

# Mythical sea creatures can reveal scientific truth

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Sightings of mythical sea monsters can provide important statistical data, according to a leading expert in the field from the University of St. Andrews.

Dr. Charles Paxton, research fellow in the Centre for Research into Ecological and Environmental Modelling believes studying the anecdotes about creatures, such as the Loch Ness Monster or the Kraken, can reveal information about [human perception](#).

He believes cryptozoology, the study of creatures rumoured to exist, can explain why people believe in what they believe, and how such data can fit in with science.

The statistical expert was speaking at an event on cryptozoology at the Zoological Society of London on July 12 called “Cryptology: Science of Pseudoscience?”

His study of old sightings revealed that, as previously believed, they were not mistaken sightings of objects or creatures in the far distance, but much closer.

Dr. Paxton said: “If you look at the distribution of reported distances of [sea](#) monster accounts, they're much closer than you would expect by chance alone.”

He said the data implies that the theory that people were mistaking

things in the far distance for a sea monster was “doubtful”.

He said: “I expected that when I did the analysis, the reports would be far away.

“I thought people were reporting monsters because they'd seen familiar things at a distance.

“But the reported distances are much closer than you'd expect. It's not because these things are a vast distance away, or at least, if witnesses are misinterpreting things, it happens over short distances.”

He gave the example of a group on their way to the Danish colony in Greenland in the 18th century who mistook an aroused whale for a sea creature with a serpent-like tail.

He believes many sightings could be mistaken but did not rule out them being of undiscovered species.

He said: “I would actually say without any doubt at all that there are unknown animals out there. The reason I say without any doubt at all, if you look at the rate at which we're discovering new species, that hasn't completely flattened out.

“Logically, the animals we've not discovered yet are the ones that are difficult to detect, which means it would be very rare for people to encounter them anyway. In terms of marine mammals, for example, I can only think of about 10 people in the world who if they saw a marine mammal would be in a position to say, "That's a marine mammal that we've never described."

However, he said an unknown animal should be the “hypothesis of last resort”.

He said: “We can't explain away all the strange reports, but just because I can't explain a report doesn't mean it's an unknown animal. That's quite a jump.”

Provided by University of St Andrews

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