

# The Big Picture of Modern Pterosaurs

Let's begin with "A Brief Introduction to Living-Pterosaur Investigations:"

YouTube video produced by Jonathan David Whitcomb

## Definition of "Modern Pterosaur"

From page 294 of the fourth edition of my nonfiction book *Searching for Ropens and Finding God*, we can read the technical definition:

*A featherless vertebrate two-winged creature, living within the past few thousand years, having an elongated digit-like bone on the leading edge of each wing and an absence of any bat-like wing-support involving bones that radiate into the wing membranes*

For those who would prefer a simple definition:

*A modern pterosaur is a non-extinct featherless flying creature often called "pterodactyl" or "flying dinosaur"*

## Cryptozoology Rather Than Standard Zoology

As of May 29, 2016, the modern pterosaur appears to fly only in cryptozoology, not yet landing on any page of a biology text book. I can be seen in the many eyewitness descriptions rather than in the zoo or in the biology laboratory.

Of course the same could once be said for other animals including gorillas in Africa. We now have no doubt in the

existence of the gorilla, although it was once thought to swing from jungle trees only in the imaginations of gullible persons. Westerners once found it convenient to dismiss stories of gorillas as Boogeyman tales.

So what evidence do we now have that at least one species of pterosaur is presently living? It's in the wide range of testimonies, from a great variety of eyewitnesses from around the world, describing flying creatures that have a remarkable consistency in details of description.

### **The Long-Tailed Ropen**

If reports of non-extinct "pterodactyls" were not enough to shock people, many of the descriptions include a long tail. In fact, the ratio between the presence of a long tail and the absence of one, in the overall sighting reports, is about 20-to-1 (41% to 2%).

What's so unusual about a dominance of long tails in modern pterosaurs? It's the opposite of what we would expect if people were just playing hoaxes. Think of the last film or television science fiction show you saw that had "pterodactyls" in it. That movie or TV show probably was depicting short-tailed pterosaurs. Those *Pterodactyloid* short-tailed flying creatures were assumed by many scientists to have been the last ones to survive, after the long-tailed ones had mostly died off. Those are the pterosaurs often shown in science fiction films and on TV, yet it's the long-tailed ones that dominate in actual human encounters with those flying creatures.

What is a ropen? It's a long-tailed pterosaur, similar in some ways to *Rhamphorhynchoid* ("basal") fossils. The end of the tail is often seen as having a structure described in various ways:

- diamond-shaped
- spade shape

- triangle

## **Sightings Around the World**

People see them in many parts of the planet. I, Jonathan Whitcomb, have received reports directly from eyewitnesses who report encountering living pterosaurs on five continents, as I have been available to communicate with those persons over the past 12+ years.

A recent sighting was in northwestern Arkansas, in the first week or two of May, 2016. Here is part of the report:

*. . . saw a pterosaur come up out of the water and fly into the woods. It was grey and did not have feathers. . . . [wingspan] was from 15 to 19 feet! . . . grey leathery skin.*

I had previously received several reports of pterosaur sightings in Arkansas as well as many in surrounding states. These included (but are not limited to) the following:

- Texas
- Oklahoma
- Louisiana
- Mississippi
- Alabama
- Tennessee
- Missouri

Indeed, it's easier to list the American states in which modern pterosaurs have *not* been reported than it is to list the ones in which they have been seen. The states shown above are listed because they surround Arkansas.

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## **Cryptozoology and Pterodactyls**

. . . the belief that all pterosaurs became extinct many millions of years ago is not based on sound objective evidence but on a number of assumptions.

### **What is this flying ropen?**

*How often we've been taught that all dinosaurs and pterosaurs became extinct . . . as if that were proven! But what if some are still living? . . . consider the many eyewitness testimonies of those flying creatures.*

### **The Ropen and Destination Truth**

*Adventure, danger, enlightenment—those I experienced half a year later, sitting in my living room, delighting in the ropen-episode of Destination Truth. I thought I remembered advising the production team “do not” enter a cave that might contain a ropen . . .*

### **Rhamphorhynchoid Pterosaurs and Ropens**

*The pterosaur suborder of Rhamphorhynchoidea, those long-tailed featherless flying creatures—they're also called basal pterosaurs. For generations, many scientists have assumed that they became extinct . . .*

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# **Reply to Misidentification**

# Conjectures

*By Jonathan David Whitcomb*

Sometimes a person who is mostly ignorant of the overall eyewitness evidence of modern pterosaurs will speculate about misidentification. Many of those conjectures fall to one of the following two flying creatures:

1. Frigate bird
2. Flying fox fruit bat

Yet many of the speculators avoid details, in particular avoiding any reference to any one sighting. Perhaps the weight of generations of Westerner assumptions appears sufficient, allowing a critic to simply toss a feather of skepticism onto the subject, to crush the idea of modern pterosaurs. Before we get into any particular sighting, let's examine how cultural assumptions play a role in our thinking.

## **Cultural Assumptions**

Each culture encapsulates what other cultures may recognize as faulty assumptions. The nature of how cultural assumptions originate may lie within the fog of ancient history, but the result is clear: The great majority of those who have been raised in a particular culture have been blinded to the weaknesses of their cultural assumptions. They will sometimes go to war, even risking destruction, to protect their weak assumptions.

Westerners have become indoctrinated into the opinion that all species of certain general types of animals became extinct many millions of years ago. In reality, no paleontologist has witnessed even one extinction of even one species of dinosaur or pterosaur. Yet the indoctrination continues, as if all of their species must have died out by 65-million years ago. This indoctrination-influence problem deserves far more attention,

but we need to move on for now.



Sketch drawn by the eyewitness Eskin Kuhn (sighting in Cuba)

### **Misidentified . . . Whatever**

I have sometimes been amazed at the imaginations of some skeptics. What an imaginative collection of speculated misidentifications! It's not been confined to oceanic birds or large bats. It has also included leaping fish and woodpeckers. Some of this deserves a little attention, even though the ideas are ludicrous.

I, Jonathan Whitcomb, have been criticized for publishing accounts of modern-pterosaur encounters, yet my critics usually ignore the following point: I have probably spent more time on living-pterosaur investigations than any other person now living on this planet. Even if I have made mistakes, those 10,000+ hours of searching, researching, interviewing, and writing may have uncovered some important truth.

If someone reports observing a potential living pterosaur and later retracts that original interpretation, it usually means we can safely classify that sighting as a misidentification. In reality, that rarely happens. To the best of my memory, I list the following cases in which a person could have changed his or her mind in that way (and these are restricted to eyewitnesses who clearly appeared to be honest):

- Number of Frigate birds reported as pterosaurs: one
- Number of fruit bats reported as pterosaurs: zero
- Number of leaping manta-ray fish reported as pterosaurs: zero

- Number of woodpeckers reported as pterosaurs: zero
- Number of Hornbill birds reported as pterosaurs: zero
- Number of mechanical flying models reported as pterosaurs: zero

The above does not imply that almost no such misidentifications have ever taken place. But those cases are so rare that I now recall only one of them, and that appeared to have been a Frigate bird seen by a man in Australia years ago.

Please be aware that I am not including the many YouTube videos that feature Frigate birds or mechanical models or 3D animations of apparent pterosaurs. Many of those can be resolved as hoaxes rather than honest misidentifications. I mostly refer to persons who have reported their sightings to me or to one of my associates. (An exception was the Frigate bird seen by an Australian; he reported his sighting to an online forum.)

### **Common Misidentifications Overlooked by Skeptics**

Critics may be ignorant of the common types of actual misidentification:

- Eyewitness first thought it must have been a weird bird
- Eyewitness first considered it a strange big bat
- Eyewitness first thought it was a perception problem

We have no room on a single blog post for all the sighting reports in which a person observed a flying creature that looked like a “dragon” or “pterodactyl” but that idea was immediately rejected. Those eyewitness pondered all the possibilities that it could have instead been some strange bird or bat. This is common with many Americans and other Westerners.

Often a person will doubt his or her ability to see properly or correctly perceive what was seen, because of the depth of

Western indoctrination into extinction dogmas. In some of those sighting cases, the eyewitness will eventually come to realize that the flying creature was actually what it appeared to be. Those are the eyewitnesses that may eventually report their encounters to me.

That kind of misidentification seems to have been overlooked by the skeptics and critics. The important point about misidentification is this: When a person comes to correct an apparently wrong early interpretation—that case has a significant potential for being a misidentification, and the vast majority of such misidentifications are **for actual modern pterosaurs** that were at first thought to have been strange manifestations or misperceptions of other things. This calls for examples.

**Paperback book *Live Pterosaurs in America* (third edition)**

*Page 28:*

*The two men [in Florida one night] had no time to recover when a second creature flew in the opposite direction, toward the neighbor's backyard. . . . This one was not as clearly visible, but obviously very similar. DR said to his friend, "Was that what I think it was?" He replied, "Naa, it had to be something else."*

*Page 32:*

*It's common for an eyewitness to first assume that what is seen is a bird. In Kentucky, MR first assumed he was watching a "large bird." In Wisconsin, EWED first assumed a "strange looking bird." In Michigan, RT first assumed an ordinary "large dark colored bird."*

*Pages 35-36 [Brownsville, Texas]*

*She was twelve years old, at most (around 1995), when she walked out into her backyard one morning to check on the dog*



. . . Next door, in the neighbor's backyard, was what she first thought was a tall man; but he was about as tall as the house, too tall. He was "draped in a long black coat or cape," facing away from her. "Dracula" came to mind as GR tried to understand what she was looking at. The "man" turned, and revealed a face that terrified the child: It was non-human.

Slowing the creature . . . unwrapped its bat-like wings, dark leathery wings.

Notice how eyewitnesses in the United States, in the above cases, initially searched for a non-pterosaur explanation for what was encountered. Only after careful consideration did they realize it may have been a pterosaur, an animal that they had been taught was extinct. Without that extinction indoctrination, it would have been immediately obvious to the eyewitnesses that they had observed a pterosaur.

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## **Honesty Credibility in Pterodactyl Sightings**

*Let's examine what's been learned from sighting reports that are mostly from North America, with a critical eye on the overall honesty-credibility of eyewitnesses.*

### **Ropens in Western USA**

*According to Cryptozoology News (online), two eyewitnesses in Nevada recently saw a "reptilian-like bird" fly up and over their vehicle on Interstate-80 at 11:00 p.m., and the description of the flying creature included "long thin tail," a head crest, and "a long and thin neck." That sounds like a ropen.*

## **Living Pterosaurs? Not by Glen Kuban**

. . . the testimonies of Brian Hennesy and Duane Hodgkinson. Glen Kuban's web page ignores those two witnesses entirely. . . . [sightings of] "prehistoric" looking flying creatures in daylight, at fairly close range, with locations being Bougainville Island and the Finschhafen area . . . [in] the nation of Papua New Guinea.

## **Figurines of Dinosaurs and Pterosaurs in Mexico**

*Where is the physical evidence for modern ropens, or extant long-tailed pterosaurs? It's there to see, for those who are open-minded enough to look.*

## **Misidentification Possibilities With Pterosaurs**

*Perhaps the oldest misidentification suggestion, for reports of living pterosaurs in Papua New Guinea, has been "Flying Fox fruit bat." It seems to satisfy reports of large featherless flying creatures in the southwest Pacific, but there are problems with "misidentified bat."*

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# **Rhamphorhynchoid Pterosaurs and Ropens**

The pterosaur suborder of *Rhamphorhynchoidea*, those long-tailed featherless flying creatures—they're also called *basal pterosaurs*. For generations, many scientists have assumed that they became extinct, at least for most of their species,

before the last of the *Pterodactyloid* pterosaurs dominated the skies, many millions of years ago. At least that has been the assumption.

In other words, according to orthodox evolutionary ideas, a typical species of *Rhamphorhynchoid* pterosaur either became extinct or it evolved into another form before the short-tailed pterosaurs became the dominant type, long ago. That line of thinking also includes the idea that all species, of both suborders, had become extinct by about 65 million years ago. All of those ideas, to me (Jonathan Whitcomb) and to my associates, are like fairy tales. Both of those suborders are still living, represented by at least a few species worldwide.

Modern *Rhamphorhynchoids* we call *ropens*. Two differences emerge with some of the modern versions of this featherless flying creature:

1. Some ropens can be much larger than a typical fossil
2. Some of them have a prominent horn-like head crest

### **Sighting in Wetlands of Central California in 1994**

From a report in *Cryptozoology News*, we learn of an encounter in California in which a mother and daughter saw an apparent pterosaur, one with a long tail.

A few miles south of Sacramento, California, thousands of acres of the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge are managed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. On a clear spring day in 1994, the two eyewitnesses there saw a flying creature, apparently featherless, with long thin tail and a "pterodactyl-like head." They were sure that it was living, not a kite. It circled overhead and then departed the area in its flight.

The eyewitness who reported the sighting said, "It had a long neck, long head and long pointed beak area. It had a large wingspan, bigger than a blue heron. It was gliding very high

up, with very little flapping movement of its wings.” That woman, who is a avid bird watcher, also said, “What we saw was neither a crane nor a heron. We saw a real living animal that was not familiar to us and looked like it was straight out of Jurassic Park.”

### **Scott Norman’s Sighting in Central California**

According to the cryptozoologist Chad Arment, Scott Norman had reported to him a sighting of an apparent pterosaur one night in mid-2007 in Central California (much further to the south of Sacramento):

*. . . this animal came gliding just over the [nearby] shed . . . [It] had an 8-10 foot wingspan, the wings were bat-like in shape . . . The body was about 5-6 feet in length, the neck about 1-2 feet in length, the head was about four feet in length . . .*

The flying creature had a head crest that the eyewitness estimated was about two feet long. Norman did not see a tail that night, but he told Arment that another eyewitness had seen an apparent pterosaur in that area in daylight, and the other man reported a long tail.

### **Sighting in Southern California**

Moving further south, the 1994 sighting in wetlands near Sacramento brings to mind another sighting in wetlands, this one in Orange County in 2007, over a hundred miles south of Scott Norman’s sighting but in the same year. It was just northwest of the University of California, Irvine.

From the nonfiction cryptozoology book *Live Pterosaurs in America* (third edition), we read about this apparent ropen:

*[The eyewitness] had no view of any feet and no good view of the head. He noticed that during the creature’s flight the tail was straight, as if it was “stretched out to be*

*measured." A flange, close to the end of the tail, he described as "triangle-shaped."*

The anonymous eyewitness saw the featherless creature fly just above Campus Drive, which separates two marshy areas, and the length of that road tells us about the size of the apparent ropan. The flying creature was about as long as the width of that road, which is thirty feet. Half of that thirty feet was the approximate length of the tail.



Eyewitness sketch of a featherless flying creature seen in  
Cuba in 1965

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### **Gitmo Rhamphorhynchoid**

*I have also learned that Carson, later in childhood or adolescence, was inquisitive and sharp and recognized one or more images of pterosaurs at the Smithsonian, when her father worked in Washington D.C.*

### **Ropen Observed in Alberta, Canada**

*A family saw an apparent pterosaur flying over the city of Edmonton (Alberta, Canada) recently, and the flying creature appeared to have been a ropen.*

### **Rhamphorhynchoid Suborder of Pterosaurs**

*Before scientists created words like Rhamphorhynchoid for long-tailed pterosaurs, common folk used the word dragon for large destructive creatures, including those with long tails and wings but no feathers.*

### **Recent Ropen Sightings**

*I'm not positive about what [I] and my 16 year old son saw flying across a major road in Richmond, Virginia . . . Its wing span was massive! It looked to be about 10 feet across and its tail was long with a triangle point! We were so flabbergasted looking at it that I nearly crashed!*

### **Long Tails of Rhamphorhynchoid Pterosaurs**

*How common is a long tail on a modern pterosaur! Of the 128 more-credible sighting reports compiled at the end of 2012, 41% reported a long tail.*

## **Universal Pterosaur Extinction?**

*To be plain, extinction has two meanings, or distinct usages, so beware of anyone—even a paleontologist—who uses the word in a general sense but with an air, and only an air, of sounding specific.*

## **Strange Flying Creatures in the United States**

*When I led a brief expedition in Papua New Guinea in 2004, I had no idea that many Americans had encountered, in the forty-eight contiguous states of the USA, flying creatures like the ropen.*

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