

From the archive, 5 November 1966: Puma a "case of the galloping bloodhound"

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There is, says Dr Maurice Burton, mammalogist and a resident in the county for many years, no Surrey puma.

That so many people in Surrey believe in its existence is due to the activities of a large feral cat, a galloping bloodhound, an assortment of lesser cats and dogs, several foxes, and other unclassified agents. Between them they are likely to have been responsible for all the evidence of the puma's existence which has been put forward so far.

Dr Burton's contention is made in this month's issue of "Wild Life". About 400 people claim to have seen the puma in the past two years. He says: "Even if we whittle down the reports to those that are the more credible, we still have a puma that has been seen regularly about once a fortnight." Pumas are secretive animals: Dr Burton doubts whether any self-respecting puma would let itself be seen so often.

Dr Burton says: "The case for the Surrey puma stands or falls by the 1964 Munstead pug-mark . . . thought to be far too big for any known dog or cat and therefore identified by the London Zoo as the pawmark of a large cat, the puma." But Dr Burton believes that the zoo was wrong. He suggests that the mark was left by a galloping bloodhound or some other large dog.

London Zoo admitted yesterday some doubt about the Munstead footmark, since it was left in sand - and sand scatters. But the case for the puma's existence was not built on the Munstead footmark alone. There was the devouring of a deer at Wiphurst in 1964; the sighting on October 2, 1964, of a creature which leapt between 10 and 12ft; and on September 30, 1963, of an animal which cleared an 8-ft. gate.

But the most scathing dismissal of Dr Burton's case came from Mr Oliver Moxon, hotelier and Liberal politician, who almost every weekend this summer has led expeditions in search of the Surrey puma. There were, Mr Moxon declared, at least two Surrey pumas, and possibly more.

He had tracked down the Crandall puma to a fairly small area now. "I've seen it myself," he said. "It moves far too fast for any dog."

There was also a puma seen in the Worplesdon area. And there had been "well authenticated sightings" further north, near Camberley. Dr Burton lives in Albury, just east of Guildford.

This ought to be well within the alleged beat of the alleged Worplesdon puma. Perhaps the best thing it could do to quell this outbreak of disbelief is to appear one night at Dr Burton's window . . .

David McKie