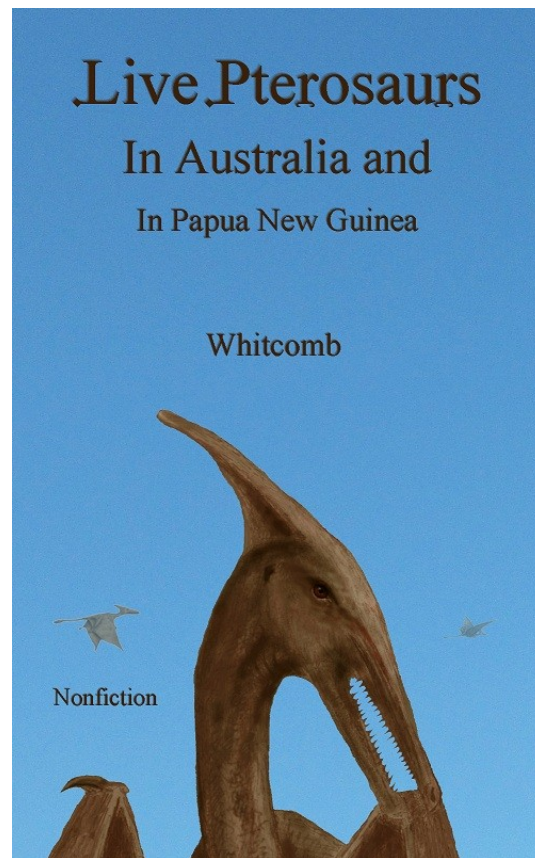


Live Pterosaurs in Australia and in Papua New Guinea



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Written and published by Jonathan Whitcomb

Illustrated by Patty Carson (large pterosaur head) and Eskin Kuhn (flying pterosaurs)
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Preface

You will here find reports of encounters with apparent living pterosaurs, including many accounts never before published in any book. Other sighting reports are condensed from the print book "Searching for Ropens." The ebook you are now examining is neither exhaustive nor rudimentary, but it explains most of what most Australians, and others, need to know about what might, on rare occasions, fly over their heads at night.

I believe in living pterosaurs and hope they will soon be officially discovered. More important, I believe in you, that you can soar above dogmatic assumptions about extinctions. I hope that you already understand that we are more than a by-product of culture: Our existence transcends the boundaries of the human cultural assumptions that have shaped our beliefs.

Now is the time for us to listen carefully, to think clearly, and to act accordingly rather than simply react when a cultural belief is contradicted: now, not after the official scientific discovery of modern living pterosaurs.

Dedication

To the eyewitnesses who have reported their sightings of apparent pterosaurs, including two artists, Patty Carson and Eskin Kuhn, who encountered, at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in 1965 and 1971, the pterosaurs shown on the cover of this book

Introduction

Are you a lucky eyewitness who has seen a living pterosaur? . . . well, maybe a cursed eyewitness? This is for you: eyewitness reports of large featherless flying creatures seen over the past few decades in Australia and in Papua New Guinea. You are no longer alone.

Have you never seen anything like a living pterosaur? Have you never before even thought about that possibility? This can still benefit you. Even if you've never been in Australia or in Papua New Guinea (PNG), you might live within a culture similar to a culture in one of those two countries, regarding disbelief or belief in modern living pterosaurs or in flying dragons; societies are less isolated than they once were. But whatever the culture in which you were raised, you may, if you choose, in some measure help in its awakening. At least you'll be better informed.

Common persons in the southwest Pacific have seen something big flying overhead, something uncommon, unlike any bird or bat. This is not fantasy, it's nonfiction, so let's begin with our feet on the ground, take one step at a time.

I don't ask you to launch your imagination to fly with every story about a live "pterodactyl." When somebody sends me an email about a strange flying creature, I don't jump onto the first paragraph as if the creature had to have been a living pterosaur; neither do I dismiss the whole account when I first encounter something unexpected. Please do the same: Judge not too quickly, either to one side or the other.

I have found, after many years of questioning eyewitnesses, that some accounts cannot be dismissed as misidentified birds or bats or as hoaxes. Keep the door open to discovering something for yourself.

What is a Pterosaur?

We must begin with the basics: What is a pterosaur? It's not really a type of dinosaur, although it's associated with them. The flying creature is called "pterodactyl" by many non-scientists; some Americans call those featherless fliers "dinosaur birds" or "prehistoric birds."

Most pterosaur fossils fit into one of two types: long-tailed *Rhamphorhynchoid* or shorter-tailed *Pterodactyloid*. Those two types differ in other ways, not just tail length, but that's a subject for a book on pterosaur fossils.

In modern eyewitness reports, long-tailed pterosaurs outnumber short-tails, at least four-to-one. Standard models of extinction make this ratio appear strange, for the long-tailed variety were thought to have dwindled before the short-tailed pterosaurs became dominant, at least that's the theory. Nevertheless, the ratio is significant in modern sightings, appearing consistent regardless of the culture or beliefs or education of the eyewitness.

Furthermore, many of those long tails are reported to have tail vanes that suggest *Rhamphorhynchoids*. A common word used by eyewitnesses, to describe the shape of the structure at the end of the tail, is "diamond."

This book focuses mostly on the long-tailed pterosaurs often called "ropens." For more information on the short-tailed ones, especially observations of apparent *Pterodactyloids* in central New Britain Island, PNG, read the most recent edition of the book *Searching for Ropens*.

About "prehistoric" creatures, consider all that you have read in textbooks, all that you have seen in documentaries, all that you have heard from teachers. How often was the possibility of a modern

dinosaur or pterosaur mentioned? Never? Western indoctrination into universal extinctions---that subject may deserve a book of its own; we'll cover it only in part, mostly in the first chapter.

Expeditions in Papua New Guinea

My American associates and I have explored remote jungles in Papua New Guinea, searching for living pterosaurs and interviewing native eyewitnesses. Most expeditions were led by one or two Americans, with one or two native interpreters. Did we fail or succeed? It depends on who interprets our investigations: skeptics who point out the lack of an official scientific discovery or open-minded cryptozoologists who recognize progress and hope it will continue.

Not all explorers are from the United States. The Australian Brian Irwin (not related to Steve) has explored in Papua New Guinea, but most of his searching has been for dinosaurs rather than for pterosaurs.

What is Cryptozoology?

Cryptozoology is not a branch of science, at least not in the usual sense; but it can motivate zoologists to conduct field investigations, at least in theory it can motivate them. It is the "study of hidden animals," and usually relies less on direct scientific examination and more on eyewitness testimony; nevertheless, we can use scientific reasoning and methods within the boundaries of cryptozoology.

The American missionary Thomas Savage, in the 1800's in Africa, obtained some bones of what we now call a "Western Gorilla," which prepared for its eventual scientific acknowledgement. Whatever led that missionary to obtain those bones can be called "cryptozoological," especially if he had been following eyewitness accounts.

In this book, we'll briefly consider the cryptozoological contributions of the missionary James Blume, who has interviewed, in Papua New Guinea, many native eyewitnesses of apparent pterosaurs. We'll also consider the contributions of explorers who were assisted by Blume, for they have interviewed other eyewitnesses.

Bioluminescent Pterosaurs

Most of the twenty-first century modern-pterosaur expeditions have resulted in at least one sighting of at least one distant flying light. We call it by its name on Umboi Island: "ropen." We believe it is a *Rhamphorhynchoid* pterosaur and that it has intrinsic bioluminescence.

Most explorers have interviewed one or more native eyewitnesses who had dramatic encounters with flying creatures described like pterosaurs: creature sightings much more revealing than distant lights. A few natives have seen, at night or in twilight, such a flying creature as it was glowing. This appears to verify native traditions that the lights come from flying creatures.

Eyewitnesses in Australia and Elsewhere

Living-pterosaur expeditions in Papua New Guinea during the past two decades---those have encouraged Australian eyewitnesses to come forward to report their own encounters: large flying creatures like those observed north of Australia.

Since the two Umboi Island expeditions of 2004, many eyewitnesses have come forward from other areas of the world: North America, Africa, and even Europe. In 2011, I collected statistical data on ninety-eight sightings. Three factors proved that no hoax or hoaxes could have had any significant influence on those sightings as a whole.

Skeptics sometimes imagine misidentifications and hoaxes as explanations for pterosaur sightings. Statistical analysis has eliminated hoaxes as a major factor, but what about birds and bats that might have looked somewhat like pterosaurs? Detailed examinations of individual sightings eliminate that misidentification idea, but each report needs to be examined individually. I have researched that possibility off and on for about eight years.

Publications, Print and Online

Between late 2003 and early 2012, I have written several editions of two print books, one paper in a peer-reviewed journal of science, and over a thousand blog posts and web pages. My critics have sometimes portrayed me as a deluded fanatic, when they have not called me worse. But strange as I might appear to them, I am not one of those common persons to whom something even stranger has appeared: As of mid-2012, I have never seen a live pterosaur. Nevertheless, I consider what eyewitnesses tell us, record and compare sightings, and report what I find. And I continue to report.

It may appear that I am ill qualified to write about living pterosaurs, having failed to observe one. My principle associates who also searched for living pterosaurs in Papua New Guinea (Garth Guessman, Paul Nation, and David Woetzel) have each seen, at some time, something that may have been one. I believe that each of those three men did indeed see a bioluminescent modern pterosaur. Their detailed reports have given me even more to analyze, more to write about.

Greater details on expeditions in Papua New Guinea from 2002-2007 are found in my book *Searching for Ropens* (SFR). Details on sightings in North America are found in my book *Live Pterosaurs in America*. This book, however, covers sightings in the southwest Pacific, some of which are absent from SFR.

When the natives Mark Kau and Luke Paina watched the night sky near Gomlongon Village, Umboi Island, on October 5, 2004, they saw the *ropen* light flying over the tree canopy of Mount Bel. (My associates and I now believe that it was a bioluminescent pterosaur.) During that sighting, I was nearby . . . sleeping: I had chosen the wrong time of night to watch the sky. But I would not dream of trading my interviews for a personal sighting of a distant flying light. Why? I have learned far more, from eyewitnesses from around the world, than I could have from a sighting of my own.

With no luck in observing any living pterosaur in Papua New Guinea, why do I write so much? Why do I write more than any other cryptozoologist? Since my expedition on Umboi Island in 2004, I have had no need to travel to find eyewitnesses: They find my web pages and send me emails, so my resources keep expanding.

If you have seen something resembling a pterosaur, or know of an eyewitness, please send me an email (info@livepterosaurs.com).

With no college degree in paleontology, how can I be sure that eyewitnesses see pterosaurs and that almost all paleontologists are wrong about universal extinctions? A complete answer could fill a book. You'll read a summary about non-extinction in the first chapter of this book.

I hope that I can continue to help Western eyewitnesses know that they are no longer alone in having seen apparent pterosaurs. I hope that natives of Papua New Guinea continue to be interviewed by Westerners. Believing that you will come to know the truth for yourself, I hope that you will experience, through their words, something of what they have encountered.

Eyewitnesses deserve to be heard, regardless of how well they can speak or write English or how well they can defend themselves against skeptics; I continue to listen to eyewitnesses. Explorers who have

risked their lives and their health in remote jungles deserve to be heard; I continue to write about their experiences. Judge for yourself if these reports deserve the attention of the general public in Australia and in Papua New Guinea. I thank you for your time.

How can pterosaurs be alive?

I have no desire to shock anybody. I partially agree with the general concept of extinctions, but without committing myself to any time frame. Most species of dinosaurs and pterosaurs appear to have been extinct for some time; nevertheless, after many years of investigations, my associates and I assert that at least two species of pterosaurs live in the southwest Pacific. Indeed, similar ones live in other areas of the world as well.

That Unbelievable Species: Humans

Is it hard to believe in a non-extinct pterosaur? Try explaining humans to reclusive nocturnal flying creatures. Explain to pterosaurs how creatures without wings flew to the moon . . . Well, let me explain their cleverness, as I would explain it to a pterosaur:

Three humans climbed into a giant egg-like thing, although that species never lays eggs (they're clever enough to make many things). Anyway, other humans threw this particular egg high up into the air, hoping it would not break. It went all the way to the moon, for that is what the humans intended all along.

The egg landed on the moon, but gently, without cracking. It soon hatched on the moon, and one human climbed out. While he was climbing out, he was talking to millions of humans who were on the earth, and they heard him . . . Of course it was too far away for anybody to hear him, but they did hear him because humans are very clever . . . Anyway, he soon returned into the egg, which was then resealed.

Finally, the egg was thrown back to the earth, again without breaking. Other humans quickly found it, floating in an ocean that stretched for thousands of miles. The egg again hatched, with the humans still alive. . . .

Now you know why I would rather explain living pterosaurs to humans: It's not so shocking.

Early Fossil Discovery

The first discovery of a pterosaur fossil by a Western scientist, in 1784, was decades before Charles Darwin began writing about his ideas on extinctions and evolution. Before Darwin, Western scientists had assumed that all species of pterosaurs were extinct for a simple reason: Those who discovered the fossils had no experience with any similar animal that was living.

Also important, probably no scientist at that time had considered that a few species of pterosaurs might still be alive, rarely seen because they're both uncommon and nocturnal. Today, some cryptozoologists believe that one or more of their species are indeed uncommon and nocturnal---and still alive.

Hiding in the Shadows are the Eyewitnesses

Almost nobody is unmoved by an encounter with a living pterosaur, although some eyewitnesses refuse to lay aside the dogma of universal extinction. How many eyewitnesses hold onto that dogma? How can I tell? Those are the ones who feel safer hiding in the shadows, the ones who fear being bitten by the words of skeptics, the ones who never get in touch with me or with any other cryptozoologist.

How do I know that some of them refuse to give up the dogma that all pterosaurs are extinct? How can I know anything about eyewitnesses who remain silent? It's easy. Some sightings are by a group of eyewitnesses, and some of those ordinary persons report not only the extraordinary flying creatures but the inordinate refusal of some fellow-witnesses to admit what was observed. (Especially telling is the

reaction of a soldier who remained silent after a 1944 encounter in New Guinea: His buddy talked.)

Those hidden eyewitnesses might be fighting with the doctrine that pterosaurs cannot be alive. It can be a cerebral wrestling match between what was observed and what they had been taught since childhood. Trying to recover from the shock of a live-pterosaur sighting, they fail to question, or delay questioning, what needs to be questioned: the universal extinction dogma.

Some Americans and Australians hesitate to report their shocking sightings of flying creatures that appear like what should not exist. That's the way things are. We may understand something of what they feel. They have the right to remain silent, and they have the right to avoid being burned by skeptics. But you have a right to know why some eyewitnesses are hesitant to report shocking encounters. You'll see an example in the chapter about the 1944 sighting by Duane Hodgkinson and his tight-lipped army buddy.

What to Fear: Insanity, Neighbors, or Monsters?

Some eyewitnesses fear discovering the monstrous possibility of personal insanity. Others fear not insanity itself but the opinions of anyone who might think them insane. Others fear discovering that some of what they had been taught about science was false; they prefer to believe that scientific proclamations must always be true. How grateful I am for those who, in spite of their fears, report to me their encounters!

Of course we're talking about Western eyewitnesses here. Some Americans and Australians fear what neighbors might say to other neighbors, so some eyewitnesses keep quiet. Natives in Papua New Guinea, on the other hand, might fear the creature itself. Who cares if your closest neighbor is thirsting for gossip? That huge long-tailed flying thing north of your village might become a close neighbor . . . and it might become hungry. You'll see an example of that kind of fear in the chapter with the interview of Gideon Koro.

Not all the fears eyewitnesses face are new. I've encountered evidence of nineteenth-century newspaper skepticism towards accounts of "dragons" in California, and I know of a more recent sighting in Perth, Australia: A lady was pained by careless remarks from skeptics. Earlier Australian eyewitnesses probably faced similar skepticism, so let's look back a little more into Western history. We need to understand the depth of the universal extinction dogma regarding pterosaurs.

Dragons and "Extinction"

Dragon stories abound in many human cultures, and before the late nineteenth century "dragon" would have been what an eyewitness might have called a living pterosaur. I suggest that some legends of flying dragons are less than 100% fictional, but this book examines more recent reports, not old legends. Nevertheless, part of the problem resides in the old English word "dragon."

Darwin emphasized extinctions. In time, the concept of many extinctions in the distant past was accepted by many scientists. That created an atmosphere unfriendly to any eyewitness account of a live pterosaur, to put it mildly. What scientist would have believed it?

The pterosaur-extinction dogma pre-dated Darwin. But if an eyewitness referred to a flying dragon, then "dragon" would have sounded too unscientific. Whatever an eyewitness said, before the twentieth century, any report of anything like a pterosaur would have been rejected by most scientists.

On that point, I have found many rejections of eyewitness testimonies to be far from objective and far from mild-mannered. One skeptic, a non-scientist, built a whole web site to ridicule the concept of modern dinosaurs and pterosaurs, putting the words "stupid" and "lies" into the URL address of the site.

We now understand something of what eyewitnesses feel and why some of them probably never report their encounters.

For "ancient" creatures assumed extinct, post-Darwin scientists were incapable of accepting anything short of an official scientific discovery. But nothing happened. How could living pterosaurs remain hidden, considering all the various scientific discoveries in the twentieth century? It was simple. The uncommon nocturnal flying creatures found it easy to remain hidden: Nobody was looking for them.

Expeditions and Bible-Believers

Who could organize any expedition to search for living pterosaurs? Only an official discovery could awaken Western scientists so they could search for extant pterosaurs, but discovery normally comes after searching, not before. Looking back at this problem, from the time of Darwin until 1990 it appears to have been an almost hopeless atmosphere for a discovery. But a solution eventually appeared . . . from an unexpected source.

It was only a partial solution, to be sure: only cryptozoological. But in the 1990's a few American Biblical creationists began intermittent light expeditions in Papua New Guinea, investigating reports of possible living pterosaurs. This led to more expeditions, from 2002 to 2007, by cryptozoologists who were better prepared and who had more success with interviews and observations.

But why Biblical creationists? For the moment, lay aside any judgment of any concept of earth-age; look only at the recent history of expeditions in Papua New Guinea. Who would be more likely to search for living pterosaurs, those who believed in a major extinction event 65 million years ago or those who believed in many pterosaurs living 6,000 years ago? How much easier to organize an expedition when the organizers are convinced of the recent existence of what is being sought!

Before considering what those Biblical creationists discovered, we need to go back into history a bit more. How deeply extinction ideas had been ingrained into Western culture!

Popularity of Darwin

Early in the twentieth century, discoveries of "living fossils" were out-paced by the rising popularity of Darwin's ideas. In addition, new discoveries of dinosaur and pterosaur fossils appeared to justify the idea of their universal extinction. Of course almost everybody was looking for old fossils and almost nobody for living fossils.

By the middle of the twentieth century, school teachings had cemented the ancient-extinction idea into Western culture, so dinosaurs and pterosaurs were portrayed as living only in science fiction and dragons only in fantasy. Expeditions in central Africa, searches for a sauropod dinosaur, were the rare exception, with no official discovery.

Science Fiction Movies

But another problem arose with the flight of modern pterosaurs. I make no accusation of conspiracy, for I have seen no clear evidence that anybody has attempted to hide modern pterosaurs from public knowledge. But realistic animation, in recent decades, has made possible science fiction movies that have further cemented modern dinosaurs and pterosaurs to the concept of fiction-only. That result, from some films, appears to have been inadvertent, unimagined by the imaginative film creators.

Did you feel anything like what I felt on watching the first Jurassic Park movie? Remember when the Tyrannosaurus rex escaped, breaking through the formerly-electric fence that was no longer shocking? (Of course, that escape had to be next to a car containing children; that's Hollywood.) But each of us

eventually walked away from the theater or the television screen with all of our body parts still intact. That walking away may have reinforced the idea that modern dinosaurs really are confined in fictional stories, confined in television sets, confined in movie theaters. And when we exited the theater, the fluttering wings were only pigeons in the patio.

How easy for some skeptics to walk away from reports of modern pterosaurs! How easy to assume that the simple minded are over-imaginative, influenced by science fiction when they report live pterodactyls! How easy to imagine that only less-intelligent persons are gullible enough to believe those who report modern-pterosaur encounters! I repudiate the notion that eyewitnesses have regurgitated fears spawned in dim cavernous theaters where they've encountered science fiction monsters. I see something entirely different.

Recovering From the Shock

How hard it is for many Westerners to abandon the idea that all pterosaurs are long extinct! The word "science" has been tied to both men who walk on the moon and to declarations that all dinosaurs and pterosaurs have been extinct for millions of years. How shocking to encounter a cryptozoologist who is cutting down a longstanding tradition about pterosaur extinction!

I don't blame anybody for simply assuming that their ancient extinction is scientific truth, for we've been taught that idea all of our lives. Real science, however, progresses, and progress means change, even when it shocks us.

When a tall tree rots from the inside and falls, destroying a decrepit storage shack on a university campus, only that shack is destroyed; the campus lives on. The eventual discovery of a living pterosaur will shock Westerners, but the destruction of fallacious conjectures, like universal pterosaur-extinctions, will not threaten theories that are verified by human experience. Real science will live on.

I imagine how an average Australian or American reacts when first encountering the title of one of my press releases. They might think "How can pterosaurs be alive?" I understand that reaction, but few people would guess how deep is the subject.

Perhaps I am alone in the world, having spent over 6,000 hours, over many years, investigating reports of living pterosaurs and writing about what eyewitnesses have reported to me and my associates. But reading the title of a press release for six seconds--that is insufficient exposure. How shallow the reasoning power of the skeptic who refuses to think about this beyond six seconds!

At times I myself am in shock at the idea of modern living pterosaurs, especially when I realize the consequence: On any given day or night, while I take a walk, a pterosaur might fly over my head. Nine years of investigating eyewitness reports has not yet completely cured me of that shock.

But whenever I question the idea, my mind returns to a few critical eyewitness sightings. That is when I again realize that some pterosaurs are indeed still living, regardless of the shock to Western humans.

The Critical Sightings

Four key sightings we'll examine in the next few chapters. Each was in the southwest Pacific: the Finschhafen "Pterodactyl" of 1944, the Bougainville Creature, the Lake Pung *Ropen*, and the Perth Creature. Each rises above the average sighting; each is shocking, with no reasonable misidentification or hoax explanation; each is usually avoided by critics (who prefer ridiculing generalized hypothetical sightings that those critics themselves have imagined). Not one of the eyewitnesses was alone.

Two of the four key sightings were before the production of the first Jurassic Park movie. The third one

was by seven native boys who had never been in a theater or watched television. The fourth one involved an eyewitness who worked in a scientific field. Those 12-14 eyewitnesses observed, in those four key sightings, a huge long-tailed flying creature that was not spawned in a theater.

Each of the four key sightings appears to have been independent in that no eyewitness had been aware of any of the other three encounters. In addition, each stands independently as convincing evidence for a species of living pterosaur, repudiating commonplace hoax and misidentification speculations.

None of the eyewitnesses were expecting anything unusual and none of them were trying to disprove extinction axioms. Each group of ordinary persons was just at the right place at the right time for an exceptional sighting.

As you read the following chapters, consider the following perspective. What eyewitness reports should we expect, should uncommon nocturnal pterosaurs live in the southwest Pacific? I suggest that sightings would be relatively few and mostly at a distance and under less than ideal viewing conditions; only a small percentage of encounters would convince eyewitnesses that they had seen a living pterosaur.

In addition, only a small percentage of those eyewitnesses would pluck up the courage to report it to anybody. In Australia, not all those who heard such a report would take it seriously. Even among the many cryptozoologists of the world, perhaps only one of them would write books about those exceptional encounters of apparent pterosaurs in the southwest Pacific. And perhaps only four of the shocking encounters would be especially noteworthy and therefore emphasized in two books. That is where we now find ourselves: This is one of those two books.

We'll examine other sightings in Australia and in Papua New Guinea, but the four key encounters make the case for modern living pterosaurs in the southwest Pacific. We begin with the encounter described by the American World War II veteran Duane Hodgkinson: a "pterodactyl" with a wingspan similar to that of a Piper Tri-Pacer airplane.

The Finschhafen Pterodactyl

Introduction to the Hodgkinson Sighting

The two American soldiers gazed at giant ants that crawled on a log, at mid-day, at the edge of a jungle clearing. The native guide had left them there as he headed for the village they were to visit, just west of Finschhafen, New Guinea. To the guide, ants were nothing strange; to American soldiers in this part of New Guinea in mid-1944, the jungle held little to fear, for the Japanese were gone.

Something came tearing through the tall grass, catching the soldiers' attention: a wild pig, no need to panic . . . but something else became startled: At the far side of the clearing, a huge creature was running and flapping its wings. All the grass around it was flattened by the blasts of wind from the creature getting airborne. Up over the jungle it flew, out of sight for the moment; but Duane Hodgkinson remained stricken: Extinction itself had just become exterminated---that was no bird.

Two Expeditions in 2004

Sixty years later, at midnight, I watched my native interpreter hop off the port side of the small cargo-passenger ship and beckon for me to follow. We had just docked at Finschhafen Harbor, miles east of that jungle clearing (although surely that clearing had long since become overgrown). I followed Luke over the side, for the crew would be loading cargo for awhile. During those few minutes on the dock, we saw nothing stranger than a huge toad, insects alone catching its amphibian attention.

What was I doing there? Late in 2004, I took four flights to get from Los Angeles to Lae, Papua New Guinea, not to explore the jungle near Finschhafen: to explore Umboi Island, to the north, where the giant flying creature of the night is called "ropen." But I knew about Hodgkinson's 1944 encounter, for I had interviewed him a few weeks before my expedition: by telephone, email, and envelope mail.

The World War II veteran completed the survey forms that I had sent him in mid-2004, returning them with a few notes to clarify what he had observed. But the 2005 videotaped interview that Hodgkinson had with my associate Garth Guessman---that launched the 1944 sighting into the number one spot: the most important sighting of an apparent living pterosaur in the southwest Pacific.

To illuminate what Hodgkinson and his army buddy saw in that jungle clearing, let's consider the results of the two *ropen* expeditions of 2004, for they validate the 1944 sighting.

The two Americans Garth Guessman and David Woetzel began their 2004 expedition on Umboi Island a few weeks after I had completed my two-week expedition there. From eyewitness testimonies, they independently verified my findings that a large solitary nocturnal flying creature lives there and apparently uses intrinsic bioluminescence (natives describe a low-altitude flying light). Guessman and Woetzel, like me, became convinced that the *ropen* is a giant nocturnal *Rhamphorhynchoid* pterosaur.

Details of the 1944 Sighting

Getting back to 1944 (fifty-five miles south of Umboi), the two soldiers were fascinated by ants much bigger than those in the States and startled by a wild pig charging through the grass: nothing outlandish. The giant creature that flattened the grass with its wing beats, however---that divided the two soldiers, for Hodgkinson wanted to talk about the "pterodactyl," but his buddy preferred to pretend they had no encounter.

How did that strange animal divide those two soldiers, opening one mouth and closing the other? (It was not that one soldier had no time to take in details, for soon after flying away the creature returned, flying in the opposite direction over the clearing.) Within seconds of their sighting, one soldier was

again stunned, not by a flying creature but by his buddy. It was an encounter between two members of the strangest species on the planet: Hodgkinson's protest "but we saw it" was answered by, "No, we didn't."

To fully explain why humans deny personal experiences would require a book by itself. For the moment, the following will suffice: "Seeing is believing" is not always true with everything. Since we're restricted to the words of the eyewitness who opened his mouth, consider what Hodgkinson tells us.

As the soldiers gazed in astonishment, the creature ran to their left, taking about eight steps to get airborne. Hodgkinson later estimated that the legs were three to four feet long. The wingspan was similar to that of a small private plane, about thirty feet. Hodgkinson's attention was drawn to the head, so he could give only a rough estimate for the tail length: "at least" ten or fifteen feet long.

He thought the head was about three to four feet long, not counting the appendage that extended from the back of the head. That pointed appendage was about half the length of the head and held parallel to the neck, which was (like the head) about three to four feet long.

The clearing was about a hundred feet across. That leaves little room for miscalculating sizes, for he was standing in the same clearing where the creature was running. Whatever exaggeration may have taken place, it was insufficient to make that flying creature anything like any scientifically classified bird or bat, either in size or in features.

In addition, nothing in Hodgkinson's interviews suggested any fear on the part of those two soldiers, so fear was not a factor in causing unintended exaggeration. The creature itself, however, was probably startled from sleep by the wild pig running through the grass, so the "pterodactyl" flew off in fear of the unknown intruder in that jungle clearing.

The encounter was actually in two parts. Within seconds after flying out of sight, the creature returned, flying over the clearing, perhaps to gaze at the strangest species on the planet. Years later, Hodgkinson could not remember the color of the "pterodactyl" except that it was dark but not black. In 1944, however, after the creature had flown out of sight for the second time, the two soldiers did remember that they carried a military camera.

The following is from the 2005 videotaped interview:

Hodgkinson: ". . . It was huge. . . . as it took off . . . the wing flaps were maybe about one or two seconds in frequency, and the brush all below was totally swaying from the down-rush of the air . . . It turned around and came back, and it was up probably I would say maybe fifty or a hundred feet above us . . . We got a perfect side view of it. I was just totally fascinated. . . . It had the large appendage out the back of its head, and it had a long neck. . . . I was so fascinated with the appendage out the back of his head, and I was watching that, as he flew by, and I didn't pay attention to what the end of his tail looked like."

Guessman: "And you're sure it wasn't just long legs . . . ?"

Hodgkinson: "No, no."

Guessman: "It was a tail, you just didn't. . ."

Hodgkinson: "Yes."

Guessman: ". . . zero in on that . . ."

Hodgkinson: "Right."

Guessman: "What was the visibility of the vegetation like, between you and the creature . . . ?"

Hodgkinson: "Absolutely clear."

Japanese Soldiers in the North

That 1944 encounter between the giant Finschhafen Pterodactyl and those two American soldiers may relate to encounters between flying creatures and Japanese soldiers far north of that jungle clearing, probably earlier in 1944. This I concluded after I'd received an email, early in 2010, from a man living in Papua New Guinea.

The native (KR) was born and raised on Manus Island, north of Umboi Island, and had seen the flying lights himself. Islanders in that area call the nocturnal creature "kor," apparently their name for what Umboi Islanders call "ropen." If these flying creatures are not the same species as the Finschhafen Pterodactyl, they may still be closely related.

Third-hand accounts raise questions of accuracy (direct eyewitness accounts are best) but KR was told that soldiers had been attacked by the kor, during World War II, and that the Japanese had therefore blown up the entrances to the caves used by those flying creatures. I don't know if the Americans were in that part of New Guinea at the time, but it appeared obvious to me that the soldiers attacked by the creatures were not Americans. Unfortunately, few Japanese World War II veterans who were there are still living. And who, among those few, would now talk about those dragons? (Still, I would listen.)

One Australian, however, did talk about his 1971 encounter many miles to the east of Finschhafen, and his account supports the words of Hodgkinson. That sighting now deserves attention.

The Bougainville Creature

Unlike most of my encounters with eyewitnesses, Brian Hennessy did not find me through my web pages: His brother-in-law found me. They were talking about the absence of birds in one area of Papua New Guinea when the subject came up: the flying creature of Bougainville Island.

I responded to the brother-in-law's email and sent one to Hennessy, who replied, on September 4, 2006, with the email subject-heading "RE: unusual sighting of a creature."

"Hi Jonathan, sorry I have been slow to respond . . . The creature I saw one early morning in Bougainville is etched in my memory. . . . I actually heard it before I saw it. A slow flap...flap...flapping sound. The air was still, and our truck had stopped on our downward journey from the top of the range to the coast way below. The sound was amplified by the road-cutting into the mountain. That is, there was bare red/orange clay, rather than the surrounding jungle.

"I can't remember why our vehicle had stopped. Maybe we had to wait for another vehicle to pass us. I don't know. But I can still hear that slow flapping sound in the stillness of an early tropical morn, on the road from Panguna down to Loloho on Bougainville Island in 1971.

"When I looked up . . . I saw a very unusual creature. Firstly, it was very big (wingspan at least 2 metres, probably more . . . possibly much, much more). I can't remember the exact distance estimate that this creature was from me . . . It was black or dark brown. I had never seen anything like it before. It certainly looked prehistoric, in that it did not look like any other bird that I have seen before or since.

"Why prehistoric? Well, maybe my memory has been influenced by the intervening years, but I recall seeing this creature with a longish narrow tail . . . the head was disproportionately large compared to the body (no feathers in sight). The wingspan was large. The head had no 'normal' beak. Rather there seemed to be . . . a kind of beak that was indistinguishable from the head, and the head seemed to continue this 'point' at the back of the head. There was a clear line running from the 'beak' to the back of the head..where the 'line' continued to protrude . . .

"The most striking thing was the giant wingspan. (in relation to the size of the body), and not a feather in sight (and that is not to say that there weren't feathers . . . maybe I could not discern them).

"Hope this info is of use to you Jonathan."

Did you notice the word absent from Hennessy's account but obvious in Hodgkinson's? In all my email correspondence with Hennessy, he never said "pterodactyl" (or "pterosaur"). Nevertheless, he was clear about the description and clear about his impression of the flying creature: "prehistoric."

I soon replied:

"Thank you, Brian. Your description reminds me of other accounts in the Southwest Pacific. May I ask some questions?"

Q: "Was anything coming out the back of the head (Whether classified as a crest, appendage, horn, or comb)?"

A: "It was like a horn."

Q: "Can you remember the wing-flapping well enough to estimate the frequency? Thinking of one cycle as the time it takes for the wings to go up and also go down, how many seconds did it take for one cycle (up-and-down-flap)?"

A: "Estimate every 2 seconds."

Q: "Was the tail straight? (Was any bending of the tail visible?)"

A: "As far as I can recall, straight."

I referred Hennessy to sketches I had drawn and he chose the head most like what he had seen.

If somebody suggests a mental health issue with Mr. Hennessy, be it known that he is a professional psychologist. I found him entirely credible.

Now we can examine the Lake Pung encounter between the ropen and seven natives of Umboi Island. We can see that native superstitions are irrelevant, having already examined two sightings by eyewitnesses not native to New Guinea.

The Lake Pung Encounter

With all the challenges we face in life, it helps to have a sense of humor. I submit the following, not to exemplify my expedition but to summarize my experiences in Papua New Guinea, concentrating on my interviews with three eyewitnesses: Gideon Koro, Wesley Koro, and Mesa Augustin. Together they encountered a giant flying creature on Umboi island, ten years before I interviewed them.

Do not rush off on an ill-prepared quest in a wilderness; I spent about seven months preparing for my 2004 expedition. Do not underestimate the dangers; it's not worth losing your life. Ignore my warnings if you will: Without preparation, tell your spouse you're going to Papua New Guinea to search for giant flying dinosaurs . . . you'll be lucky to get out the front door alive.

As I prepared for my expedition, to be in a remote wilderness, leaving my wife at home for weeks, how fortunate that I was married to a trustworthy Christian woman . . . You know what I mean: "Thou shalt not kill!" Actually, I brought up the subject gradually: An important expedition was needed . . . I must assist those who would go . . . Unfortunately none of the other Americans was a professional videographer . . . Unfortunately, I myself had to go.

But how did I come to such a strange quest, searching a remote wilderness for a non-fictional flying dragon? It requires an explanation.

By the end of 2003, my small business in Long Beach, California, had evolved from wedding videos to legal videos. I had long since given up my hobby of raising juvenile crocodilians and measuring their growth rate for different water temperatures. By 1978, when I met the woman who would soon become my wife, all the large reptiles were gone, which partially explains why I was so fortunate to get a wife.

Something else, however, slept in the shadow of my adolescence. It was my passions for stories of expeditions like those of Ivan T. Sanderson. His encounters with strange animals in remote areas of the world resurfaced in my middle-aged years, in a new century. But my interest became more focused: I devoured everything I could read about eyewitness reports of living dinosaurs and pterosaurs.

I wrote to Carl Baugh (founder of a small museum in Texas) in 2003, asking about reports of apparent pterosaurs in Papua New Guinea. Baugh had led at least two light expeditions on Umboi Island, and some of the native-eyewitness interviews were videotaped. Some natives described a flying light, which led the Americans to conclude the creatures were bioluminescent; in fact, Baugh himself saw one of the flying lights.

Baugh's associate, Paul Nation (also of Texas), gave me a surprise phone call and soon sent me videos of their interviews in Papua New Guinea. My experience in legal video strengthened my confidence in judging the credibility of videotaped witnesses. I found the native eyewitnesses highly credible, including the testimony of a teenager: Gideon. That boy had encountered a giant flying creature on Umboi Island, at Lake Pung: not a glow at night but a creature in daylight.

Knowing that Paul Nation and two other Americans were planning another expedition on Umboi Island, I longed for a place on the team. I could be the one professional videographer on the 2004 Umboi Island expedition.

What an adventure! How could I resist the possibility of videotaping a modern living pterosaur? Think of it. But two teams of two men each, to eventually form into a four-man team on Umboi Island---that was not to be.

I met Garth Guessman (who lives just a few miles from me in Los Angeles County) early in 2004, a

man equally excited about discovering living pterosaurs. He was planning to go to Papua New Guinea with a man from New Hampshire: David Woetzel. Some plans find a way of unfolding, however. When Paul Nation dropped out because of lack of funds, I assumed that I would then be part of a three-man team; but Woetzel had never met me and had set his mind on a simple two-man expedition.

Stunned for several days, at being left off the team, I soon determined I would go alone. Encouraged and tutored by Paul Nation (who had explored Umboi Island twice), I prepared to search for the ropen of Umboi Island, even if I had to search alone in a wilderness. From what one of the interviewers said on one of the videotapes, the native boy Gideon had seen ten or twenty ropens together; I should be able to find one of them, even if it would take a month.

I studied Tok Pisin for many weeks, but by August of 2004 I had learned less than three hundred words. I would need to find an interpreter on the mainland of Papua New Guinea before taking a ship to Umboi Island.

I arrived on Umboi on September 26, six days after leaving Los Angeles, and after four plane flights and an overnight voyage on a small ship. I wanted to stay for at least three weeks, assisted by Luke Paina, my interpreter and bodyguard, but expenses accumulated and we had to leave the island after only two weeks.

Luke and I saw no form or features of any pterosaur during those two weeks, although Luke did see a brief flying light at low elevation. Our excursion into the bush was met by opposition from leaders of a village to the west of our base camp near Gomlongon Village, so we were forced to return to Gomlongon after only two nights on a hill-top southeast of Lake Pung.

Our brief, light expedition thus resembled the preceding ropen expeditions: no direct evidence of any pterosaur. But eyewitness testimonies---cryptozoological evidence---proved our expedition a success, as I now judge it by looking back at the experiences and considering the results: My writings resulted in many eyewitnesses contacting me with their own accounts.

I was able to interview many natives of Opai Village, just west of Gomlongon, who told me much about their observations of the ropen light: It appears on some nights, flying between mountains or between a mountain and the coast. But none of the villagers I interviewed in Opai had been close enough to see any form or features of the ropen.

After my return to the United States, I was able to analyze the times-of-night and directions of the ropen flights. It was consistent with my conjecture: A nocturnal bioluminescent flying creature leaves a mountain early at night, flies to a reef on the coast, and returns inland later at night.

But in the fall of 2004, on the outskirts of Gomlongon Village, when I realized that I had too little money to remain and that I must leave without seeing any ropen, I was downcast. Then the battery in my satellite phone died: no more communication with my wife until I got back to the mainland. That was about the time when I received a verbal summons to appear in a village court in Gomlongon: One local man was complaining about the community not receiving enough profit from the visits of foreigners.

On the sunny side, I soon learned from several young men of Tarawe Village that Gideon still lived on Umboi, near Lake Pung. The weather was still friendly (about three weeks before the rainy season), and my experience as a forensic videographer came to my rescue, urging me forward. My interpreter and I, assisted by several native guides, made a second excursion into the bush, this time searching not for a ropen but for an eyewitness. Videotaping and interviewing humans was, after all, my profession.

After a long hike (for me), I enjoyed the hospitality of the villagers whom we surprised with our visit: Everybody gathered around to watch me eat the papaya they had given me. Gideon Koro soon arrived, now a grown man and ready for the second videotaped interview of his life.

An early question surprised him: "How many" (ropens)? He surprised me with his answer: "We saw only one."

I later realized what went wrong in the earlier interview in 1994: The interpreter had misunderstood Gideon, for "ten or twenty" did not refer to the number of ropens that he and his six friends had seen at Lake Pung; it was Gideon's estimate of the size of the ropen in meters. That in itself explains why the seven teenagers ran home in terror. It also helps explain why American cryptozoologists who explore Umboi Island never see a flock of ropens.

Gideon told me the ropen had a tail. When I asked "how long," he looked at the ground to his left, his eyes darting back and forth. He then looked me in the eye and said, without blinking, "seven meeta" (to an American, twenty-three feet).

He also told me that when he and his friends arrived at the lake they saw no ropen but "a few minutes later, it came down." When I asked if it had feathers, he said, "There's no feathers." When I asked how high the ropen was flying over the lake, he said, "thirty meeta."

I asked Gideon about the ropen's mouth. He paused for a few seconds before answering: "Like a crocodile." That gave me an idea. My experience raising young crocodilians long ago---that now paid an unexpected dividend.

Later in the interview, I used a machete to draw two similar sketches in the dirt: two animal heads. Knowing about crocodiles, I drew one head like a crocodile (with the eye above the rest of the head) and the other head identical except without the protruding eye. Gideon immediately chose the non-crocodilian head.

I delighted in his quick response, for it showed me he was telling the truth about the creature. A lie would have caused him to choose the crocodilian head, to support his earlier answer about the mouth. Gideon was jungle-smart, but not clever enough (if he were lying) to quickly choose the non-crocodilian eye. How few people, in any culture, would quickly realize that a flying creature with a mouth like a crocodile would have no need for a crocodilian eye socket!

Gideon told me what he and his friends did when they saw the ropen. "When we saw it, w' come back home . . . very frightened." How understandable was their fright, considering that the strange creature with a mouth like a crocodile was larger than common private airplanes!

I asked him about the wingspan: my mistake. After I had returned to the United States, it dawned on me: Gideon was surely unfamiliar with that English word.

He hesitated when I said "wingspan." Even when I rephrased the question with "wings," he probably missed the "s" at the end, assuming I meant the singular. Perhaps no language in this part of the world, other than English, creates a plural noun by adding an "s."

Gideon answered my wing question: "seven meeta." When I asked if it was the same as the length of the tail, he agreed.

He later drew the creature's body, wings, and tail, making it appear that one wing was about as long as the tail. That was a clue I appreciated only long afterwards.

It now seems obvious to me. Why would any native think that Americans would measure two wings as

if they were one object? How strange! (Two wings really are two things.) But strange as the Lake Pung ropen may seem to us---a flying creature with a wingspan approaching fifty feet---that estimate resembles the one given by an Australian couple who saw a giant creature flying over Perth in 1997.

Sometimes Gideon appeared to understand my English better than my Tok Pisin. He had attended the local school (my guides and I had passed it earlier that day) and probably learned much English there, for that is one of Papua New Guinea's three national languages. Nevertheless, we need not suppose that he always understood everything spoken by a visiting English speaker: I am now sure he had no previous experience with the word "wingspan."

Was this young native being realistic? He surely had no knowledge of what an Australian couple had seen in 1997, a creature with a wingspan estimated at 30-50 feet. That estimate appears similar to Gideon's choice of "ten or twenty" (meters) in his 1994 interview. A fifteen-meter size is also consistent with one wing being seven meters long. But even if he were exaggerating, the ropen that terrified those seven boys was no bird or bat known to Western science.

Was his 2004 interview consistent with his 1994 interview? When I asked him how long ago he had been interviewed by another visitor with a camera, he said, "Maybe ten years ago." His memory was certainly accurate in that detail.

I found no evidence of any hoax and much evidence that Gideon was telling the truth. And additional support then stepped forward.

The villagers surprised me: Two other eyewitnesses were present. Wesley Koro (brother of Gideon) and Mesa Agustin had previously been just part of the crowd watching me interview Gideon. After they were pointed out as fellow witnesses, those two young men were taken aside to be interviewed.

Mesa agreed to stand in front of the wall of a hut, but his face revealed as much as his words: He appeared as if the camera were a gun pointing at his heart. He said little, but described the end of the ropen's tail as having a shape like a diamond.

The fear in his face reminded me of the fear in the face of Gideon in his 1994 videotaped interview. The earlier fear appeared more understandable: Gideon's encounter with a giant ropen was probably only months, or even just weeks, before he was first interviewed. Mesa's fear, ten years after the encounter at Lake Pung, might have a simple explanation: He had not yet fully recovered from the terror.

Of course there's another explanation. I later noticed Mesa in the video footage of the many villagers standing together in front of my camera; before he was put on the witness stand, Mesa was smiling without a care in the world. Maybe he just gets nervous when people stand him up alone in front of the wall of a hut. Not everybody enjoys being the center of attention.

Regardless of cause, I could not bear to force Mesa to suffer for long: I allowed him to step down from the witness stand, replaced by Wesley, who confirmed that he was with his brother when they encountered the ropen.

I asked Wesley, "Do you remember seeing the end of the tail . . . what the tail looked like?"

He answered, "Yes . . . it just look like diamond."

I asked, "Was the tail long or short?"

"Long."

I eventually asked, "You saw the ropen . . . were you afraid?"

He answered, "I'm very scared."

"You left right away?"

Laughing at my question, Wesley said, "I run away."

Years after my expedition, I wondered why those seven boys had such a spectacular daytime sighting of a giant ropen but American cryptozoologists, who had searched for ropens on Umboi, never saw any form or features of the creature. (Most, if not all, modern pterosaurs are nocturnal.) After many years of interviewing eyewitnesses from around the world and analyzing their sighting reports, I have at last found the answer: A daylight sighting of a modern pterosaur usually happens when a sleeping creature is awakened by noise.

When the seven boys arrived at Pung, it was Gideon's first time to see that spectacular crater lake; perhaps it was also the first time for some of the other boys. What would we expect seven teenagers to do on first glimpsing a wonderful landscape, a crater lake? Put yourself in their bare feet. Run along the shore of the lake yelling in delight. No wonder the nocturnal ropen woke up and flew over the surface of Pung to see what was going on. Humans are indeed the strangest species on the planet . . . assuming, of course, that teenagers are a genuine sub-species.

Looking back on those interviews with Gideon, Wesley, and Mesa, I can imagine what might have happened if I had arrived on Umboi Island with better funding. After interviewing those three young men, at least one of them could have guided me at least part of the way up to nearby Lake Pung. Luke and I could then have sent the other guides back to Gomlongon for more supplies. But problems can arise when you camp for many nights near a crater lake where you might be successful in finding a nocturnal predator with a tail seven meters long and a mouth like a crocodile. . . . Yes, I can be grateful my funding was limited.

I'm also grateful that I was able to interview many native eyewitnesses during my expedition on Umboi Island. During the many years since then, I have communicated with many eyewitnesses of this kind of creature. I am grateful to learn of their sightings, their sometimes frightening encounters. I am grateful to analyze and write about them . . . while I sit in front of my computer.

In addition, other explorers, besides me, need the opportunity to discover this incredible ropen of Umboi Island, this giant nocturnal predator. Also, my wife does not want me to go back to that place.

I learned more from Gideon, Mesa, and Wesley, about extraordinary features of the ropen and about common native reactions to it, than if I myself had experienced a common sighting: a brief light flying at night. But within a few weeks of the end of my expedition, two other Americans would set foot on Umboi Island, and they would learn more and see more.

Two of my fellow Americans camping out for several nights near Lake Pung---that gives me great pleasure to describe . . . while I sit in the comfort of my living room. Let's now enjoy the fruits of the second expedition of 2004 and see how it relates to Gideon's encounter.

Another Expedition on Umboi Island

Garth Guessman and David Woetzel left the United States a few days after I had returned home. Like me, they stayed a short while in the city of Lae, on the mainland of Papua New Guinea, before they went to Umboi Island; but from there, many things differed from my expedition.

In Lae, they met the missionary Jim Blume; his wife, Mary Blume; and the native minister Jacob Kepas, who would travel with the team as an interpreter. First, Guessman interviewed two of them.

Jim Blume told Guessman about his brief observation, one night in 1996, of a possible ropen. He and Carl Baugh were near a mangrove swamp of one of the islands north of Umboi when he saw a pulsating light that he estimated was one-and-a-half feet high and almost a foot wide. It appeared to be about the size and shape of a penguin, although Blume could not see the form or features of what created that light.

Seklo-bali Seen by Jacob Kepas

Jacob Kepas, years before Blume's sighting, observed more than just a glow. In his 2004 interview with Guessman, Kepas described his encounter on the mainland when he was about twelve years old. A "whoosh" of wind caught his attention one night. He saw the flying seklo-bali briefly---the back of the wings and tail. He also saw "sparklers" that fell from the creature; that is a bad sign in his village in Morobe Province, for it is said that when the creature's glowing particles fall upon a person, the seklo-bali will return for that person.

In his village language, "seklo-bali" means "he who carries his bed with him." Within a few weeks, near the end of their expedition on Umboi, Guessman and Woetzel would find an explanation for that cryptic phrase.

Blume found a pilot for the three explorers; and Guessman, Kepas, and Woetzel, soon flew to the village of Lab Lab, on the east coast of Umboi. From there, they took a banana boat around the northeast coast, stopping to refuel at Kampalap Village.

Natives of Kampalap Village

Before leaving Kampalap, they learned about the ropen's behavior on that northeast coast. It glows until it alights on a tree on a promontory north of the village; when it lands on the tree, the light goes out. Later the ropen flies to the nearby reef to feed.

After the second expedition of 2004, after Guessman gave me many details about their interviews and copies of their videos, I discovered similarities in what natives revealed to us. In both expeditions of 2004, islanders told us that the ropen light glows for only a few seconds at a time, around five or six seconds.

The natives were not trying to deceive us into believing in a fictional creature, contrary to what some American critics later proclaimed. They simply answered our questions, telling us what they had experienced.

At Kampalap Village, for example, one man told the three explorers, in Tok Pisin, what those islanders knew and what they did now know about the ropen's leaving and entering a cave at night:

"Taim em kam aut . . . save . . . taim em go bek, em no gat." (Tok Pisin is an English pigeon language. "Taim" means "time" and "go bek" means "go back.")

They know when it leaves its cave but not when it returns. That correlates with my findings from interviewing islanders closer to the south coast: The ropen returns inland later at night, after feeding on the reef. On the northeast coast, perhaps the ropen returns to its cave after the local humans have gone to bed.

That villager in Kampalap admitted he did not know what the ropen eats on the reef, and he did not know the size of the creature. If he were trying to deceive the Americans, he would have fabricated something, rather than admit his ignorance.

The honesty of the natives is not to say that they never come to questionable conclusions. At Kampalap, one man told the three explorers that the ropen waits on a tree on the promontory, to see if anybody is watching it, before it flies out to the reef. I suggest that the bioluminescent creature is recharging the secretions that will soon enable it to glow when it feeds on the reef.

Villagers of Arot and Mararamu

The explorers resumed their banana boat ride, disembarking near the village of Aupwel. Then they hiked up inland to the village of Arot.

The magistrate of Arot, Robin Ambois, told Guessman and Woetzel that they see the ropen light about once a month. In fact, they saw it the previous week, as it flew from Mount Bel to Mount Sual and later from Mount Sual to Mount Tolo.

Jonathan Ragu, of Mararamu Village, was interviewed by Guessman. From what he and a few other Umboi Island natives told us about their closer encounters, I suspect one or more ropens occasionally visit Umboi (although I believe that only one ropen lives there as a permanent resident), for eyewitnesses give us various size estimates, with too much variation to be from estimation error.

Ragu saw one of them in July of 2004, at a beach. Early at night, with good visibility, he and another eyewitness saw the ropen fly away from the northwest coast of Umboi, heading toward Tolokiwa Island. It was glowing brightly from the head and trailing edges of the wings, as it flew fast at tree-canopy level. The nose-to-tail length he estimated: eleven feet.

Perhaps that smaller creature had seen enough of Umboi Island, after encountering a ropen with a tail-length alone over twenty feet; on the bright side, perhaps Umboi was a perfect honeymoon location for the smaller creature . . . until the honeymoon ended. Whatever the encounter, the smaller creature was lucky to be able to fly away from Umboi. And perhaps it had just enough time to fly back to Tolokiwa Island before dark.

Before leaving the United States for their expedition, Woetzel and Guessman had prepared interview forms, including a page of silhouette sketches of birds, bats, and pterosaurs. Each sketch was numbered but with no clue, to the natives, what each one represented. From among those thirty-four images, Ragu chose #13, the *Sordes Pilosus*, a Rhamphorhynchoid (long-tailed) pterosaur.

Guessman, Woetzel, and Kepas, with several local guides, hiked up to Lake Bono, on October 23, a crater lake similar to Pung. Unfortunately, on three nights camped out near Mount Sual they saw nothing strange around the crater lake Bono.

The name "Sual" relates to the local Kovai-language word for "sun," if I understand correctly, and "sualowkan" means something like "good morning." But the visitors encountered more rain than I had a few weeks earlier: The wet season had just arrived.

After the explorers arrived back at Arot, soaked by rain and shoes covered by mud, they interviewed

Dickson Nolo, a man from Mararamu, the largest village on Umboi. Some residents of Arot had mentioned that the tail of the ropen never bends. Nolo, however, made an adjustment: The ropen's tail is stiff except where it connects to the body.

Guessman was thrilled at that statement, for he knew something about the anatomy of Rhamphorhynchoid tails. In living creatures, those vertebrae would allow only limited bending movement, except near where the tail connects to the body: The vertebrae near the base of the tail can move much more freely.

Ropen Lights are not Meteors

But distant flying lights are what villagers usually see. Could those five-to-six seconds of light be something other than ropens, maybe meteors? Guessman asked Gibson, a school teacher in Arot, "What's the difference between looking at a ropen and seeing a shooting star?" Gibson answered, "A shooting star, the light is not as bright . . . and the altitude of the light is . . . higher than the ropen . . ."

Regarding misidentifying meteors, we need to see the whole chess board. Regardless of where we stand on this planet, looking up at the night sky, only a few meteors appear to fly almost horizontally and close to the horizon. Horizontally flying meteors should not appear regularly below, or even near, the horizon, with any preference for any particular mountains.

When my interpreter and a local village leader saw a flying light near Mount Bel, a few weeks before the Woetzel-Guessman expedition, it was unlike a meteor. That light had Mount Bel for its background, and the observers were only a few kilometers away from that mountain. Other eyewitnesses have also mentioned that mountain when reporting ropen lights. But there's more.

Others have seen similar flying lights in other areas of Papua New Guinea, and eyewitnesses have included foreign visitors. The details in their descriptions prove meteors were not involved.

Lights Observed by a British Biologist

In the summer of 2009, Richard Muirhead, a cryptozoology researcher, sent me copies of several pages from a book by a British biologist, Evelyn Cheesman. She had observed a number of horizontally flying lights in New Guinea, many decades ago, and they were nothing like meteors.

In her book "The Two Roads of Papua," (1935) Cheesman wrote about her sightings near Mondo, deep in the mainland of what is now Papua New Guinea: ". . . a most curious phenomenon which I could not understand; nor could I later hit upon any satisfactory explanation . . ."

Why did the British biologist not think of meteors? The lights were flying below the horizon and in a strange consistency: first one light and then another one nearby. Each light flew below the horizon.

She wrote, ". . . in a moment it came again, and this time I counted; yes about four or five seconds, but that flash had been a little distance away from the first."

Other lights appeared, but they eventually stopped flashing. A week later, at the same mountain ridge (again about three miles away from the biologist), the same lights appeared. Cheesman wrote, "It may be dismissed at once that the flashes were due to any human agency."

I am certain meteors can also be dismissed.

Ropen Light Seen by David Woetzel

Getting back to the second Umboi Island expedition of 2004, on October 28, at about 10:00 p.m., near

Arot Village, searching the sky paid off: David Woetzel observed a distant flying light. He later told me, "My sighting was so quick that it was impossible to get a video—maybe two seconds." Flying near the horizon, it disappeared behind Mount Tolo.

A week earlier, Guessman had seen a flying light; but that sighting was too brief: It could have been a meteor.

Woetzel's sighting lasted longer. The strange glow flew almost horizontally and left no trail. At an estimated angular size of about 20%-25% of a full moon, it should have left a meteor trail, if it were a meteor. To me, flying towards Lake Pung is too much for a coincidence. It was a ropen.

Campout at Lake Pung

The next day, Woetzel, Guessman, and Kepas, with several guides, hiked up to Lake Pung, hoping to get a glimpse of the ropen that had already arrived. What would we have done? It seemed the obvious choice for explorers who were prepared to videotape the huge flying creature. But a problem arose.

Many months after they reported to me their experiences, after I pondered what went wrong with the Lake Pung campout, it dawned on me: They were following a flying creature that stays only briefly on each major mountain, as it changes daylight sleeping locations, for it follows a circuit in its nightly visits to the reefs that surround the island.

The hiking humans had just missed a creature they could never catch up with. The explorers saw nothing strange around the crater lake Pung. Arriving too late, they missed the flight. But they soon encountered more eyewitnesses.

After a few days and nights camped overlooking Lake Pung, the explorers left the cool windy mountain and headed southeast, into the area I had explored a few weeks earlier.

Jonah Jim Interviewed

I had met Jonah Jim (a month before Guessman and Woetzel met him), after finishing my interviews Gideon, Mesa, and Wesley. I was tired and anxious to get back to Gomlongon Village and soon return to Lab Lab to catch the next boat for the mainland. After the dramatic interviews just completed, I found nothing unusual about Jonah Jim's sighting; I didn't even take notes. How grateful I am that Woetzel and Guessman found Jonah Jim, interviewed him, and recorded many details!

Jonah Jim saw the creature in 2001, between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m., as it flew about 500-550 feet overhead, in the general direction of Lake Pung. The tail was glowing blue.

He estimated the size: The wingspan was six or seven meters and the tail length was three meters or a little less. Guessman later told me that he made sure that Jonah Jim understood "wingspan," for Guessman spoke to him in detail about that concept.

Jonah Jim was shown the same pages of silhouettes shown to Jonathan Ragu. From among those thirty-four images, he chose #13, the *Sordes Pilosus*, the same Rhamphorhynchoid pterosaur chosen by Ragu.

I was excited to learn that those two native eyewitnesses chose the same image, but I learned something else. The critical point that I had overlooked when I spoke with Jonah Jim now appears obvious: The native confirmed that the large flying creature glows while flying. Ragu had confirmed that detail, of course. We now have no need to rely on native traditions alone: Large flying creatures glowing at night have been seen by eyewitnesses: first-hand accounts.

I also noticed that Jonah Jim's ropen was about half the size of Gideon's ropen. I guess Lake Pung

really is an ideal honeymoon location. But I never did believe that the giant ropen of Umboi spent every single night hunting for food on the reefs.

Completion of the Second Expedition of 2004

When Guessman, Woetzel, and Kepas reached Opai Village, they interviewed another eyewitness of the flying light. Leonard told them that he sees the ropen about once a month, lighting up the village as it flies overhead towards the southern coast. Meteors would not light up Opai Village once a month flying towards the southern coast.

Before leaving Umboi Island, the explorers found an explanation for the name "seklo-bali" (he who carries his bed with him). A native near the southern coast showed them a few old clam shells, explaining that this was a small example of what the ropen eats. Another native then showed them bigger shells, heavy to hold in the hand. Another native then led them to giant clam shells almost too heavy for a man to lift. Those shells were brought up onto the island, from the reef, according to the natives, not by them but by the ropen. Guessman, Woetzel, and Kepas then saw how a huge flying creature carrying such a giant clam could be perceived, at a distance, by natives: carrying his bed around with him.

The Perth Creature

In Australia, eyewitnesses also see large flying creatures unlike any bird or bat; unlike natives of Papua New Guinea, however, most Australians have no common tradition of any extant flying creature larger than any bird or bat. Most Australians do know the Western assumption that all dinosaurs and pterosaurs became extinct millions of years ago; but that Western tradition slaps eyewitnesses in the face. How do you tell a friend, neighbor, or relative that you saw a live pterodactyl?

In the summer of 2004, before my expedition, I found an online story of an Australian lady who reported a giant creature flying over Perth. I'm grateful that the forum post included her email address, for we began a long-term correspondence that strengthened my belief in living pterosaurs in the southwest Pacific. In fact, it blew aside potential doubts that might have hindered my expedition.

She was taking a walk with her husband, in December of 1997, at about 10:30 p.m., near the suburbs of Ocean Reef and Heathridge, on Marion Avenue [Marmion Avenue?], when something appeared in the sky. Gliding parallel to the coast, it approached the couple, who soon became shocked, for it had a "lizard appearance," a long tail, and a wingspan that appeared to be thirty to fifty feet.

The lady told me, ". . . "We do know that it was definitely a living creature. . . . looking at it from the ground as it soared over to the right of us. We would not have been able to see what it was if the ground lighting had not lit its underside as it was [previous to that] a huge dark shape in the night sky. . . . We could clearly see it coming and stood rooted to the spot watching it as it drew closer and, as it came to a point to the right of us and above, the ground lighting lit it up and that was a stunning moment for the both of us. I was so totally shocked, amazed, awed and bewildered . . . This was completely out of the reality I had grown up to know. . . . I can tell you in all honesty it has changed me. I never believed those things existed until that night."

When she told me how large the creature was, I asked if the apparent tail might have actually been legs.

She said, "My husband and I both have talked about what we saw many times since that night in 1997 . . . and yes, we believe it did have a tail, and don't believe they were feet, but actually a tail."

Her husband eventually sent me an email:

"We had been walking in the evening and had just crested a hill and were on the down slope along a major thoroughfare. In the distance, I perceived an object in the sky. At this point it was rather indistinct, and wondering what it might be, I watched it as it approached. Soon I was able to determine that it was some sort of flying creature, and my first thought was that it must be some very large bird."

". . . Its progress had brought it closer and while its shape did resemble a bird, I thought by now that from its apparent distance, it must be the largest bird I had ever witnessed. I would estimate that at this time it was about a quarter mile north of us and quite high. . . .

"Within a minute or so it had reached our position and was about 250 or 300 feet above us and slightly inland. The area was moderately well lit and I saw that it seemed to be a light reddish-tan color. It did not appear to be covered with feathers but had a leathery texture.

"Soon after it passed us, it flew over a more brightly lit sports area which highlighted even more the leathery appearance, also bringing more detail to view. The wings were the most definite leathery feature. They were shaped in a triangular arch, similar to a very elongated shark fin. The body also still appeared leathery, though textured as though possibly covered with fine hair or small scales . . .

"The head was close to the body, though whether from a short neck or from having its head drawn in,

in the manner of some long-necked water fowl, I cannot say. I also could not see detail of the head which appeared to either be always in shadow, or possibly simply of a darker color. The creature, during the time we observed it, was mostly gliding. There was some wing movement as in a hawk or other bird controlling its flight path, but did not flap as a sparrow or other small bird.

" . . . I, at the time, however, estimated the size to be in excess of thirty foot, possibly as great as fifty foot. My eyes told me it was nearer the greater of these, my rational mind wants me to believe the lesser, since either of these is astounding for a flying creature . . ."

Husband and wife preferred to be anonymous and I respected that. I found nothing wrong with any part of the accounts given to me by either this lady or her husband. Problems can arise, however, when a skeptic confronts their accounts from a dogmatic stand, for the word "science" may be used as if scientific evidence proves the eyewitnesses were grossly mistaken. But diving into that topic could take up the content of a whole book, and we need to move on. I found these two eyewitnesses highly credible.

The creature seen flying over Perth in December of 1997 may not have been the same species as the one seen by Duane Hodgkinson in New Guinea in 1944 or the ones seen by natives on Umboi Island, for the Perth creature seems to have had a short neck. But it appeared to those two Australians as a real living creature, so I accept their word. I take it as evidence that the Western dogma of universal pterosaur-extinction may itself become extinct. And those two eyewitnesses in Perth are no longer alone.

Other Sightings in Australia

Sighting in Queensland

I continued email contact with the Perth couple, on occasion, and in 2010 the lady forwarded me an email that she had received from another eyewitness: a lady in Queensland.

The report had only a few details but enough to catch my attention. Kathy was driving [at about 8:30] at night, with her thirteen-year-old daughter, when the huge creature flew over the car:

"We both saw it appear from the side of the road as a black big shape moving fast."

"The wings were so big. Black bat leather like."

"One wing covered the car . . . you could see, just the underneath."

"As it [bent its] wing to continue flight you could see how strong it was, so big."

"It was so close I thought we were going to hit it."

"No feathers just leather."

"You could see the vein look stretching across the wing and thicker broom handle size being the main bone wing structure . . . covered with black stretched leather."

I was happy to receive Kathy's response to my email, for she added more details:

"I have read some of your research information, very interesting and exciting indeed. It was so interesting to read what [the Australian couple] had seen and other sightings . . ."

Kathy answered my question about the location:

"We saw it at Mt Coolum Sunshine Coast . . . one hill away from Centenary Heights Rd."

She was impressed by the sound the creature made:

". . . We heard it coming . . . the swoosh noise. It is a modern car, the windows were up, so that is a loud sound."

It must have been startling, considering the following:

"It crossed our path. I couldn't see the road for a moment, just wing covering the entire windscreen. The body was over the car and it's other wing. . . . bat like leather . . . that was dinosaur era."

I found nothing in Kathy's report that would suggest any likely refutation to the obvious: She and her daughter had a close encounter with a huge featherless flying creature. Regardless of whether or not it was the same species as the Perth creature, I believe it was a pterosaur.

Sighting in Victoria

In 2009, I received an email from Michael Hayward, who lives east of Melbourne:

"Dear Jonathon,

"After many misgivings about going 'public' as it were, I have decided to contact you with my experience of sighting what I believe to have been a Pterodactyl. . . ."

". . . I am not a whacko, just a normal family man, married with a wife of 40 years . . . I have held a Real Estate Agent's Licence since 1974 and worked as an Agent until 1989 and then in the Commonwealth Public Service for 18 years until my retirement . . .

"I cannot be sure of the year of the sighting now as I put it out of my mind for fear of being labelled a nut but I think it would have been around the late 1990's.

"What I saw was what I first thought was a pelican flying about 3000 feet high but realised pelicans at that height did not look as large as this.

"I was standing outside about nine o'clock one night. It was full moon and very bright with a cloud bank to the south east extending to and over the Ranges. Mt. Dandenong is about 2000 feet high and the clouds were much higher than this.

"I glanced to the south and something caught my attention. It was something flying that appeared to be at the height of light planes that fly around here, as Moorabbin Airport is not far away. This thing was at least as large as a light plane, say a Cessna.

"It was about 5 klms away and was lazily flapping it's wings, flying to the east in, at that point, a clear sky. It appeared to be lit up by the moonlight and shining as if it had no feathers. Very strange if it was some sort of bird.

"I could see it quite clearly. I had it under observation for about 5 mins [when] it disappeared into the cloud bank. I estimate it was flying at a height higher than Mt Dandenong.

"After some time I decided to look in the Internet and Googled ["Pterodactyls"], and came across Ropens and your page. My experience, it seemed, was shared by many others.

"I am not mad, thank the Lord. There was even a sighting in Perth, Australia, and the description of the creature that couple saw seemed to be the same as the one I saw in Victoria.

"I am now reminded of an article I saw recently about a weather balloon someone released in South Australia and they estimated it's speed at around 200 klms+ as it was blown towards the Victorian Alps, where it was eventually tracked down. Perhaps a Ropen may use this tailwind to cover great distances around the world? Airliners in Australia can cut the flying time from Perth to Melbourne by an hour compared to the other way.

"I won't take up any more of your time except to say that you can give me any amount of bibles to swear by, I absolutely guarantee that what I have just told you is the truth. You can contact me anytime day or night on my mobile."

I did contact Mr. Hayward by phone, in 2012, and I believe he told me the truth. My time was well spent.

Sighting by two Plane Pilots

Eyewitnesses of living "pterodactyls" need not be on the ground when they see flying creatures. In 2008 I received a phone call from a plane pilot in England, who reported what he and his co-pilot had seen just a few weeks earlier.

The two men were flying a Britten-Norman Islander, past the halfway point from Broome, Australia, to Bali, Indonesia, at 6500 feet, when they nearly collided with a large flying creature. They had a few weeks to ponder their experience, search online, and consider contacting me; you know the result.

Planes flying in the opposite direction should have been 1,000 feet above or below them, as the two men flew the light twin-engine aircraft northwest from the Australian coast, but what flew at them was on a head-on collision course.

The pilot answered my later questions by email:

"I saw what I thought was a dark-coloured, single-engine aircraft coming on reciprocal heading at same height. . . . [My co-pilot] was head down, looking at a chart, so didn't see it at that moment.

"I was flying using autopilot, which – having failed to disengage it – I over-powered manually by diving the aircraft in order to avoid collision. As I did so, the other 'aircraft' dived towards us. [The co-pilot], disturbed by the sudden manoeuvre, looked up and saw the creature. [He said] 'What the *** is that.'

"At that moment, its wings took one enormous, slow, articulated flap. This was no aircraft! I banked left and it went down our starboard side in the opposite direction.

"We were both astounded by what we had seen. [My co-pilot] looked again at the chart, searching for any island off the Indonesian coast – which, he joked, must be called Jurassic Park!! There was no island.

"We both agreed . . . that we needed to seek advice on what it might have been. He said, 'You know it looked like a . . .'" (and we both said "pterodactyl" simultaneously – and laughed)."

They gave me their names and I later verified, through online searching, that they are indeed highly experienced pilots; but they want to be anonymous in publications.

What was that creature? An unclassified bird, a pelican, a ropen, something related to a ropen? The pilots and I could not be sure, even if we had kept analyzing it for a long time, for the sighting was too brief.

Given the appearance and behavior of the creature, the pelican possibility seems the mostly likely non-pterosaur explanation, but pelican probability seems far below 50%, perhaps only 10%. My best guess? It was a ropen or something related to a ropen.

I mention the sighting in this chapter because the two men were flying from Australia and the creature was flying towards Australia.

Another Encounter in Perth

Getting back to Perth, in 2007 another eyewitness sent me an email:

"[In November or December of 2002, in Perth] I heard my dogs just go nuts one night so I looked out of my window which is at the back of the house. . . . just in time I saw a huge shadow glide over it. It was at least 4m in wingspan and distinctly had a head. It glided like a sting ray and there was no noise. Naturally I was freaked out.

"Only this year I tried to find some information on the internet and I [read] what those [two persons in Perth] wrote. This is where it gets freaky because I saw they had seen it along Marmion between suburbs Ocean Reef and Heathridge.

"I live in Beldon which is the following suburb to the two mentioned and my street comes off Marmion Ave and is only a few hundred metres from where they saw a similar thing five years earlier. Just thought I should pass on what I saw."

I was delighted to receive her email and replied:

"We had been hoping for years that someone else from the Perth area would get in touch with us. May I ask some questions?"

"What time of night was it? Did you see the creature itself or just the shadow? . . .

"Do you know of any seal populations on the coast, within about 100 kilometres of Perth? If so, it might be a potential source of food for the biggest ropens in that area of the world."

She replied:

"It was the shadow but the outline was very very clear and it looked low flying. The time was about 7-10 pm; sorry it can't be more exact [---it was] five years ago. I do remember freaking out and running to my mum though . . .

"As for seals, we definitely have them off the coast. There is a small place called "Seal Island" in fact just a few kilometers south west of my place off Hillary's Marina I think."

I thanked her, with gratitude that the Perth couple were not the only eyewitnesses on the west coast who reported to me a sighting.

We Need More Australian Eyewitnesses

Now I need to explain why this chapter is so short, when "Australia" dominates the title of this book: We need more Australian eyewitnesses to report their sightings.

I am grateful for the Australians who have reported to me their encounters; they have made a welcome contribution to our knowledge of these extraordinary flying creatures. But regardless of possible ropen rarity, I know there must be more humans who have seen them. Part of the reason I wrote this e-book was to encourage more Australian eyewitnesses to come forward, even if they choose to be anonymous in publications.

I have received, from 2004 to 2012, emails from various other parts of the world: Singapore, Philippines, Africa, Greece, Spain, Netherlands, England, Canada, Cuba, and between Caribbean islands (from two different cruise ships); reports from the United States are countless. Now we need more Australians to know that they are not alone when they see this kind of flying creature, and that they are joining other eyewitnesses, lucky or otherwise, in reporting their encounters.

If you have seen a pterosaur or any similar flying creature, please contact me by email: (info@livepterosaurs.com)

Expedition of 2006

After the two ropen expeditions of 2004 on Umboi Island, other expeditions followed but in other areas of Papua New Guinea.

An American business executive contacted me in 2006, one of the first readers of the first edition of my first book, "Searching for Ropens." He offered to help finance another expedition, so I referred him to Paul Nation, who had missed both 2004 expeditions.

Because of the generosity of that businessman, later in 2006 Paul Nation embarked on the most breathtaking of all living pterosaur expeditions: videotaping two ropen lights and bringing back to the United States, in that video footage, the first physical evidence of the large bioluminescent flying creatures.

It was not the first physical evidence that he had personally witnessed, of the ropen's existence, however, for he was with Carl Baugh, on the 1994 Umboi Island expedition, when they hiked up Mount Bel. That mountain, the tallest on Umboi, is the most common area where the ropen light is seen by natives, and the Americans who were led to its peak (for the equivalent of about \$1000 in American money) saw a bedded-down area of grass where the creature appeared to have slept.

But on the 2006 expedition, deep in the mainland of Papua New Guinea, one of the explorers, with a local guide, witnessed with his own eyes a giant winged creature sleeping on a cliff.

Paul Nation and Jacob Kepas were flown into the remote mountainous area by the plane pilot Jim Blume, the same missionary who assisted the 1990 expeditions and the second 2004 expedition. (The only practical way to get to the Tawa Village area of Papua New Guinea is by small plane.) Blume had to make two flights, for the two passengers and their luggage, but he himself did not stay long in Tawa.

Apparently none of those men, nor any of the local guides, had any knowledge that only about three mountain ridges to the north, the British biologist Evelyn Cheesman had observed, over sixty years earlier, strange flying lights that she could not explain. In Tawa Village, however, the lights were attributed to the flying creatures that had once been in the habit of attacking their village, at least a few years earlier, and carrying away pigs or children. Those villagers call the creature "indava."

After Paul's expedition, when he was able to get internet access he reported his success and answered some of my questions:

Q: "Did you obtain any video . . . of the ropen-lights?"

A: "Yes I have a short video of the Tawa sightings the two on the mountain side."

Q: "Are these villages on the mainland? . . . near Wau?"

A: "Villages on the mainland south southwest of Wau. . . ."

Soon after Paul had returned from Papua New Guinea, I flew to Texas and interviewed him in his home in Granbury. I'm grateful that he allowed me to document his testimony through that videotaped interview.

Q: "Who went with you to this first observation post?"

A: "Jacob and Joseph. They didn't see the first one. They were inside the hut cause the sky had just cleared and my tent was above the hut and I was able to just unzip the fly from the tent and look out through the mosquito netting and observe without getting out into the weather. . . .

"Saturday we hiked up to the high garden site . . . and that gave us a real clear access of the valleys . . . flight paths."

Q: "Tuesday night you had three . . . sightings there?"

A: "Right. There was another one . . . I didn't even tell you about . . . It was a bright yellow light . . . earlier in the evening, about 7:25."

Q: "Which night was that?"

A: "Tuesday night . . . but it was earlier, and it was just moving away . . . It basically stayed in the same elevation, altitude, but it just got dimmer and dimmer . . . I'm assuming it was going away from me just because . . . [the brilliance got] dimmer and dimmer."

Q: "OK, that lasted for a few seconds?"

A: "I probably watched it for a minute or so . . ."

I then asked Paul about his sighting after his group had left the "high garden site" and returned to the Tawa area. There he videotaped two indava lights, just before they took flight from a nearby ridge.

A: "I was able to watch the two [lights] on the mountain range . . . at this little saddle. . . . [the lower left light] appeared first. About a minute or so later, the higher one [the second light, slightly to the right] appeared, and the first one disappeared.

" . . . the second one . . . took up and over [flew over] . . . the back side [of the ridge]. . . ."

Before I left Granbury, Texas, Paul allowed me to make a digital copy of his video of those two indava lights. In California, that video footage was analyzed by a missile defense physicist, Clifford Paiva.

In March of 2007, I received Paiva's detailed report. The computerized image processing was done through SCION Corporation's Advanced Image Processor, and his early analysis made it clear that the two images in Paul's video were three-dimensional, not from any paste-on hoax. Paiva then confirmed that the two lights were not from ordinary sources.

The report included, "These frames were obtained at a distance of .5 to .75 miles. 17 seconds of digital frames were obtained . . ." He was able to estimate the distance from the video camera to the top of the ridge by measuring the diameter of the tree trunks on that ridge; thus he was able to estimate the diameter of the two lights: about 0.9 meters and 1.1 meters (much bigger than any firefly).

But even if the trees differed in size from Paiva's assumption, the two lights would still have been much too big to have been made by bioluminescent insects. In addition, fire flies glow for only a fraction of a second at a time, not for many seconds.

Of course Paul and I were not surprised by Paiva's estimate of the size of the lights: No matter how remote a village in a jungle, there's not the remotest chance that any species of fire flies could carry off children and pigs. But Paiva's analysis gave us a scientific basis for believing in a large species of bioluminescent flying creature.

The physicist found structural detail in the two images but nothing that showed any form or features of what created the lights. The centers of the two lights were much dimmer, dispelling any idea that they

were two camp fires or two flashlights (electric torches) or car headlights.

He found that there was no combustion plume nor ionized trail: The two lights were definitely not fires or meteors. His analysis also showed that they were separate objects: one was not a camera artifact of the other.

In addition, Paiva found evidence of natural atmospheric turbulence, further strengthening the case that they were not fabricated by a paste-on hoax. (To an expert, even a slight breeze can leave a visual trace, in video footage of a light at night, unless the light is very close to the camcorder.)

From my examination of the video footage and Paiva's computerized analysis of it, I found a problem: The video footage ended without showing any movement of those lights (Paul saw the second light fly away). But I also found three reasonable explanations, any one of which would explain it: The camera had accidentally shut down before the second glowing object flew away, or I had stopped my digital recording of the original footage when the event appeared to be over, or Paul had accidentally videotaped over the footage in which the second light had flown away. In any event, the seventeen seconds of footage (that were preserved in what I gave to Paiva) revealed that the two lights did not move in relation to the background: They were not meteors or airplane lights.

Paiva found that the left light ("source one") did not go out completely but just gradually became dimmer. When the left light appeared to the human eye to have gone out completely, computer analysis revealed a faint residual glow. This is consistent with a complex biological process, unlike a simple mechanical process like switching off an electric light.

In the five years since this expedition, hundreds of web pages have been written about Paul's videotaping of the two indava lights; relatively few pages, however, acknowledge the daylight sighting by Jacob Kepas and the local guide Joseph. The huge winged creature sleeping on a cliff deserves more attention.

Paul had loaned the two men his camcorder, but the binoculars made possible the daylight sighting; Paul later found the video footage disappointing. Jacob and Joseph were not able to get close enough to the cliff where the creature was asleep.

They described their encounter afterwards, as Paul videotaped his interview with them. Joseph said, "Mi lukim samting balus," meaning that what he saw was somewhat like an airplane. The two men had climbed up a mountain across from another mountain where, on a cliff, at least one creature slept. But it was too far away. Jacob was unsure he saw what Joseph was observing until he climbed up to the same level as Joseph, where he could see better.

Jacob told Paul about his first observation: "I saw the creature sleep . . . but it's not moving . . . just go slow, so I don't know; maybe that's the real creature or just the other thing." Later Jacob could see better and said, "When I used my binoculars, I saw . . . it had something like a wing [wings] on both sides . . . like [hiding] its head under his wing . . . and a . . . tail . . . but we cannot see really clear because it's . . . [many] meters away; we struggled to see . . . but it's really high."

I have no doubt that those two men saw a creature of the same species that had years earlier, in Tawa Village, carried away pigs and small children. The binoculars made the observation barely possible, but the amateur video camcorder was insufficient, at least, perhaps, with untrained hands that were exceptional for climbing but not for holding a camcorder steady.

I trust the four eyes of those two men and the binoculars. I believe they saw a creature similar to what was seen by Hodgkinson, Koro, Hennessy, and other eyewitnesses.

To the best of my knowledge, this 2006 quest in search of indavas was the first expedition in which the form and features of a living pterosaur were observed by a member of the expedition team. And Paul Nation interviewed those two eyewitnesses, while videotaping them, within hours of the daylight sighting.

After writing about the successes of the 2006 expedition, I noticed a skeptic's few words of criticism on some online cryptozoology forum. He ridiculed the video footage, as if two vague lights were the total result of the expedition of 2006. I don't know if he was totally ignorant of the daylight sighting by Joseph and Jacob, but to me his perspective appeared to be quite narrow. Why proclaim that the video footage of those two lights is trivial?

My experience with outspoken skeptics of living-pterosaur investigations leads me to believe that many of them would reject anything short of one overwhelming piece of direct evidence. No combination of accumulating evidences can convince them that a species of modern pterosaur lives. Some skeptics appear incapable of adding one plus one plus one . . . preferring to round off each "one" to zero so that the total is zero. And anything appearing to be of greater value than "one" (but less than about a hundred) they assume to be some error, making it also zero.

In other words, some skeptics assume that they would be converted to believing in a modern living pterosaur if someone presented to them the body of a recently deceased one, but no number of eyewitnesses of such a living creature could ever convince them. What a pity to disbelieve in the existence of honest intelligent humans!

Those skeptics appear oblivious to the possibility that they themselves may contribute, if they would, to an important discovery, by opening their minds and encouraging others to do likewise. We must open our minds to what many persons have experienced, even if they are outnumbered by persons who imagine something that contradicts experience.

After Paul Nation's 2006 expedition, I continued to receive reports of strange lights and large pterosaurs in Papua New Guinea. Let's consider more encounters and more about Paul's investigation.

Other sightings in Papua New Guinea

Paul Nation's 2007 Expedition

A few days after my interview with Paul Nation in Texas, he became restless. Something bothered him about one of the lights he had observed in November, for it differed from the other lights, and he wanted to search again for the indava. He went on another expedition, early in 2007, but the weather had changed and the indavas had left the area.

He investigated the white light that had appeared different from the other lights and found that it had been from a car on a distant road. He soon returned to the United States to report that detail. How valiant is Paul Nation in pursuing truth!

The other sightings of strange lights, that he had observed late in 2006, could not be explained away as car headlights, for they were in areas where there were no roads. In addition, in California, at about the same time as Paul's second expedition on the mainland of Papua New Guinea, Cliff Paiva's analysis of the video proved car headlights were not involved with those two lights. Whatever skeptics may say to try to explain away the two lights videotaped by Paul, they cannot touch his passion for honesty in this investigation and they cannot pin "car headlights" onto those two lights he had videotaped.

Destination Truth Television Production

A few days before my interview with Paul Nation in November of 2006, I consulted with Neil Mandt and some of his associates, in their Hollywood office. Their production company was planning an expedition for several episodes of the Destination Truth television series. I stressed the reality of the ropen, that it was not just a native legend but a living creature.

The producers appeared to have a healthy skepticism: They listened as I talked. A few months later, in Papua New Guinea, they would encounter a flying light that would shock the members of their expedition team, for they would not expect to see what others had reportedly seen.

Early in 2007 Josh Gates led the Destination Truth team on an expedition on the east coast of the mainland of Papua New Guinea, between where Paul Nation videotaped two lights and Umboi Island. Whether healthy or not, skepticism may have been carried by some of the American explorers, but their doubts were shaken by the light they saw and videotaped.

I watched the ropen episode from the comfort of my living room couch, in mid-2007, and enjoyed the entertainment, although the scene with Josh Gates exploring a cave and finding human remains made me nervous, for ropens are said to live in caves.

Six American members of the television production team flew to Papua New Guinea, where they met Steve, an Australian who versed them in Tok Pisin (one of the three national languages of PNG). The Americans flew to the city of Lae, where they met Pastor Jacob Kepas.

I found it interesting that Josh Gates asked about Jacob's sighting of a bright round light around Wau. I suspect Josh was unaware of the pastor's more recent daylight sighting near Tawa Village.

Josh asked, "So you believe in this ropen."

Jacob answered, "Yes."

"You're a man of God."

"Yes."

"And you believe in a dinosaur."

"I believe that what God created is still alive there."

Josh: "But you believe it's left over from an older time?"

Jacob: "Some of them already dead but some are still alive."

Some skeptics may have assumed that "destination truth" refers to a religious quest. It does not. It's the name of a television adventure show, and I have found nothing religious in the motivations of any of the American participants. Josh appears to have exercised common interviewer-skepticism in questioning Pastor Jacob.

Following a lead from that Baptist minister, Josh's team took a boat south from Lae, to Salamaua, where they met a local eyewitness, Fabian, who described the light produced by the flying creature.

Josh: "You saw a big winged creature?"

Fabian: "One night, we see the big bird flying."

Josh: "Do you remember what the body looked like, the shape of the body?"

Fabian: "We see the red light underneath the wings."

Josh questioned him with a sketch of a long-tailed pterosaur, and Fabian pointed out where two lights glow from the underside of the creature's body. He also confirmed that the head and tail in the sketch resembled the creature. He then told Josh that it might be hiding in caves around Salamaua.

The team of American explorers eventually found a cave, which Josh and one or two others explored briefly. They found little, if any, evidence that a ropen had lived there, but they did find many human bones. I suspect those bones were from Japanese World War II soldiers who had died from starvation and related illnesses.

The team then set up four video cameras nearby and watched the monitors and the sky. That night, they saw no form or features of a pterosaur, but they were shocked by distant flying light over the sea, "an enormous glowing orb," that could not be explained away as anything common.

Josh reminded the other team members that planes cannot fly at night in Papua New Guinea. Nobody could explain the flying light without referring to the ropen.

Josh said, "It's like a glowing orb and it pulses."

He added, "It's way too big to be a satellite; satellites look like tiny stars."

Standing near a cliff, Josh later said, "Camera two is pointed straight out over nothing [over a cliff]. This ridge line drops down here probably almost a thousand feet, down to the ocean and the shore line . . . It's very strange."

The next day, Josh showed their video footage to Fabian, who confirmed that the light was from the flying creature that he had seen.

After returning to the United States, Josh took their video of the flying light to two video experts in California: Steve Buller and Gregg Stutchman, video/audio forensics specialists. The light was not any reflection. They admitted it was unlike anything that they had ever seen.

On watching this television broadcast episode of Destination Truth, I noticed that their videotaped flying light appeared similar to the two videotaped by Paul Nation.

Cottingham's Sighting on Umboi Island

In July of 2007 I received an email from an Australian, Steven Cottingham, who was the government's Officer-In-Charge of Umboi and surrounding islands thirty-five years earlier (when Australia was still responsible for the islands; I believe it was still called "New Guinea"): "Reply to me if you are interested in my sighting back in 1972 on Umboi Island." I was indeed interested.

He told me, "I have visited all of the villages and areas mentioned in your reports. My sighting occurred at night near Lab Lab on the southern tip of Umboi. The light lasted for four to five seconds, and until reading your reports now, have never been able to explain the sighting. The natives I was with simply said it was a spirit light!"

Cottingham answered my questions in detail:

Q: "Do you recall the time of night?"

A: "Approx 7 pm. I had been out fishing off the reef."

Q: "What direction was the light traveling (or was it stationary)?"

A: "Horizontal, across the top of the coconut palms. It was moving slowly and in a wavelike motion."

He then added, "It was too high and covered too much distance to be a person walking with a lantern, but I checked at daybreak to see if there was a walking track on a hill behind the coconut palms. There was nothing at that height. The coconuts were on flat ground."

Q: "Was there any color to the light or was it just white?"

A: "Yes, dull orange. Not as round as the moon, but bigger than what a Coleman lantern would be."

Q: "Was the wavelike motion from side-to-side or up-and-down?"

A: "Rhythmic, gentle UP-AND-DOWN as the light flowed in the direction of left to right."

I believe that the wave-like motion he described relates to the wing beats. I don't recall anyone else describing the motion in such detail, but most eyewitnesses of the flying light were further away from it than Steven Cottingham was.

Daylight Sighting Near Umboi

In August of 2009, I received an email from a second-year business accounting student at the Papua New Guinea University of Technology in Lae City:

(Edited to correct English) "I just want to [tell] you of the current sighting of the dragon named "Ropen." I was on an outboard motor [boat] as early as 9 am when we saw a giant creature floating along the coastline near Bunsil Bay. Its body was submerged under the sea but its tail was emerged. I saw that its tail is about 6-7 meters long with sharp diamond shape. It was an awesome scenerio and I started pointing to the others towards the object. It was floating 10 meters away from the boat and its color [probably referring only to the tail] was brownish-dark without any form of hair.

"I wish I had a camera at that time because it was a frightening scene."

Baptist Minister Jim Blume

The contributions of the missionary James Blume include more than just taking cryptozoologists into his plane and flying them into remote areas of Papua New Guinea. For years, he has interviewed native eyewitnesses of strange flying creatures.

Garth Guessman interviewed Blume by telephone in 2000. By that time, the missionary had already questioned about 70 natives who had seen apparent pterosaurs in Papua New Guinea. Blume had learned that the flying creatures seen in coastal areas have wingspans over ten feet. He was told that they have long bodies with tails and comb-like structures on their heads like “a rooster’s, only stiffer.”

Some of the larger creatures are dangerous and feared by natives in some areas. In the mid-1980’s one native, while tending his garden, was attacked, killed, and carried away.

Conclusion

What dictionary defines "pterosaur" without the word "extinct?" There lies the first problem, in Western society, for Australians and Americans are raised from young childhood to believe in the extinction of all species of pterosaurs and dinosaurs, without compromise, and what is the explanation? "Science."

But another problem has blocked our progress towards the official discovery of modern living pterosaurs. Understanding cultural differences helps us clear away the landslide on the road to this discovery. A major boulder in that landslide is an unwritten Western dogma related to scientific superiority, the assumption that civilized people are less superstitious, more objective.

Building machines that enable wingless humans to fly does not bestow, upon comfortable Westerners, the wisdom that allows us to see the truth in the words of a native who has seen a giant flying creature in Papua New Guinea. And a native's lack of modern machinery does not cause him to see a bird or bat and think he saw something else: a giant featherless flying creature with a long tail.

The problem lies in Western mentality: Civilized ignorance---that is harder to cure than the native's ignorance. What is the cure for Western ignorance regarding these sightings? It's coming to know and understand that Americans and Australians encounter the same giant flying creatures that natives encounter.

No bat or bird known to Western science fits the descriptions commonly given for these flying creatures. Pterosaurs fit much better. Since eyewitnesses have different backgrounds, different languages, and different basic beliefs, the similar descriptions mean the creatures are what they appear to be: modern living pterosaurs.

Science must progress and zoologists must investigate these valid human experiences: encounters with live pterosaurs in Australia and in Papua New Guinea.