

Ghostly Animals

Continuing on our string of longevity in ghostly apparitions, we have to take a moment for other ghostly visitors: domestic animals. While we could skip this topic completely if they only survived in nonreactive form, the fact is that there are too many interactive ghost animals around to ignore. They make themselves known in many ways, but there is no doubt that they are there with us.

Let's give a few examples of what I am talking about.

A family dog is hit by a car, yet each night, the entire family can hear their pet walk onto the porch of their home, his nails clicking along on the wood flooring, to come to rest outside the living room window, with a slight thud and a deep exhalation. This was his regimen in life and continues it after death. The phenomenon goes on for about 3 months, then stops, but in times of high stress in that family, the sounds return as if to say, "I am here to protect you."

At the ranch where ASUP is headquartered there is a ghostly dog; she is not always present, but when the living canines are in the kitchen being fed, the apparition can be seen in the bedroom door nearby, watching the show. She appears to be a terrier, gray in color, pointed ears and short and the first thing you see is the glowing eyes. This animal (or another) is also heard at night clicking across the kitchen floor when everyone else, including the dogs, are fast asleep. Some research on this resident canine leads us to believe that in life, her name was "Midget," the prized pet of the former owner.

Another case centers on a particularly athletic cat that has a long history of acrobatics in his owner's bed room for years, but as time passes, his agility begins to wane and more and more he begins to miss on his landing. As years go by, he continues his athletics, even in old age, but the jumps are far less in distance. The cat eventually died of old age but the owner, who had raised him from birth and who was now in her late twenties, claimed that on the night he died, he returned as a shadow figure, and attempted a leap from the top of a bureau to a dresser, but missed on landing. As the days and months went on, the apparition would return, attempt the same leap and with time, got proficient in the trick. This went on for several years, and then became less frequent, finally stopping five years after his passing.

A cat, who died of natural causes, returns to his friend's bed each night, laying beside her and audibly purring. This EVP of sorts was captured on tape and continued for as long as the woman lived in her apartment. When she moved, the cat apparently did not.

And finally, while talking about felines, we have the famous cat at the Jefferson Hotel, who is felt to tug at the covers when sleeping and was reported to have cuddled up to more than one guest, sitting on their stomachs or under their arms and purring away. He or she has been in residence since the hotel opened its doors! A very long run for a ghostly feline.

Of course there are countless others that we have not personally investigated. There are a host of great hounds on the moors of Great Britain, as well as in their castles' some are heard, while others are full spectral anomalies.

My personal knowledge on spectral animals of other kinds is limited. I'm not sure I have ever heard of a ghostly herd of cattle, or even a ghostly dinosaur, although I have heard of spectral

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buffalo in the Dakotas and while the vast majority of these otherworldly animals are friendly, the few that are ferocious seem to be most remembered. Conan-Doyle's *Hound of the Baskerville's* was based on an old legend of the moors and was reportedly witnessed by the great creator of Sherlock Holmes, himself a proponent of the afterlife.

So, we have ample reason to believe that at least domesticated animals can have a ghostly afterlife, but how does that fit into the greater scheme of things? Must they always be tied to a human? Or is this simply an animal with a very evolved personality that simply is not ready to cross over? And finally a question we addressed years ago, can a dog go to heaven?

Domesticated animals, especially dogs have a peculiar bond to humans, so if the concept of the ghost is tied to unfinished business in people, it should be the same for dogs. As to the survival of dogs to an afterlife, that is more a question of philosophy. The phrase, "All dogs go to heaven," seems appropriate, if only to fulfill the overall picture of life, death and afterlife. I am reminded of a short piece I wrote not too long ago about the topic, aimed specifically to a Sunday school teacher, who proclaimed to her class that theology dictates only human's can experience heaven.

The teacher's position was based on an ill conceived belief that only humans have souls, thus life after death is limited to them alone. A few obvious points seem to counter that belief. Angels, for example are clearly not "human" and by every definition, subservient to humans. That was the position that allegedly caused the original rift between Lucifer, God first chosen among the angels, and the Almighty, after God relegated the heavenly host to the protection of earthbound man.

Beyond that argument we have the entire issue of the Catholic tradition of honoring domesticated animals each October 3rd, the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, the 11th century theologian and founder of the Franciscan order of priests and monks. For all his major accomplishments as a priest, theologian and scholar, he is most remembered as the Patron Saint of Animals. It was said that Francis would sit in the gardens of his friary in later life and animals of every description would flock to his side, where he would speak to them and they would respond in turn.

Another fact that scratches at the theology that might set animals apart from the grand plan is the fact that to this day, several religions of standing, including the Catholics, Jews, Greek Orthodox and Muslims all agree that possession by a demon is possible, in humans, their dwelling and their animals.

Falling further back in the theological history of Christianity, the early symbols of the new church included the dove and it was said that in that form, the Holy Ghost visited our world. Whether you believe any of that or not is immaterial; what is important is the fact that every major religion has included the symbolism of animals and included them in their belief structures. The fact that some errant Pope decided that animals were devoid of a soul is at best illogical. The greatest minds of the church have wrestled with the concept of the soul, so how can any one man argue the possibility of the existence of a soul in other animals. Meanwhile, all agree that angels are already in heaven, as is the Holy Ghost. So why not the animals of the field and our own beloved pets?

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Regardless of your feelings on that subject, you have to look at the extension of such belief systems that regard other “animals,” such as the wood nymph, fairy or wee people. Whether you believe in them or not, thousands do and if they believe they exist in this world, they must exist on the other side, at least for them. Referencing Joy Maner’s recent find in the British press concerning the recent find by doctors in the UK who now have a possible explanation for such sightings as an ocular condition, this point may be moot, but to be open and honest, philosophers might argue that until such time as there might be empiric proof to the contrary, the wee people most certainly exist, if not as a separate being as a misinterpreted spirit or ghost. Thus one could argue, they too have their place in the afterlife, if in fact, they are not already there.

So the next time you are out at Old Alton Bridge, take a moment to say hello to Luca and never assume that the sound of a dog (or cat) in a house under investigation is a solid earthly creation. I fear that in the past, we have overlooked this kind of phenomenon, especially in America and respectfully suggest we broaden our sights just a bit to include them.

A quick story is appropriate here. Many years ago, while living in upstate New York, I had several friends who enjoyed deer hunting, and they asked me to join them. Now, for the record, I dislike the taste of venison; it is not that I have a problem with shooting a deer, the herds in that part of the country are overstocked, under hunted and I might add much larger than their Texas cousins, who look like dogs next to the northern variety. I declined to hunt the animals, but said I would tag along with a camera.

Now the woods around what was then my home, bordered on state parkland, The Catskill Preserve and there was no shortage of deer, so the group went out of their way to pass up on the smaller animals in search of a “trophy rack” the multi-horned old timer that they were sure was out there. About 2 p.m. everyone heard the loud snorts of a giant deer, not yet visible, but nevertheless close at hand. The party broke up, one group foraging into the thickets, the second hunkering down to see what was going to materialize. And materialize it did, a giant buck with a rack of at least twelve points. The group bided their time, waiting for the deer to come closer as I snapped away.

After a few moments, one of the group signaled he was going to take his shot, the second also prepared to fire should he miss, but at the range in question, that was unlikely. The sound of four shots rang out in succession, but the buck failed to fall and simply hopped away back into the thicket, where another two shots were heard from the foragers. No one bagged the giant buck, there was no blood, and no one succeeded in hitting the beast. While several of the others were upset, I just laughed; among the entourage were two former US Army Rangers, who were very proud of their marksmanship badges. That, and the fact that they were shooting with ultra sophisticated weapons made the moment all the funnier.

I returned home, shared some beer and hours of talking about how such a shot could be missed and then went to the local camera store to have them develop my film. I did some other shopping in town (population 300), put gas in my jeep and returned to the shop. I quickly looked through the photos, then I looked again more closely. It appeared that I had good shots of the location, the thicket in the background, but no buck. I put the film on a light table to look more closely, at which time the owner asked if there was something wrong.

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I explained at length about the illusive buck, where we had been hunting and how I knew I had at least six good shots of his profile before a shot was fired. The old man, who had lived his entire life in the area laughed. “You were shooting a ghost!” he explained. “People have been shooting that same deer for almost a hundred years.” The man suggested that I take a look in the local library archives, “About 1934 I believe,” And said no more.

The next visit to town, I did stop at the library and asked where I might find newspapers from 1934. I was told there were none; the librarian asked what I was looking for and when I explained, she too laughed. “Right this way!” Up on a shelf gathering dust was the newsletter of a local hunting club and there in 1934 was the first of many sightings of the giant buck that everyone saw and no one ever managed to shoot. The librarian then flipped forward, it seemed that the big buck was a reoccurring phenomenon, showing up every seven years. “I’ll tell the gun club that you will be writing up your experiences,” she said with a smile, “You were the first to try taking a photo; now isn’t that interesting?”

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