

The Legend of Goatman

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As a professional naturalist, I must abide by the unwritten rule that is part professional responsibility, part personal pride. The rule, known as Chapter 4, Section 1, Subsection A, Paragraph 1.1 of the Professional Naturalists' Unwritten Code of Ethics, states: A professional naturalist, upon being asked a natural history-related question for which the naturalist does not know the correct answer, will diligently seek factual information to answer the question being presented. If sufficient factual information is not available, the professional naturalist will continue to pursue a factual response throughout the naturalist's career.

Normally, abiding by this rule is not too difficult, but for any naturalist who has ever called the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge home, one question serves as our collective albatross: What is Goatman, aka, the Lake Worth Monster?

I was first asked this question by a curious visitor shortly after I came to the Nature Center in 1997. My answer, in accordance with Unwritten Rule 4-1A-1.0, which states that it is acceptable not to know the answer to a question, was, "I don't know, but I will get back with you." Twenty-two years later, despite doing my due diligence in seeking factual information to answer the question, I still don't know.

With 2019 being the 50th anniversary of Goatman's appearance on the Refuge, I began the year with the goal of answering the question. I've scoured the Nature Center's archives for documentation of all sightings. I've searched all available City of Fort Worth records, sifted through local media reports, and taken a deep dive into the world of cryptozoology, the science of unknown animals.

Piecing together information from a myriad of sources, it is certain that Goatman falls under the category of 'cryptid,' or a creature which is not currently known to science. This grouping includes an array of creatures ranging from so-called lake monsters such as Nessie and Champ to West Virginia's Mothman and the Hodag of Wisconsin. While these creatures have been observed thousands of times, science requires physical evidence to declare them to be "real." Science, in fact, has stricter requirements in terms of evidence than the legal system, where eyewitness testimony can be accepted as evidence.

Most cryptozoologists classify Goatman as a member of the Sasquatch group based on the preponderance of details related by those who observed the creature in 1969. Goatman's described size, large human-like tracks, and reported behavior are similar to that reported for Sasquatch.

While many might be under the mistaken impression that Sasquatch isn't a Texas phenomenon and is only found in the tall timbers of the



A photo of Goatman known in the cryptozoological community as a "blob-squatch." Photo used with permission of Sallie Ann Clarke archives.

Pacific Northwest, my exploration of the cryptid literature has found that Texas is, in fact, the location of many, many Sasquatch sightings. In fact, many in the cryptozoology field believe that Sasquatch are much more common in Texas than in any other state.

Assuming that Goatman was simply a local Sasquatch, 1969 was not even the last reported interaction with the beast on the Refuge. The Bigfoot Research Organization (BFRO) maintains a database of reported sightings and other interactions. Texas claims well over 200 reports statewide, including a report from December 1976 describing vocalizations heard emanating from the nighttime woods along the West Fork of the Trinity River within the Refuge. The vocalizations were described as a "roar, scream, howl" consistent with other vocalizations believed to be Sasquatch-related and are classified as a BFRO Class B report due to the lack of a clear visual sighting.

The problem with this information is the question of factuality. Can these reports of sightings, vocalizations, footprints, and even blurry pictures and videos be considered factual? The non-cryptozoology scientific community says, "No." Where does this leave me in my quest to answer the question and abide by the unwritten rules of professional naturalists?

As we approach the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Goatman on the Refuge with October 26's Trails and Treats featuring the Lake Worth Monster Bash, the question remains unanswered, and my pursuit of the truth continues. However, we can still celebrate the mystery that is...The Legend of Goatman.