

'Big cat' country? New Zealand's obsession with giant feline sightings

Level: Elementary

1 Warmer

Where do these animals live? Match each animal to the correct place.

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. Bigfoot | a. the Himalayas |
| 2. the Loch Ness Monster | b. the seas around Norway and Greenland |
| 3. the Kraken | c. North America |
| 4. the Yeti | d. a large lake in Scotland |

2 Key words

a. Match the words in the box to the definitions below. The paragraph numbers will help you.

aerial

aura

expert

feral

wilderness

witness

- someone who sees something happen _____ (para 1)
- a quality that surrounds or comes from a person, place or situation _____ (para 1)
- describes an animal that lives in a wild state but was once a pet or lived on a farm _____ (para 2)
- taken from the air _____ (para 4)
- people who know a lot about a particular subject _____ (para 5)
- an area of land where people do not live and where there are no houses, farms or other buildings _____ (para 7)

awful

border

exist

headlights

pleasure

- the two lights on the front of a car, used for driving at night _____ (para 8)
- the official line separating two countries _____ (para 10)
- to appear in the real world _____ (para 11)
- a feeling of happiness, enjoyment or satisfaction _____ (para 12)
- unpleasant; terrible _____ (para 12)

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b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. The _____ said that she heard someone shouting at midnight.
2. He was able to take excellent _____ photos with the new drone.
3. Flying dragons don't really _____.
4. There was an _____ of mystery in the castle library.
5. Luckily for me, my son is a computer _____.
6. The wine was excellent, but the food was _____.
7. There's a family of _____ cats living in the old factory.

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- 1 The photograph shows a dark shape walking up a path in the distance. It is hard to see the size of the animal. The witness was a man named Mark Orr who was out with friends in Hanmer Springs. He said the animal was "about knee-height", looked "very strong and quite short" and "had an aura".
- 2 An aura. All animals have auras, don't they? Even feral cats, goats, wild pigs. The idea of the aura was strange but also interesting. I want to believe.
- 3 There is not much information about New Zealand's "big cat", but people have seen it since the 1960s.
- 4 There are some aerial photos of an animal going up South Island hills and a security-camera video that shows a black shape crossing a road. On the video, a man shouts, "That's not a cat!"
- 5 Experts think that the big cat is probably a feral cat. But as one expert said, "These witnesses have seen something. It's different; they're not sure what it is."
- 6 But the witnesses are sure. They know what they saw. One witness said, "It's not a dog." Another man said he's seen it twice.
- 7 In October, a possum-hunter in North Canterbury said he'd seen a "huge" cat, about the size of a puma, and would never go into the wilderness alone again.
- 8 In 2019, two people were driving along State Highway 1 at night when a "great, big, huge, black cat" ran across the road in front of them. Their headlights lit it up.
- 9 A monster mystery brings people together. At a time of global chaos and worry, there is something nice about the idea of the big cat – alone and part of the wilderness.
- 10 Of course, many people laugh at the idea of the big cat. For a long time, I laughed, too. Look at the facts! It isn't eating farm animals. There are no big-cat footprints or hair. And New Zealand has strict border controls.
- 11 But now, I don't know. "We can't say things don't exist just because we find them hard to believe," said animal expert Darren Naish.
- 12 And there is pleasure in not knowing, isn't there? Many kinds of uncertainty in the world are awful, but this one is fun.

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3 Comprehension check

Are the statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text? Correct any that are false.

1. People say that there is a strange big cat living on New Zealand's North Island.
2. Witnesses say that the big cat is large, thin and looks like a big dog.
3. Possum-hunters have found footprints and hair that probably belong to the big cat.
4. Farmers say that the big cat eats their farm animals.
5. Most experts believe the big cat is really just a large feral cat.
6. An expert says that we should not say things don't exist just because we find them hard to believe.

4 Using key language

a. Find all the animals in the article. Write them into the box.

1. Which of these animals have you seen?
2. Which of these animals live with you or near your home?
3. Which would you (not) like to meet when you go out in the wilderness?

b. Write a sentence for each animal.

E.g. *Wild pigs live in the woods in my country, but I have never seen one.*

5 Discussion

- What do you think the author means when she says that 'A monster mystery brings people together'? Do you agree with her?
- Do you believe that the New Zealand big cat or the other animals in task 1 exist? Say why.

6 In your own words

Which animal would you like to look for?

- New Zealand's big cat
- the Yeti
- the Loch Ness Monster
- Bigfoot
- the Kraken

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Write a paragraph about what happened when you saw this animal. Use the sentence prompts below.

I went to ... to look for ...

I heard a noise ...

I saw a ... shape.

The animal looked ...

It was ...

I was really ...