has made it easier for reports to be recorded. As the volume of reports increased, the likelihood of misidentifications and false reports increased as well. It is important to note that this trend may also point to an overall rise in events described as “paranormal” or a period of increased UFO sightings and high strangeness. The existence of the Jersey Devil remains shrouded in mystery, but it is clear that its aura of mystery has not diminished with time. In conclusion, the Jersey Devil is a fascinating and elusive “creature” that has captured the imaginations of many for centuries. While conventional explanations may offer some insight into its existence and nature, it is clear that there are still many questions to be answered. The paranormal explanations of the Jersey Devil, while unproven, should neither be readily nor entirely be dismissed. However, they should be approached with caution, as invoking unproven theories that can be stretched to fit the mystery may not offer a satisfactory explanation. The Jersey Devil retains its aura of mystery and serves as a reminder of the enduring power of folklore and the unknown in our culture.

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