Bigfoot: If It's There, Could It Be a Bear?: A Critical Examination

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Abstract

This paper reevaluates the study by Foxon (2024). Foxon's paper, "Bigfoot: If It's There, Could It Be a Bear?", first circulated in early 2024 as part of ongoing efforts to reconcile cryptozoological claims with established wildlife data. Building on earlier research by Blight (2005) and Lozier et al. (2009), Foxon expanded the geographic scope and employed a negative binomial model to analyze Sasquatch sightings against black bear populations in the United States and Canada.

The work was subsequently peer-reviewed and published in the Journal of Zoology, attracting attention for its statistical approach to an often-dismissed topic. Although it garnered praise for applying rigorous methods, it also faced criticism for reliance on a single year of bear population data and for downplaying sightings in regions where black bears are rare.

While Foxon's original work contended that high bear populations correlate with increased Bigfoot sightings, this review highlights several oversights that arise when focusing too narrowly on American black bears (Ursus americanus) as the primary explanation.

Notably, numerous sightings in states with relatively small bear populations—such as Texas, Ohio, and Florida—do not fit Foxon's bear-based misidentification model. By ignoring or downplaying these anomalous regions, Foxon's analysis risks confirmation bias.

The question of Bigfoot's existence and distribution demands a more balanced, data-driven approach and a willingness to incorporate the possibility that not all sightings stem from bear confusion.

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1. Introduction

The existence of Bigfoot remains a contentious subject in zoology and cryptozoology. Whereas skeptics often attribute sightings to hoaxes or misidentified wildlife, including bears, proponents point to numerous eyewitness reports, tracks, photographs, and possible biological evidence as reason to believe that an undiscovered hominid roams North America (Green, 2006; Meldrum, 2007). Foxon (2024) argues that increased black bear populations statistically coincide with so-called "Bigfoot hotspots," suggesting that many or most Sasquatch sightings arise from bear misidentifications.

The present review challenges Foxon's conclusion by considering key inconsistencies in the data.

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2. Data Inconsistencies and Bear Population Limitations

A major concern raised by critics is Foxon's reliance on a single year of black bear population estimates—2006 (Spencer, Beausoleil, & Martorello, 2007)—to infer a continent-wide correlation with Sasquatch sightings (Foxon, 2024).

Black bear demographics are subject to rapid change due to shifts in habitat, conservation efforts, and relocation practices. More importantly, multiple U.S. states and Canadian provinces have fluctuating bear populations that have not been rigorously documented in every region over time.

Thus, using 2006 data as a de facto representation of ongoing bear distributions may produce a distorted statistical view and overlook recent expansions or declines in local bear numbers.

Moreover, Foxon excludes certain regions due to a lack of bear data, yet extrapolates his bear-misidentification hypothesis broadly. Such data gaps call into question the universality of his conclusions, particularly if the omitted areas do not align with the simple "bears explain everything" narrative.

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3. Counterexamples: Texas, Ohio, and Florida

Critically, Foxon's model struggles to address states with **high numbers of Bigfoot reports** but **low black bear densities**:

1. **Texas**
   While black bears have begun repopulating parts of Texas, their numbers remain far below those in bear-rich regions like Montana, Washington, or Maine (Hristienko & McDonald, 2007). Yet, Texas consistently ranks among the higher states for recorded Bigfoot sightings (Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization, 2023). This mismatch suggests that bears cannot account for all reported encounters in Texas.
2. **Ohio**
   Although black bears have been reemerging in eastern Ohio, overall bear sightings and population size remain modest. Despite this, Ohio has a robust history of Sasquatch reports, from the hilly woodlands of southeast Ohio to the farmland around central Ohio. Foxon's bear-driven explanation offers few insights into why these sightings persist in regions with demonstrably low bear presence.
3. **Florida**
   Foxon (2024) briefly notes that Florida's black bear population is comparatively small relative to states in the Pacific Northwest. Nonetheless, Florida Bigfoot (colloquially called the "Skunk Ape") sightings have been frequent for decades. Forested swamps in the Everglades and other southern wetlands present a unique habitat that does not map cleanly onto black bear distribution. Foxon's approach does not adequately explain why sightings remain widespread even in areas where black bears are scarce or absent.

Collectively, these examples raise doubts that misidentified bears are the principal driver behind Bigfoot sightings. A more nuanced model that acknowledges legitimate, non-bear-based observations is required to account for variations between regions.

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4. Confirmation Bias in Foxon's Study

Foxon (2024) emphasizes repeatedly that Bigfoot's reported size, fur color, diet, and standing posture could all be attributed to black bears. However, this interpretation heavily favors one explanatory path—bear misidentification—while minimizing other possibilities. Such **confirmation bias** appears in several ways:

- **Disregarding Incongruent Data**: States like Texas, Ohio, and Florida are either brushed off as outliers or explained away by referencing greater human populations or increased public interest, rather than conceding that some sightings might genuinely be non-bear creatures.
- **Narrow Focus on One Species**: The study centers on the American black bear, even though many states host other large mammals (wild hogs, for instance) that might factor into misidentifications—or might *not* be relevant at all. By neglecting these variables, Foxon's model may artificially inflate the bear–Bigfoot correlation.
- **False Equivalence**: Foxon's repeated refrain that "if Bigfoot is there, it might be a bear" risks conflating eyewitness descriptions of upright hominids with typical bear behavior—while ignoring aspects such as footprints with dermal ridges, alleged vocalizations, or anecdotal sightings of creatures that appear distinctly non-ursine.

A more balanced approach would systematically analyze areas with high Sasquatch activity and comparatively low bear populations, as well as triangulate sightings with climate, vegetation density, and ecological factors that might facilitate an undiscovered hominid species.

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5. Alternative Explanations and the Case for an Existing Bigfoot

From a pro-Bigfoot viewpoint, multiple lines of evidence support the possibility of a real, undiscovered North American primate:

1. **Fossil Record Gap**
   Skeptics often note a lack of fossil evidence, but limited fossilization in heavily forested or wetland environments can obscure the record of large mammals (Meldrum, 2007).
2. **Anecdotal and Cultural Traditions**
   Indigenous legends of "hairy giants" throughout North America predate modern cryptozoological interest (Green, 2006). This continuity suggests that the Sasquatch phenomenon is not a mere product of contemporary pop culture.
3. **Ongoing Sightings and Physical Traces**
   Many claims include footprints with unique morphological features inconsistent with common

hoaxes, hair samples with inconclusive DNA analyses, and unidentified vocalizations recorded in certain hotspots (Meldrum, 2007).

In these contexts, *Bigfoot's existence is entirely plausible,* and sightings in low-bear-density regions support the notion that at least some proportion of encounters describe a real, unknown hominid rather than misidentified fauna.

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6. Conclusion

Foxon's analysis (2024) provides an interesting hypothesis linking black bear numbers to Bigfoot sightings, but it overlooks critical data from states with robust sightings yet scant bear populations. This omission, combined with a narrow focus on a single year of bear estimates, raises questions about overreliance on a single explanatory cause: bear misidentifications.

Moreover, any assumption that *all* eyewitnesses are confusing Sasquatch with black bears disregards the breadth of alternative evidence—geographical, anthropological, and testimonial—suggesting that Bigfoot may indeed be a living, as-yet undocumented species.

Going forward, comprehensive studies should:

- Incorporate updated, region-specific wildlife data across multiple years.
- Consider sightings in historically "bear-poor" regions, examining consistency with black bear presence vs. alternative explanations.
- Use robust, qualitative reviews of eyewitness accounts (photos, footprints, vocal recordings) to discern whether the described features align more with a bear or with an unknown hominid.

Until these improvements are made, attributing most sightings to black bear misidentification remains both selective and incomplete, ignoring scenarios in which Bigfoot genuinely exists and is encountered, particularly in areas where bears are limited or absent.

References

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