

A Hoax in Wingspan Estimates?

I know that I recently wrote something closely related to this subject of wingspan estimates in "Pterosaur News for Early December." I there gave a brief statistical analysis of the 57 wingspan estimates that now need further examination. This comes from another blog, one I often quote.

More on Pterosaur Wingspans

Look at the raw data for the left and middle of the graph (wingspan in feet): 2 2 4 4 4 4 5 5 5 6 6 6 7 7 8 8 9 9 9 10 10 10 11 11 12 12 12.5 13 13 13 13 15 16 16 17 17 17 18 – According to standard ideas in paleontology (and that is mostly what is mentioned in Western media when it is mentioned at all), only a small percentage of Rhamphorhynchoids attained wingspans over eight feet. But the data on wingspan estimates does not show any sharp decline above six feet, more of a gentle downward slope (fewer eyewitness estimates) into sizes much larger than standard ideas about Rhamphorhynchoid fossil wingspans. If a significant number of hoaxers made some of these fifty-seven estimates, and a significant number of those hoaxers were trying to portray Rhamphorhynchoids, there would have been a steeper decline above seven feet. But in fact, 26% of reports involved wingspans estimated at 9-13 feet, completely out of line for this particular hoax conjecture.

I will not duplicate the display of that graph here, for it gives too much emphasis to a peak that is less significant than what it appears to be on that graph. Sufficient is part of the raw data of the above numbers.

Most of the 98 sighting reports, from which the 57 with wingspan estimates were taken, suggest flying creatures that have long tails like *Rhamphorhynchoids*. That is where the idea comes from for the possibility that hoaxers may have tried to

conjure up that type of pterosaur in their hoaxes. But the data shows something far different from what is commonly believed about *Rhamphorhynchoids*, for the size-estimates do not fall sharply at around five-to-seven-feet, but gradually decline at huge wingspans, far larger than what is standard-size for even the largest flying birds of modern times.

A Hoax Suggestion in the Opposite Direction

On the other side of the graph, what about hoaxers who may have tried to convince people that they had seen giant pterosaurs? The *Live Pterosaur* post also shows up this conjecture, for the gentle slope from small wingspans, and the great number of those small wingspans, counts against any significant hoax pollution of the data.