

SCIENCE

DNA tests on "Yeti" hair and bone samples bear results



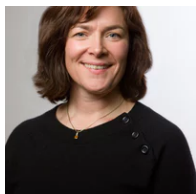
Michael Irving | November 29th, 2017



This femur, found in a cave on the Tibetan Plateau, was claimed to have come from the legendary Yeti, but a new genetic study has identified its true origin (Credit: Icon Films Ltd)

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The Yeti is usually regarded as a folklorish figure, but physical evidence like hair and bones has been found to back up centuries of sightings. Now, an international team of scientists has conducted one of the most detailed DNA studies to date on some of these samples, and they've uncovered what may be behind the legends of the so-called Abominable Snowman.



Often described as huge and ape-like, stories of the Yeti date back hundreds of years among the local Himalayan people, but the creature came to the forefront of Western civilization during the 20th century, as explorers began climbing these treacherous peaks. Even Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, the first party to reach the summit of Mt Everest, reported finding gigantic footprints in the snow during their historic 1953 expedition.

But it's not all hearsay. There are plenty of physical remains on display in museums or revered as holy relics by Buddhist monks. One such relic was the supposed Yeti scalp kept in the Khumjung monastery, but when it was studied it was found to have been fashioned from an animal hide - and a similar story usually plays out on closer inspection of these samples.

Led by Charlotte Lindqvist, a biologist at the University at Buffalo and Nanyang Technological University, the new study claims to be "the most rigorous analysis to date of samples suspected to derive from anomalous or mythical 'hominid'-like creatures." The team analyzed nine specimens supposedly of Yeti origin, including bones, teeth, skin, hair and feces, which were gathered from museums and private collections.

Among them was a fragment of femur bone, which reportedly came from a Yeti corpse found in a cave on the Tibetan Plateau, and a skin sample from the paw of one of the animals, which was part of a relic in a monastery.



Sure enough, genetic testing revealed that both of these samples came from bears. The bone belonged to a Tibetan brown bear, while the skin was from an Asian black bear. In fact, eight of the nine samples bore bear DNA, and the last turned out to be a dog.

"Our findings strongly suggest that the biological underpinnings of the Yeti legend can be found in local bears, and our study demonstrates that genetics should be able to unravel other, similar mysteries," says Lindqvist.

While the news may be disappointing for "cryptozoologists", regular zoologists can learn more from the study about the local bears, which are rare and a little mysterious themselves.

"Bears in this region are either vulnerable or critically endangered from a conservation perspective, but not much is known about their past history," says Lindqvist. "The Himalayan brown bears, for example, are highly endangered. Clarifying population structure and genetic diversity can help in estimating population sizes and crafting management strategies."

For this part of the study, the scientists sequenced the DNA of 23 Asian bears, including those misidentified as Yetis, and compared them to other bears around the world. The results revealed that Himalayan brown bears diverged from other brown bears earlier than previously thought, some 650,000 years ago.

"Further genetic research on these rare and elusive animals may help illuminate the environmental history of the region, as well as bear evolutionary history worldwide - and additional 'Yeti' samples could contribute to this work," says Lindqvist.

The research was published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*.


Source: [University at Buffalo](#)


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