

Abominable Snowman believers will find this unbearable

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In this March 5, 2008, file photo, Sangay Wangchuk, national director of conservation, stands near plaster casts that he claims are of footmarks from a Yeti, at Thimpu, Bhutan. AP Photo/Saurabh Das

LONDON — A British scientist says he may have solved the mystery of the Abominable Snowman — the elusive ape-like creature of the Himalayas. He thinks it's a bear.

Tests suggest the creature, also known as the yeti, is the descendant of an ancient polar bear.

Oxford University professor Bryan Sykes studied DNA from two Himalayan animals the local people called yetis. He found they shared genes with a polar bear jawbone that is at least 40,000 years old.

Sykes said Thursday that the tests showed the creatures were not related to modern Himalayan bears. They were direct descendants of the prehistoric animal.

Two Hairy Samples

He said "it may be a new species, it may be a hybrid" between polar bears and brown bears.

"The next thing is go there and find one," he added.

Sykes asked museums, scientists and yeti aficionados to share hair samples thought to be from the creature.

One of the samples he analyzed came from an alleged yeti mummy in the Indian region of Ladakh, at the Western edge of the Himalayas. It was taken by a French mountaineer who was shown the corpse 40 years ago.

The other was a single hair found a decade ago in Bhutan, 800 miles (1,300 kilometers) to the east.

Now To Find The Creature

Sykes said finding the hairs so recently and so far apart suggests the members of the species are still alive.

"I can't imagine we managed to get samples from the only two 'snow bears' in the Himalayas," he said.

Finding a living creature could explain the descriptions of the yeti. The polar bear genes could make them act and look different and walk on two feet more often, he said.

Sykes' research has not been published, but he says he has submitted it for peer review. It is a reasonable explanation for the yeti stories, said professor Tom Gilbert of the Natural History Museum of Denmark.

"It's a lot easier to believe that than if he had found something else," said Gilbert, who was not involved in the study. "If he had said it's some kind of new primate, I'd want to see all the data."

Sykes' findings are unlikely to lay the myth of the yeti to rest.

The Stuff Of Legends

The yeti, or Abominable Snowman, is one of a number of legends about beasts, such as Sasquatch and Bigfoot. Decades of eyewitness reports, blurry photos and stories have kept the legend alive. But scientists doubt it.

"I do not think the study gives any comfort to yeti-believers," David Frayer, a professor of biological anthropology at the University of Kansas, said in an email. But "no amount of scientific data will ever shake their belief."

If Sykes wanted "to refute the yeti nonsense, then good luck," he said.

Sykes said he was simply trying "to inject some science into a rather murky field."

"The yeti, the Bigfoot, is surrounded in myth and hoaxes," he said. "But you can't invent a DNA sequence from a hair."

Quiz

- 1 Which scientific evidence from the section "Now To Find The Creature" shows why descendants of an ancient polar bear could be mistaken as the Yeti?
- (A) Sykes said finding the hairs so recently and so far apart suggests the members of the species are still alive.
 - (B) "I can't imagine we managed to get samples from the only two 'snow bears' in the Himalayas," he said.
 - (C) The polar bear genes could make them act and look different and walk on two feet more often, he said.
 - (D) It is a reasonable explanation for the Yeti stories, said professor Tom Gilbert of the Natural History Museum of Denmark.
- 2 Which of the following sentences from the section "The Stuff Of Legends" shows why the legend of the Yeti has been described as murky?
- (A) The Yeti, or Abominable Snowman, is one of a number of legends about beasts, such as Sasquatch and Bigfoot.
 - (B) Decades of eyewitness reports, blurry photos and stories have kept the legend alive. But scientists doubt it.
 - (C) "I do not think the study gives any comfort to Yeti-believers," David Frayer, a professor of biological anthropology at the University of Kansas, said in an email.
 - (D) "The Yeti, the Bigfoot, is surrounded in myth and hoaxes," he said. "But you can't invent a DNA sequence from a hair."
- 3 Select the paragraph from the section "The Stuff Of Legends " that is MOST relevant to include in the summary of the article.
- 4 What is the central idea of the section "Now To Find The Creature"?
- (A) On the basis of the samples found, the species can be considered to be alive.
 - (B) Sykes research is yet to be published but his findings will be broadcast on television.
 - (C) Sykes would need more data to prove whether this is a descendant of the polar bear or a new primate.
 - (D) Finding a living Yeti is important as the genes of a polar bear in a Yeti could make it behave and look different.