



Is there a monster living

The Beast of Loch Ness

UP CLOSE

Text Evidence One main idea of this article is that people feel a need to explore the mysteries around them. Look for evidence to support this idea as you read.

LOOK FOR WORD NERD'S
8 WORDS IN BOLD



On an April afternoon in 1933, Aldie and John Mackay were driving along the shores of one of Scotland's largest lakes, Loch Ness. (*Loch* is the Scottish term for lake, pronounced "lock.") The road, the A82, was brand-new, and Aldie was enjoying the view from the car window. April is usually a rainy month in the Scottish Highlands, but this day was bright. The trees were vivid green, and even the murky waters of the lake seemed to sparkle.



in Scotland's legendary lake?

Loch Ness

Then Aldie saw something she would never forget. The water rippled, and a giant creature seemed to rise out of the loch. It appeared to be black, with a humped back. Aldie grabbed her husband's arm, trembling with fright, and pointed out the window. "Stop! The beast!" she gasped. John screeched the car to a halt. For several

minutes, the stunned couple stared at the loch as the creature seemed to "roll and plunge," until the waters finally calmed.

For a few days, Aldie and John kept quiet about what they had seen. After all, who would believe them? A monster in Loch Ness? It sounded preposterous. People would think they were liars or, worse, that they were insane.

But of course, the couple couldn't resist sharing their remarkable story, and the news soon spread. As the Mackays had predicted, some people rolled their eyes and laughed. But many others listened with fascination. There had always been something mysterious about Loch Ness, something spooky. For centuries, people from the nearby towns had whispered stories of a legendary creature living in the loch, a huge and terrifying beast. Many avoided the surrounding woods because of it. To a number of local people, the Mackays' story was completely believable.

Over the next few weeks, more people claimed to have seen the creature.

"It was horrible," reported a schoolteacher. "It had a head like a cobra."

"It was big as an elephant," said a local farmer.

"My heart stopped," recounted a visiting businessman, who said he saw the beast while taking a walk. "It looked right at me."

But what was it?

Fantastic Creatures

For thousands of years, people from around the world have been telling stories of mysterious creatures. Some of these mythical beasts are obviously fictional, as fantastic as Norbert, Hagrid's pet dragon from the Harry Potter books, or the fauns from the Chronicles of Narnia.

But some creatures of myth and legend have turned out to really exist.

For hundreds of years, sailors told stories of a hideous creature

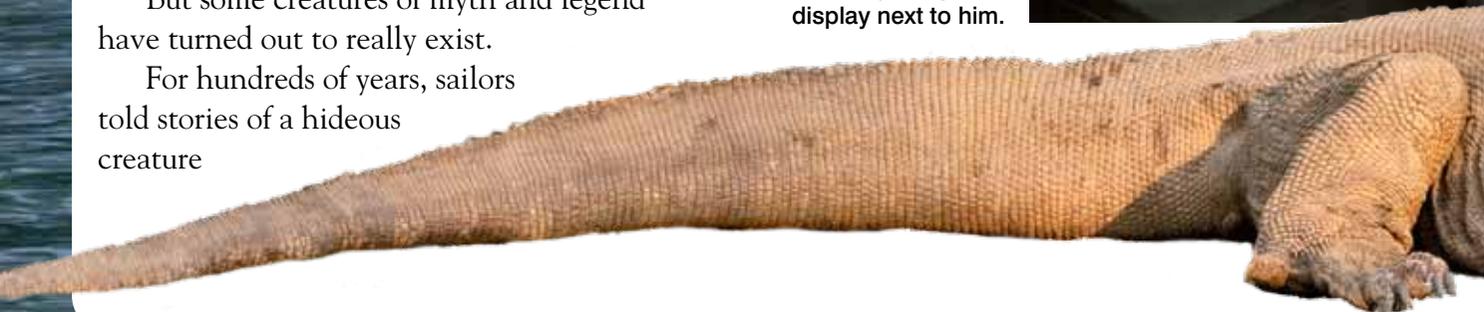
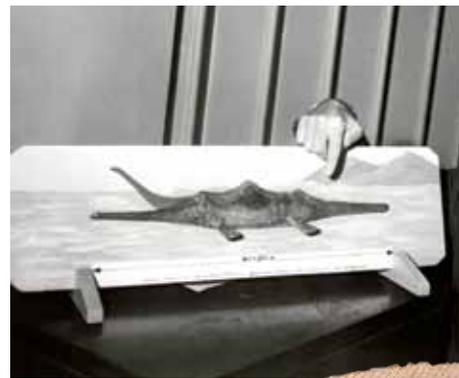
with a large round head, a jagged-edged beak, and enormous, powerful **tentacles**. They called this creature the kraken. Despite hundreds of eyewitness accounts, most people dismissed the kraken as a tall tale that sprang from the imaginations of homesick, sunstruck sailors. But in 1873, a fisherman and his son spotted one in the waters off Newfoundland, Canada. They managed to cut off a 19-foot piece of tentacle. This slimy specimen convinced **skeptics** that the old sailors' stories were absolutely true.

This photograph, taken in 1934, supposedly proved that there was a creature in the loch. It turned out to be a hoax, a creature made from a toy submarine and clay.



PAGES 6-7 TOP TO BOTTOM: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (TOY SUB); BETTMANN/CORBIS (DINSDALE);

Tim Dinsdale, right, led 56 expeditions to the loch. In 1960, he saw a "long oval shape" in the water and captured it on film. Skeptics were not convinced by the blurry image, on display next to him.



Scientists gave the kraken a new name: the giant squid.

Years later, in 1912, a group of pearl fishermen landed on a small island in what is now known as Indonesia. The men were relaxing on the rocky shores when one of them heard something approach from behind. He turned and screamed. It was an enormous lizard, maybe 10 feet long. It was rushing toward them, its beady eyes glistening with **menace**. The men escaped and made it home to tell their story, which few believed.

Eventually, a scientist named W. Douglas Burden happened to hear the story. He organized an **expedition** with the American Museum of Natural History in 1926. Sure enough, he found a population of ferocious, meat-eating lizards exactly where the fishermen said he would, on the island of Komodo. He named the creatures Komodo dragons.

Incredible stories like these have encouraged some men and women to devote their lives to the search for mythical and legendary creatures. These people call themselves cryptozoologists (krip-tuh-zoh-AH-luh-jists). (*Kryptos* is the Greek word for “hidden” or “secret”; a zoologist is a scientist who studies animal life.) To many people, cryptozoology seems more like fantasy than real science.

But some

cryptozoologists are respected scientists. They are convinced that there are still astonishing undiscovered animal species on Earth.

And one of those creatures, they say, could be lurking in Loch Ness.

Finding the Proof

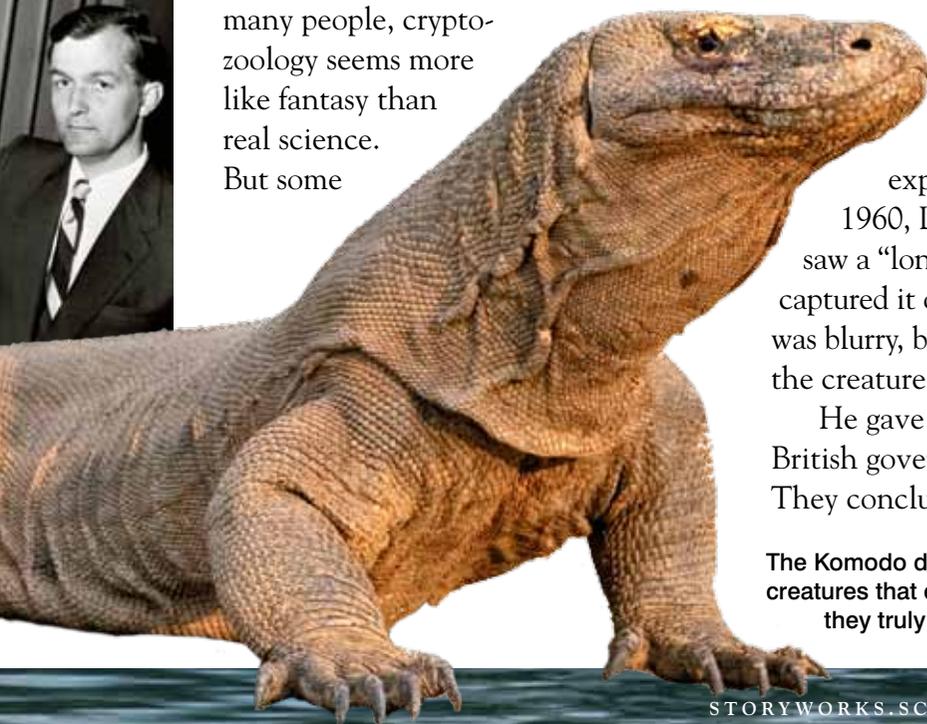
Over the decades, cryptozoologists have come up with several theories about what the beast of Loch Ness could be. Some say it is an unknown water mammal. Others believe it is an enormous fish. Some even say it is a prehistoric creature—perhaps a plesiosaur. These long-necked **marine** reptiles lived alongside the dinosaurs and died out 66 million years ago. Perhaps a few survived, some suggest, and one of their **descendants** is now living in the loch.

But these are just the theories of a few passionate believers, theories that most scientists reject and ridicule. The water of the loch is freezing cold and so dark that few plants survive, let alone fish. What would the creature eat? And how could there be just one creature? There would have to be a family that breeds and raises its young. Is it really likely that a **clan** of giant animals is living in the loch, invisible to all but a few accidental witnesses?

Perhaps no person has been as interested in these questions as Tim Dinsdale was. He was an engineer who led 56 Loch Ness expeditions between 1960 and 1987. In 1960, Dinsdale and his fellow investigators saw a “long oval shape” in the water and captured it on film for two minutes. The image was blurry, but Dinsdale was convinced it was the creature.

He gave the film to experts from the British government, who studied it carefully. They concluded that the object was probably

The Komodo dragon (left) and the giant squid are two creatures that existed in legend before scientists proved they truly exist.



alive and that it was between 12 and 16 feet long. Cryptozoologists cheered. But skeptics were unimpressed with the image of a murky blob moving slowly through the water.

Another respected Loch Ness investigator was the American scientist Robert Rines. In the 1970s, Rines used sonar (sound) equipment to capture an image that seemed to show the head and body of a large underwater creature. But, as with Dinsdale's film, the image was too blurry to provide clear answers.

In 2003, British scientists studied the loch using sonar and satellites. They were hoping to prove the plesiosaur theory. They investigated the loch "shoreline to shoreline, top to bottom," said scientist Ian Florence. The team found logs and old buoys. "We have covered everything in this loch, and we saw no signs of any large living animal," Florence said, his voice **tinged** with disappointment. "I think this might settle the question. There is nothing there."

But what about the people who say there is?

Imagination and Belief

In the eight decades since the Mackays took their fateful drive, more than 1,000 people have claimed to have seen some kind of creature in the water or on the shores of the loch. Certainly some of them are attention seekers or pranksters.



Scientists have studied Loch Ness from "shoreline to shoreline" using sophisticated technology, including this submarine, which was lowered into the loch in 1969. Though nobody has found solid evidence of a monster's existence, many scientists continue their quest to solve the mystery.

But can all of them be making it up?

Even skeptics admit it's likely that the Mackays really did see something on the loch that April day. Perhaps a log was caught in the waves, or an overturned boat was bobbing up and down. Perhaps the glittering sunlight on the loch turned an ordinary object into a fantastic monster. The human imagination is powerful. And so is our power of belief.

After all, isn't it imagination and belief that have led to humankind's greatest scientific achievements?

"If you don't have an open mind, in my judgment, you're not a scientist," said Rines. "If you don't have ideas, if you don't have adventure, you'll never make a discovery."

Rines believed that a major discovery is waiting in the murky waters of Loch Ness. One day, perhaps he'll be proved right. 

WRITE TO WIN

Why do people continue to look for a monster in Loch Ness? Answer in two paragraphs, providing two reasons supported by the text. Send your entry to "Loch Ness Contest" by Nov. 15, 2014. Ten winners will each receive a copy of *The Abominables* by Eva Ibbotson. See page 2 for details.

FIND AN
ACTIVITY
ONLINE!

