ANIMAL MUTILATIONS

History

The earliest known documented outbreak of unexplained livestock deaths occurred in early 1606 “...about the city of London and some of the shires adjoining. Whole slaughters of sheep have been made, in some places to number 100, in others less, where nothing is taken from the sheep but their tallow and some inward parts, the whole carcasses, and fleece remaining still behind. Most agree that it “tended towards some fireworks.” The outbreak was noted in the official records of the Court of James I of England. Charles Fort collected many accounts of cattle mutilations that occurred in England in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

John Keel mentioned investigating animal mutilation cases in 1966 while with Ivan T. Sanderson that were being reported in the Upper Ohio River Valley, around Gallipolis, OH. The phenomenon remained largely unknown outside cattle-raising communities until 1967, when the *Pueblo Chieftain* in Pueblo, Colorado published a story about a horse named Lady near Alamosa, Colorado that was mysteriously killed and mutilated. The story was republished by the wider press and distributed nationwide. This case was the first to feature speculation that extraterrestrial beings and unidentified flying objects were associated with mutilation.

Later developments

Democratic senator Floyd K. Haskell contacted the FBI asking for help in 1975 due to public concern regarding the issue. He claimed there had been 130 mutilations in Colorado alone, and further reports across nine states. A 1979 FBI report indicated that, according to investigations by the New Mexico State Police, there had been an estimated 8,000 mutilations in Colorado, causing approximately $1,000,000 damage.

Characteristics

Physical characteristics

In most cases mutilation wounds appear to be clean and carried out surgically. Mutilated animals are usually, though not always. reported to have been drained of blood and have no sign of blood in the immediate area or around their wounds.

George E. Onet, a doctor of veterinary microbiology and cattle mutilation investigator, claims that mutilated cattle are avoided by large scavengers “such as coyotes, wolves, foxes, dogs, skunks, badgers, and bobcats” for several days after its death. Similarly, domestic animals are also reported to be “visibly agitated” and “fearful” of the carcass.

According to a survey taken by the National Institute for Discovery Science (NIDS), mutilation of the eye occurred in 59 percent of cases, mutilation of the tongue in 42 percent of cases, the genitals in 85 percent of cases, and the rectum in 76 percent of cases. According to Dr. Howard Burgess, nearly 90 percent of mutilated cattle are between four and five years old.

Some mutilations are said to occur in very brief periods. A 2002 NIDS report relates a 1997 case from Utah. Two ranchers tagged a specific calf, then continued tagging other animals in the same pasture. The ranchers were, at the most, about 300 yards from the calf. Less than an hour later, the first calf was discovered completely eviscerated—most muscle and all internal organs were missing. There was no blood, entrails, or apparent disturbance at the scene. Independent analysts both uncovered marks on the calf’s remains consistent with two different types of tools: a large, machete-type blade, and smaller, more delicate scissors.

The absence of tracks or footprints around the site of the mutilated carcass is often considered a hallmark of cattle mutilation. However, in some cases, strange marks or imprints near the site have been found. In the famous “Snippy” case, there was an absolute absence of tracks in a 100 ft radius of the carcass (even the horse’s own tracks disappeared within 100 ft of the body.) But within this radius several small holes were found seemingly “punched” in the ground and two bushes were absolutely flattened. In Rio Arriba County, New Mexico, June 1976, a “trail of suction cup-like impressions” was found leading from a mutilated three-year-old cow. The indentations were in a tripod form, 4 inches in diameter, 28 inches apart, and disappeared 500 feet from the dead cow. Similar incidents were reported in the area in 1978.

Laboratory reports

Laboratory reports carried out on some mutilated animals have shown unusually high or low levels of vitamins or minerals in tissue samples, and the presence of chemicals not normally found in animals. However, not all mutilated animals display these anomalies, and those that do have slightly different anomalies from one another. On account of the time between death and necropsy, and a lack of background information on specific cattle, investigators have often found it impossible to determine if these variations are connected to the animals’ deaths or not.

In one case documented by New Mexico police and the FBI, an 11-month-old cross Hereford-Charolais bull, belonging to a Mr. Manuel Gomez of Dulce, New Mexico, was found mutilated on March 24, 1978. It displayed “classic” mutilation signs, including the removal of the rectum and sex organs with what appeared to be “a sharp and precise instrument” and its internal organs were found to be inconsistent with a normal case of death followed by predation. “Both the liver and the heart were white and mushy. Both organs had the texture and consistency of peanut butter”.

Gabriel L Veldez, New Mexico Police

The animal’s heart as well as bone and muscle samples were sent to the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory for microscopic and bacteriological studies, while samples from the animal's liver were sent to two separate private laboratories.

Los Alamos detected the presence of naturally occurring Clostridium bacteria in the heart but was unable to reach any conclusions because of the possibility that the bacteria represented postmortem contamination. They did not directly investigate the heart’s unusual color or texture.

Samples from the animal's liver were found to be completely devoid of copper and to contain 4 times the normal level of zinc, potassium and phosphorus. The scientists performing the analysis were unable to explain these anomalies.

Blood samples taken at the scene were reported to be “light pink in color” and “Did not clot after several days” while the animal’s hide was found to be unusually brittle for a fresh death (the animal was estimated to have been dead for 5 hours) and the flesh underneath was found to be discolored. None of the laboratories were able to report any firm conclusions on the cause of the blood or tissue damage. At the time, it was suggested that a burst of radiation may have been used to kill the animal, blowing apart its red blood cells in the process. This hypothesis was later discarded as subsequent reports from the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory later confirmed the presence of anti-coagulants in samples taken from other cows mutilated in the region.

Conventional explanations

As with most disputed phenomena, there are a number of potential explanations to cattle mutilations, ranging from death by natural causes to purposeful acts by unknown individuals. U.S. governmental explanation. After coming under increasing public pressure, Federal authorities launched a comprehensive investigation of the mutilation phenomenon. In May 1979, the case was passed on to the FBI, which granted jurisdiction under Title 18 (codes 1152 and 1153). The investigation was dubbed "Operation Animal Mutilation".

The investigation was funded by a US$44,170 grant from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration and was headed by FBI agent Kenneth Rommel. It had five key objectives:

To determine the reliability of the information on which the grant was based, which entailed gathering as much information as possible about the cases reported in New Mexico prior to May 1979. To determine the cause of as many mutilations as possible, especially those reported in New Mexico. To determine if livestock mutilations as described constitute a major law enforcement problem. If these mutilations do constitute a major law enforcement problem, to determine the scope of the problem and to offer recommendations on how to deal with it. If it is shown that the mutilation phenomenon is not a law enforcement problem, to recommend that no further law enforcement investigations be funded.

Rommel’s final report was 297 pages long and cost approximately US$45,000. It concluded that mutilations were predominantly the result of natural predation, but that some contained anomalies that could not be accounted for by conventional wisdom. The FBI was unable to identify any individuals responsible for the mutilations. Details of the investigation are now available under the Freedom of Information Act. The released material includes correspondence from Rommel where he states that “most credible sources have attributed this damage to normal predator and scavenger activity”.

Prior to the involvement of the FBI, the ATF launched their own investigation of the phenomenon. Both federal investigations were preceded (and followed, to some extent) by a state level investigation carried out by enforcement officials in New Mexico. This investigation reported finding evidence that some mutilated animals had been tranquilized and treated with an anti-coagulant prior to their mutilation. It also contended that alleged surgical techniques performed during mutilations had become “more professional” over time. However, officers in charge were unable to determine responsibility or motive.

The ATF investigation was headed by ATF Agent Donald Flickinger. The New Mexico investigation was headed by Officer Gabriel L Veldez of the New Mexico Police, with the assistance of Cattle Inspector Jim Dyad and Officer Howard Johnston of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

Natural causes

Blowflies have been implicated as possible scavengers involved in making livestock carcasses look “mutilated.” While many unconventional explanations have been put forward to explain cattle mutilations, a variety of scientists, veterinary workers, and knowledgeable observers (including farmers and other agricultural workers) have suggested more conventional ideas, most of which revolve around the hypothesis that “mutilated” animals died of natural causes and were subjected to known terrestrial phenomena – including the action of predators, parasites, and scavengers.

Missing or mutilated mouth, lips, anus, and genitalia are explained as:

* Contraction of missing/damaged areas due to dehydration.
* The actions of small scavengers and burrowing parasites seeking to enter or consume the body in areas where skin is at its thinnest.

Missing/mutilated eyes and soft internal organs are explained as:

* The action of carrion feeding insects such as blowflies, and opportunistic or carrion birds such as vultures, which are known to direct themselves toward an animal’s eyes, and to enter the body through the openings of the mouth and anus in order to feed on soft internal organs.

Absence of blood is explained as:

* Blood pooling in the lowest points in the body where it will break down into its basic organic components.
* Blood that is external to the body, or in the area of a wound being consumed by insects or reduced by solar desiccation.

Surgical incisions in the skin are explained as:

* Tears in the skin created when it is stretched by postmortem bloat and/or as dehydration causes the animal’s hide to shrink and split, often in linear cuts.
* Incisions caused by scavengers or predators, possibly exacerbated by the above.

The hypothesis that natural phenomena account for most mutilation characteristics has been validated by a number of experiments, including one cited by long-time scientific skeptic Robert T. Carroll, conducted by Washington County (Arkansas) Sheriff's Department. In the experiment, the body of a recently deceased cow was left in a field and observed for 48 hours. During the 48 hours, postmortem bloating was reported to have caused incision-like tears in the cow's skin that matched the “surgical” cuts reported on mutilated cows, while the action of blowflies and maggots reportedly matched the soft tissue damage observed on mutilated cows. No explanation was made however, for the entire absence of any blood.

Experiments have also been conducted to compare the different reactions of surgically cut hide/flesh and predated hide/flesh to natural exposure. They demonstrated pronounced differences between surgical cut and non-surgical cuts over time. This article does not address tearing due to bloating.

Some ranchers have disputed the more scientifically mainstream “natural causes hypothesis” on the grounds that the mutilated animals often fall outside of the normal categories of natural deaths by predation or disease. One reason cited is that the animals were healthy and showed no sign of disease prior to death and were large and strong enough not to be a likely target for a predator. In some cases, ranchers have reported that the mutilated cattle were among the healthiest and strongest animals in their herd.

Other critics of the accepted position include investigators involved in paranormal and UFO research organizations, such as National Institute for Discovery Science which report the discovery of anomalies in necropsies which, they claim, cannot be explained by natural processes.

Human intervention

Animal cruelty and human activity

It is alternatively hypothesized that cattle mutilations are the result of two unrelated deviant phenomena. The bulk of mutilations are the result of predation and other natural processes, and those with anomalies that cannot be explained in this way are the work of humans who derive pleasure or sexual stimulation from mutilating animals.

Attacks against animals are a recognized phenomenon. There have been many recorded cases around the world, and many convictions. Typically, the victims of such attacks are cats, dogs, and other family pets, and the actions of humans are usually limited to acts of cruelty such as striking, burning, or beating animals. However, attacks have also been recorded against larger animals, including sheep, cows, and horses. Humans, particularly those with sociopathic disorders, have been found to have mutilated animals in elaborate ways using knives or surgical instruments.

On April 20, 1979, Dr. C Hibbs of the New Mexico State Veterinary diagnostics Laboratory spoke before a hearing chaired by Senator Harrison Schmitt. Dr. Hibbs testified that mutilation fell into three categories, one of which was animals mutilated by humans (page 25). FBI records did not record the percentage of mutilated animals that fell into this category. The standard criminal charge for mutilating an animal, including cattle, is animal cruelty.

Cults

Closely related to the deviant hypothesis is the hypothesis that cattle mutilations are the result of cult activity. However, contrary to the deviancy hypothesis, which holds that cattle are mutilated at random by individual deviants, the cult hypothesis holds that cattle mutilations are coordinated acts of ritual sacrifice carried out by organized groups.

Beliefs held by proponents of the cult hypothesis vary, but may include:

* That the apparent absence of blood at mutilation sites may indicate cult members harvest it.
* That organs have been removed from cattle for use in rituals.
* That unborn calves have been harvested from mutilated cattle.
* The hypothesis that cults were responsible for cattle mutilation was developed in the U.S. during the 1970s and 1980s, a time of growing national concern over cults (such as the Peoples Temple and Jonestown) and ritual satanic abuse “Satanic panic”.

In 1975, the US Treasury Department assigned Donald Flickinger to investigate the existence of connections between cults and the mutilation of cattle. The operation came under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

Flickinger recorded a number of “unusual” incidents and circumstantial evidence but was unable to find sufficient evidence of cult involvement for the ATF to take further action. Media reports of the time reported his investigation was dropped when it was determined cattle deaths were not a prelude to a coordinated campaign against elected officials by cult members.

However, there were various reports during the time of menacing groups prowling around mutilation sites. In September 1975, a forestry service employee in Blaine County, Idaho, reported seeing a group of people in black hooded robes. Several cattle were found mutilated in the area the following day. On October 9, 1975, a motorist on U.S Highway 95 in northern Idaho, in an area of frequent cattle mutilation, reported to police that some 15 masked individuals formed a roadblock with linked arms, forcing him to turn around.

Public interest in the cult hypothesis waned during the 1980s, but interest was maintained by proponents such as the Colorado based television evangelist Bob Larson, who campaigned to raise public awareness of links between cattle mutilations and cult activity through his ministry and radio shows.

Another proponent of the cult hypothesis is Montana author Roberta Donovan. In her 1976 publication *Mystery Stalks the Prairie* she documents the experiences of Deputy Sheriff Keith Wolverton of Great Falls, Cascade County, investigating cattle mutilations with suspected cult involvement. Since the beginning of the cult hypothesis, law enforcement agents in several states and provinces, including Alberta, Idaho, Montana, and Iowa have reported evidence implicating cults in several instances of cattle mutilations.

During their investigations, the FBI and the ATF were unable to find appropriate evidence, including signs of consistency between mutilations, to substantiate that the animals had been the victims of any form of ritual sacrifice or organized mutilation effort. They were also unable to determine how or why a cult would perform procedures that would result in the anomalies reported in some necropsies, or to verify that the anomalies were 1) connected to the mutilations themselves 2) the result of human intervention.

In most cases, mutilations were either ruled due to natural causes, or the cattle were too far decayed for any useful conclusions to be drawn. Some cases of cult hysteria were traced back to fabrication by individuals unrelated to the incident. In one case it was concluded that claims had been falsified by a convict seeking favorable terms on his sentence in exchange for information. In another case, claims were traced back to local high school students who had circulated rumors as a joke.

Government or military experimentation

In his 1997 article “Dead Cows I've Known”, cattle mutilation researcher Charles T. Oliphant speculates cattle mutilation to be the result of covert research into emerging cattle diseases, and the possibility they could be transmitted to humans.

Oliphant posits the NIH, CDC, or other federally funded bodies, may be involved, and they are supported by the US military. Part of his hypothesis is based on allegations that human pharmaceuticals have been found in mutilated cattle, and on the necropsies that show cattle mutilations commonly involve areas of the animal that relate to “input, output and reproduction”. To support his hypothesis, Oliphant cites the Reston ebolavirus case in which plain clothes military officers, traveling in unmarked vehicles, entered a research facility in Reston, Virginia, to secretly retrieve and destroy animals that were contaminated with a highly infectious disease.

Additionally, a 2002 NIDS report relates the eyewitness testimony of two Cache County, Utah, police officers. The area had seen many unusual cattle deaths, and ranchers had organized armed patrols to surveil the unmarked aircraft which they claimed were associated with the livestock deaths. The police witnesses claim to have encountered several men in an unmarked U.S. Army helicopter in 1976 at a small community airport in Cache County. The witnesses asserted that after this heated encounter, cattle mutilations in the region ceased for about five years.

Biochemist Colm Kelleher, who has investigated several purported mutilations first-hand, argues that the mutilations are most likely a clandestine U.S. Government effort to track the spread of Bovine spongiform encephalopathy “Mad Cow Disease” and related diseases, such as scrapie.

Theories of government involvement in cattle mutilation have been further fueled by “black helicopter” sightings near mutilation sites. On April 8, 1979, three police officers in Dulce, New Mexico, reported a mysterious aircraft which resembled a U.S. military helicopter hovering around a site following a wave of mutilation which claimed 16 cows. On July 15, 1974, two unregistered helicopters, a white helicopter and a black twin-engine aircraft, opened fire on Robert Smith Jr. while he was driving his tractor on his farm in Honey Creek, Iowa. This attack followed a rash of mutilations in the area and across the nearby border in Nebraska. The reports of “helicopter” involvement have been used to explain why some cattle appear to have been “dropped” from considerable heights.

Other explanations

Aliens and UFOs

In 1974, a few months after the first spate of alleged mutilations in the US, multiple farmers in Nebraska claimed to witness UFOs on the nights their cattle were harmed. One claimed he saw an object which “looked as if it had a little bluish-green light on each side with a glow surrounding it.” The sightings were hailed by UFO researchers as the first physical evidence of extraterrestrial life.

Government Interference

At the same time that UFO reports were being filed with law enforcement and larger number of ranchers claimed to see black helicopters around their fields, coinciding with the cattle mutilations. Although some initially thought these were used by cattle rustlers, suspicion soon pointed toward a military operation running out of Fort Riley, Kansas. Reporter Dane Edwards spread the theory that the government was testing cattle parts to develop biological weapons to use in Vietnam, going so far as to write to Floyd K. Haskell during his investigation to accuse agents of threatening him into silence. Vigilante groups were formed.