

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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