

story which appeared under the heading **DOWN ON THE FARM**, in the **WORLD ROUND-UP** columns of the September-October 1964 issue of the **REVIEW**. The clothing of the crewman at Whidby Island, and his method of getting out of, and back into his ship, are remarkably similar to those of the space visitors at Mr. Wilcox's farm near Newark Valley, New York State.

The object of the visit to Mr. Wilcox's farm?

None other than soil sampling, though the technique of stealing trays full of Mr. Wilcox's topsoil was crude by comparison with the methods of the Whidby Island visitors!

Which brings us to the question: was *soil sampling* the cause of those famous craters of the summer of 1963—particularly the ones at Charlton in Wiltshire, at Flamborough Head, on Dufton Fell in Westmorland, and in a Southampton Park?

MYSTERY ANIMALS

By Charles Bowen

THE increase in the appearance of large mystery animals of the cat family has been most marked in the past eighteen months. Reports of the sudden advent of feline predators in regions where they are normally unknown among the local fauna, have filtered through from far and wide. Not so far, either, in some cases, for there has been a veritable rash of reports from Southern England.

It may surprise the general public, but not, surely, readers of this **REVIEW**, to learn that the "lion" hunts that have been mounted are neither isolated incidents, nor are they peculiar to the 1960's. There have been several instances in England alone during the last hundred years.

For example, in March 1906, the good people of Windsor were greatly perturbed by the ravages of a strange animal which mauled sheep so severely that they had to be killed. Before the disturbance died down, fifty-one sheep had been killed outright.

Little purpose will be served by cataloguing numerous other incidents from the past. Suffice it to say that the works of Charles Fort abound with evidence of identical scares!

Not unnaturally, Ufologists have been interested in the recent developments, and more than a year ago, I heard the view expressed that it would be only a matter of time before there would be evidence of a tie-up between the animals and the flying saucers.

That remark was made after the fuss about a cheetah which was encountered in the Shooters' Hill area of Kent, had died down. There were several cheetah "sightings", and a serious and well-organised hunt was mounted in this populous district in the south-east corner of London. Police and tracker dogs joined in, but to no avail.

The Shooters Hill affair was in July 1963, a time when we were deeply interested in the happenings at Mr. Blanchard's farm in Charlton, Wilts., (see **FLYING SAUCER REVIEW** of September/October 1963).

On February 14, 1964, a new mystery animal was reported, this time in the Hawkhurst-Cranbrook area of Kent, some 50 miles from London. This animal was alleged to be "huge", with two-inch razor-sharp claws. A Mr. John Golding, of Park Cottages, Hawkhurst, found a set of giant paw marks on Duval's Farm. He and the owner, Mr. F. C. Brinsley, followed the trail across the farm. The marks were described by the local veterinary surgeon, Mr. Douglas Good, as probably having been made by a member of the "Big cat" family with front feet nearly twenty-four inches apart, and heavy enough for the feet and claws to sink nearly two inches into fairly firm ground.

Five days later, a *tiger* was reported at large in East Anglia. This creature was seen on a railway embankment at East Runton, near Cromer. Appeals were made on television for further information: some thirty police dogs were employed in a search, again to no avail, although there were persistent eye-witness reports describing the animal variously as a tiger, a puma and a cheetah.

The Vereeniging Story

It was at this time that we heard tell of an amazing story which had been published in "Die Brandwag", an Afrikaans language magazine from South Africa. A translation appeared in the May/June 1964 issue of the **FLYING SAUCER REVIEW**.

The two men, who were driving at night on the Potchefstroom/Vereeniging road, were surprised to see a strange, large animal. In a land which boasts a vast array of magnificent beasts, they were surprised enough to stop to investigate this creature, which they merely supposed could be a large dog. They weren't too sure on that point, and events which followed must have driven thoughts of the animal right out of their minds, for their car was "buzzed" by a UFO. Several spectacular passes were made at them, and they were petrified.

To us, in the comfort of our armchairs, it seemed that the UFO was trying to distract the attention

of the men while the animal escaped. This then, was the first hint of an apparent connection between mystery animals and flying saucers. There would have to be closer investigation of any future mystery animal story.

Of one thing we could be certain: mystery animals, and those who saw them or suffered their depredations, would be accorded the full ridicule treatment, and there would be an ample flow of evasive official explanations and denials. Indeed, there was a precedent in the 1906 case at Windsor, for a sentry who shot at the animal was put on a charge, and confined to barracks for firing *without cause!*

There was also the engaging possibility that Randallism (defined by Waveney Girvan in page 7 of the September/October 1963 issue of *FLYING SAUCER REVIEW*) would again rear its ugly head!

Surrey-Hampshire Border Country, 1964

In August a mystery *puma* was the subject of a wave of reports from the area around Godalming, Farnham and Odiham. Much of the country is farmland, but there are large tracts of woodland and dense bushy undergrowth. Hunts were organised, with headquarters at Godalming Police station, and when farm manager Edward Blanks reported that one of his steers had been savaged, the search was intensified. It was then that seriousness gave way, at least in some sections of the national press, to ridicule, and, as was expected, Randallism appeared in the form of a Canadian lion-hunter who called himself Billy Davidson.

It was time to investigate the mystery.

A quick perusal of a volume from Allen's Naturalist's Library, *Cats*, by R. Lydekker, revealed that the Puma (*Felis Concolor*) is one of the largest cats of the New World. The native Indians, and the French, call it the "Cougar", whilst U.S. hunters called it the "Panther". The average size of the Puma is 40 inches from nose to tail root, with a tail of some 20 inches. It has a small head, with no mane, but with large rounded ears, and is tawny coloured on its upper parts, dirty white underneath. It often attacks its prey for the sheer pleasure of killing, leaping from prominent rocky positions or from overhanging trees. It rarely attacks man, and will usually only do so if cornered. In fact, there are records of Pumas actually defending men from attacks by other wild beasts.

Bushylease Farm, October 1964

Fortified by this reassuring information, I made my way to Bushylease Farm on October 11.

The well-appointed farm comprises about 300 acres, and the houses and outbuildings are some quarter of a mile from the main road. Access is by

a roadway which rises over a low ridge, and then drops down to the farm, flanked by woodland (mostly silver birch and pine) and large areas of bushy undergrowth which are quite close to the farm buildings.

Two fiercely barking dogs, one an alsatian, gave the alarm at my approach.

Mr. Blanks, weather-beaten and down to earth, told me that the woods were not preserved by gamekeepers, and are known to contain foxes.

It seems that the mystery puma has been around the farm on and off for two years. During the severe winter of 1962/63, when the farmer expected to trail it easily in the snow, it failed to put in an appearance. At other times during its earlier visits, Mr. Blanks let the dogs off their leads, but they flatly refused to go after it. They were terrified.

Apparently the animal has a very strong smell, with a tang of ammonia, which Mrs. Blanks can detect at some considerable distance—surprising, seeing that it is in the open air.

The mystery animal is usually nocturnal. There have been daytime visits, but these were in fog. It betrays its presence with a screaming, or "yowling" noise, like one would expect, says Mr. Blanks, from a dozen cats whose tails are trodden on simultaneously! The "yowling", furthermore, only appears to be made when the animal crosses open ground.

The puma has been seen on a number of occasions: once it stopped when caught in the headlights whilst crossing the approach road in front of the Blanks' car. For an instant or so it stared at them, then made off with a swish of its tail. Quite recently Mr. and Mrs. Blanks and their son, had walked under a tree which overhangs the road, unaware that the puma was lurking in the branches. They heard it jump down after they had passed, and just caught a glimpse of it in a torch beam. It had landed on, and crossed, a manure heap, and its pad marks have been preserved: they were more than four inches long. I also saw claw marks and scratches on the smooth-barked tree.

By this time, Mr. Blanks was talking freely: at first one had the feeling that he was apprehensive of being thought ridiculous. He had been perturbed by the attitude of authority, and disappointed by the reactions of the press. Then there was the search by the Canadian hunter—but more of that in due course.

By now, satisfied that here at last was an interviewer who was prepared to treat the matter seriously, Mr. Blanks ventured to tell me the most surprising part of his story—the matter of the *STRANGE LIGHTS*. I should point out that at no

time did I mention my interest in flying saucers.

Part of Mr. Blanks' routine is to make the rounds of his farm before retiring for the night.

On two occasions he suddenly became aware of a mysterious light on the roofs of the farm buildings. The light moved from roof to roof, yet he could not see the beam which produced the light. It was certainly not produced by car headlights from the Odiham Road: the local topography precluded that possibility. Mr. Blanks could not trace the source of the light, and he was puzzled and worried by the phenomenon, because on each occasion the mystery puma arrived on the scene shortly afterwards!

I can only presume Mr. Blanks did not give this part of his story to the press for fear of further ridicule.

The story "blew wide open" when one of Mr. Blanks' steers was attacked. The mystery animal had been around on the night of the attack, and when the farmer found that his herd had panicked and smashed through a fence in three places, he rounded them up and discovered that one steer was missing. It was found lying in a pool of mud and blood in the undergrowth, with terrible claw marks down its shoulders, on both sides of the neck and along its flanks. It was still alive, and subsequently the veterinary surgeon's treatment cost £20. Six days elapsed before the steer could get back onto its feet.

The visit of the Canadian hunter must have been quite a pantomime. "Give me 48 hours", said Mr. Billy Davidson, "and I'll get me a cat!" Much hard work was done in the undergrowth, with more than 40 reporters in tow; the one thing missing from the proceedings was stealth! This strange interlude was treated lightheartedly in sections of the press, particularly by the London *Evening News* of August 31.

Mr. Davidson retired defeated, and one is left with the feeling that this was another instance of Randallism, that he had been put up to his task merely to be shot down like an Aunt Sally, with the object of discrediting the whole affair.

Mr. Blanks assured me that the puma had returned several times since the Davidson fiasco: the frequency of appearance is about once in every five days. He has concealed himself in carefully constructed tree hideouts, but has never seen the puma on these occasions. Strange droppings, some covered, have been found.

As one would expect of a countryman, Mr. Blanks knows a great deal about foxes, and he laughs at the suggestion that he has mistaken a fox for the mystery puma. He pointed out that when the animal is in the vicinity, foxes have broken cover, which is most unusual: perhaps they, like



Mystery Animal Haunts

the dogs, are terrified, but for them it is merely a case of "out of the frying pan and into the fire", because in one fortnight alone Mr. Blanks shot eight of them *in the open!*

No doubt our farmer, and many others who have seen the mystery animals, will be amused by the recent attempt in the press to say that the "puma" chased at Farnborough airfield, proved only to be a fox. If it was a fox, then what was it doing on the runways? Perhaps it was scared of the terrifying thing in the nearby woods!

As usual, any old explanation is seized upon to kill an inexplicable mystery. Authority does not like a mystery: nor does the press, when it remains a mystery!

And mystery it does remain. Even as I finished this article, I learned of a report of two more sightings of the Hampshire puma by new witnesses. This report was in the B.B.C. "Today" programme of October 18.

Where do these animals come from? Certainly not zoos and circuses, for no such losses have been reported. It seems highly unlikely that a number of private persons have had cheetahs and pumas as domestic pets which they cannot report as lost because they smuggled them into the country in the first place. So I repeat, where do they come from, and what is their purpose?