New analysis of DNA evidence contradicts claims of 'Yeti' brown/polar bear hybrid in Himalayas

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Undated photo made available by Britain's Channel 4 television Thursday Oct.17 2013 of Oxford University genetics professor Bryan Sykes posing with a prepared DNA sample taken from hair from a Himalayan animal. Sykes says he may have solved the mystery of the Abominable Snowman—the elusive ape-like creature of the Himalayas also known as the Yeti. He thinks it's a bear, based on two samples sharing a genetic fingerprint with a polar bear jawbone found in the Norwegian Arctic that is at least 40,000 years old. His findings, yet to be published, will be aired in a TV show in the UK Sunday. (AP Photo/ Channel 4)

(Phys.org)—A pair of researches are challenging claims made by a British scientist last year that DNA samples of animal remains found in the Himalayas were from a brown/extinct polar bear hybrid that is still alive and wandering about in the mountains—and is likely the source of rumors of a Yeti. Now, Ross Barnett and Ceiridwen Edwards of the Natural History Museum of Denmark and Oxford, respectively, have published a paper in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* suggesting that an analysis they conducted on the same animal remains shows that one came from a modern polar bear and the other from a rare type of brown bear that is still alive today.

Last year, Bryan Sykes, a genetics professor at Oxford, and colleagues, claimed that a DNA analysis of two hair samples, one found by itself, the other as part of the frozen remains of an animal—found at two sites far from each other in the Himalayas—revealed that they'd come from a hybrid animal—a brown bear and a supposedly extinct polar bear relative–and that it was clearly still alive today. His claims were covered by the BBC and eventually wound up in a paper also published by the Royal Society.

Now Barnett and Edwards are suggesting that Sykes and his team made a mistake during their analysis—matching DNA from a sample with an ancient extinct polar bear, instead of a modern polar bear, which is what they found. They concluded that the other DNA sample came from a sub-species of brown bear that is still alive today living in very remote locations high up in the mountains. Thus, there is no evidence of a hybrid animal and reports of a Yeti, they maintain, are likely made by people mistaking a brown bear for something more ape or human-like.

In reviewing the findings by Barnett and Edwards, Sykes and his team acknowledged, via the BBC, that they had made errors in database searchers. But they still maintain that their conclusions suggesting that the Yeti is still likely a modern unknown primate of some sort is likely

correct. They're also suggesting that the true identity of the Yeti still needs to be "refined" by analyzing other samples that were not part of either study.

More information: Himalayan 'yeti' DNA: polar bear or DNA degradation? A comment on 'Genetic analysis of hair samples attributed to yeti' by Sykes et al. (2014) C. J. Edwards, R. Barnett , Published 17 December 2014. DOI: 10.1098/rspb.2014.1712 . http://rspb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/282/1800/20141712