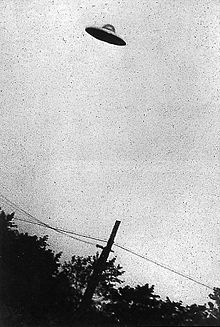
Unidentified Flying Object

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*For other uses, see*[*Unidentified flying object (disambiguation)*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unidentified_flying_object_(disambiguation))*.*

*"UFO" redirects here. For other uses, see*[*UFO (disambiguation)*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UFO_(disambiguation))*.*

*"UFO" redirects here. For the genus of gall-wasps, see*[*UFO (genus)*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ufo_(genus))*.*



Photograph of a purported UFO in Passaic, taken on July 31, 1952.

**Unidentified flying object** (**UFO**) is the popular term for any aerial phenomenon that cannot immediately be identified. Most UFOs are [identified](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identification_studies_of_UFOs) on investigation as conventional objects or phenomena. The term is widely used for claimed observations of [extraterrestrial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extraterrestrial_life) spacecraft.

Terminology

The term "UFO" (or "UFOB") was coined in 1953 by the [United States Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force) (USAF) to serve as a catch-all for all such reports. In its initial definition, the USAF stated that a "UFOB" was "any airborne object which by performance, aerodynamic characteristics, or unusual features, does not conform to any presently known aircraft or missile type, or which cannot be positively identified as a familiar object." Accordingly, the term was initially restricted to that fraction of cases which remained unidentified after investigation, as the USAF was interested in potential [national security](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_security) reasons and "technical aspects" (see [Air Force Regulation 200-2](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Air_Force_Regulation_200-2,_Unidentified_Flying_Objects_Reporting)).

During the late 1940s and through the 1950s, UFOs were often referred to popularly as "[flying saucers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flying_saucer)" or "flying discs". The term UFO became more widespread during the 1950s, at first in technical literature, but later in popular use. UFOs garnered considerable interest during the [Cold War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War), an era associated with a heightened concern for national security, and, more recently, in the 2010s, for unexplained reasons. Nevertheless, various studies have concluded that the phenomenon does not represent a threat to national security, nor does it contain anything worthy of scientific pursuit (e.g., 1951 [Flying Saucer Working Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flying_Saucer_Working_Party), 1953[CIA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Intelligence_Agency) [Robertson Panel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robertson_Panel), USAF [Project Blue Book](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Blue_Book), [Condon Committee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Condon_Committee)).

The [Oxford English Dictionary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxford_English_Dictionary) defines a UFO as "An unidentified flying object; a 'flying saucer'." The first published book to use the word was authored by [Donald E. Keyhoe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Keyhoe).

As an acronym, "UFO" was coined by Captain [Edward J. Ruppelt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_J._Ruppelt), who headed Project Blue Book, then the USAF's official investigation of UFOs. He wrote, "Obviously the term 'flying saucer' is misleading when applied to objects of every conceivable shape and performance. For this reason the military prefers the more general, if less colorful, name: unidentified flying objects. UFO (pronounced Yoo-foe) for short." Other phrases that were used officially and that predate the UFO acronym include "flying flapjack", "flying disc", "unexplained flying discs", and "unidentifiable object".

The phrase "flying saucer" had gained widespread attention after the summer of 1947. On June 24, a civilian pilot named [Kenneth Arnold](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_Arnold) reported seeing nine objects flying in formation near [Mount Rainier](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Rainier). Arnold timed the sighting and estimated the speed of discs to be over 1,200 mph (1,931 km/h). At the time, he claimed he described the objects flying in a saucer-like fashion, leading to newspaper accounts of "flying saucers" and "flying discs". UFOs were commonly referred to colloquially, as a "Bogey" by military personal and pilots during the cold war. The term "bogey" was originally used to report anomalies in radar blips, to indicate possible hostile forces that might be roaming in the area.

In popular usage, the term UFO came to be used to refer to claims of alien [spacecraft](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spacecraft), and because of the public and media ridicule associated with the topic, some [Ufologists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ufology) and investigators prefer to use terms such as "unidentified aerial phenomenon" (UAP) or "anomalous phenomena", as in the title of the National Aviation Reporting Center on Anomalous Phenomena (NARCAP). "Anomalous aerial vehicle" (AAV) or "unidentified aerial system" (UAS) are also sometimes used in a military aviation context to describe unidentified targets.

Studies

Studies have established that the majority of UFO observations are misidentified conventional objects or natural phenomena—most commonly aircraft, balloons including [sky lanterns](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sky_lantern), satellites, and astronomical objects such as [meteors](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meteoroid#Meteor), bright stars, and planets. A small percentage are [hoaxes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoax).[[note 1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unidentified_flying_object#cite_note-13) Fewer than 10% of reported sightings remain unexplained after proper investigation, and therefore can be classified as unidentified in the strictest sense. While proponents of the extraterrestrial (ETH) suggest that these unexplained reports are of alien spacecraft, the [null hypothesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Null_hypothesis) cannot be excluded that these reports are simply other more prosaic phenomena that cannot be identified due to lack of complete information or due to the necessary subjectivity of the reports. Instead of accepting the null hypothesis, UFO enthusiasts tend to engage in [special pleading](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_pleading) by offering outlandish, untested explanations for the validity of the ETH. These violate [Occam's razor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occam%27s_razor).

Almost no scientific papers about UFOs have been published in peer-reviewed journals. There was, in the past, some debate in the [scientific community](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_community) about whether any scientific investigation into UFO sightings is warranted with the general conclusion being that the phenomenon was not worthy of serious investigation except as a cultural artifact. UFOs have been the subject of investigations by various governments who have provided extensive records related to the subject. Many of the most involved government-sponsored investigations ended after agencies concluded that there was no benefit to continued investigation.

The void left by the lack of institutional or scientific study has given rise to independent researchers and fringe groups, including the [National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Investigations_Committee_on_Aerial_Phenomena) (NICAP) in the mid-20th century and, more recently, the [Mutual UFO Network](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutual_UFO_Network) (MUFON) and the [Center for UFO Studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Center_for_UFO_Studies)(CUFOS). The term "[Ufology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ufology)" is used to describe the collective efforts of those who study reports and associated evidence of unidentified flying objects.

UFOs have become a prevalent theme in modern culture, and the social phenomena have been the subject of academic research in sociology and psychology.

Early history

Unexplained aerial observations have been reported throughout history. Some were undoubtedly astronomical in nature: [comets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comet), bright meteors, one or more of the five planets that can be readily seen with the naked eye, planetary conjunctions, or atmospheric [optical phenomena](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Optical_phenomenon) such as [parahelia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun_dog) and [lenticular clouds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenticular_cloud). An example is [Halley's Comet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halley%27s_Comet), which was recorded first by Chinese astronomers in 240 BC and possibly as early as 467 BC. Such sightings throughout history often were treated as [supernatural](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supernatural) portents, [angels](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angel), or other religious [omens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omen). Some current-day UFO researchers have noticed similarities between some religious symbols in medieval paintings and UFO reports though the canonical and symbolic character of such images is documented by art historians placing more conventional religious interpretations on such images.

* On [April 14, 1561](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1561_celestial_phenomenon_over_Nuremberg), residents of Nuremberg described the appearance of a large black triangular object. According to witnesses, there were also hundreds of spheres, cylinders and other odd-shaped objects that moved erratically overhead.
* On January 25, 1878, the [*Denison*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denison,_Texas)*Daily News* printed an article in which John Martin, a local farmer, had reported seeing a large, dark, circular object resembling a balloon flying "at wonderful speed." Martin, according to the newspaper account, said it appeared to be about the size of a saucer, one of the first uses of the word "saucer" in association with a UFO.
* In April 1897, thousands of people reported seeing "[airships](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mystery_airship)" in various parts of the United States. Many signed affidavits. Scores of people even reported talking to the pilots. [Thomas Edison](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Edison) was asked his opinion, and said, "You can take it from me that it is a pure fake."
* On February 28, 1904, there was a sighting by three crew members on the [USS *Supply*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Supply_(1873)) 300 miles (483 km) west of San Francisco, reported by Lieutenant [Frank Schofield](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Herman_Schofield), later to become [Commander-in-Chief](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commander-in-chief) of the Pacific [Battle Fleet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_Fleet). Schofield wrote of three bright red meteors - one egg shaped and the other two round - that approached beneath the cloud layer, then "soared" above the clouds, departing after two to three minutes. The largest had an apparent size of about six Suns, he said.
* The three earliest known pilot UFO sightings, of 1,305 similar sightings catalogued by NARCAP, took place in 1916 and 1926. On January 31, 1916, a UK pilot near [Rochford](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rochford) reported a row of lights, resembling lighted windows on a railway carriage, that rose and disappeared. In January 1926 a pilot reported six "flying manhole covers" between [Wichita, Kansas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wichita,_Kansas), and [Colorado Springs, Colorado](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colorado_Springs,_Colorado). In late September 1926 an airmail pilot over [Nevada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nevada) said he had been forced to land by a huge, wingless, cylindrical object.
* On August 5, 1926, while traveling in the [Humboldt Mountains](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kunlun_Mountains) of [Tibet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibet)'s [Kokonor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qinghai) region, Russian explorer [Nicholas Roerich](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_Roerich) reported, members of his expedition saw "something big and shiny reflecting the sun, like a huge oval moving at great speed. Crossing our camp the thing changed in its direction from south to southwest. And we saw how it disappeared in the intense blue sky. We even had time to take our field glasses and saw quite distinctly an oval form with shiny surface, one side of which was brilliant from the sun." Another description by Roerich was of a "shiny body flying from north to south. Field glasses are at hand. It is a huge body. One side glows in the sun. It is oval in shape. Then it somehow turns in another direction and disappears in the southwest."
* In the Pacific and European theatres during [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), "[foo fighters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foo_fighter)" (metallic spheres, balls of light and other shapes that followed aircraft) were reported and on occasion photographed by Allied and Axis pilots. Some proposed Allied explanations at the time included [St. Elmo's fire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Elmo%27s_fire), the planet [Venus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus), hallucinations from oxygen deprivation, or German secret weapons.
* In 1946, more than 2,000 reports were collected, primarily by the Swedish military, of unidentified aerial objects over the Scandinavian nations, along with isolated reports from France, Portugal, Italy and Greece. The objects were referred to as "Russian hail" and later as "[ghost rockets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghost_rockets)" because it was thought that the mysterious objects were possibly Russian tests of captured German [V1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V-1_flying_bomb) or [V2](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V-2_rocket) [rockets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rocket). Although most were thought to be such natural phenomena as meteors, more than 200 were tracked on radar by the Swedish military and deemed to be "real physical objects." In a 1948 [top secret](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classified_information) document, Swedish authorities advised the USAF Europe that some of their investigators believed these craft to be extraterrestrial in origin.

Investigations

UFOs have been subject to investigations over the years that varied widely in scope and scientific rigor. Governments or independent academics in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Japan, Peru, France, Belgium, Sweden, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Mexico, Spain, and the [Soviet Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union) are known to have investigated UFO reports at various times.

Among the best known government studies are the ghost rockets investigation by the Swedish military (1946–1947), Project Blue Book, previously [Project Sign](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Sign) and Project, conducted by the USAF from 1947 until 1969, the secret U.S. Army/Air Force [Project Twinkle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_fireballs#Project_Twinkle) investigation into [green fireballs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_fireballs) (1948–1951), the secret USAF Project Blue Book Special Report No. 14 by the [Battelle Memorial Institute](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battelle_Memorial_Institute), and the [Brazilian Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_Air_Force)'s 1977 [*Operação Prato*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opera%C3%A7%C3%A3o_Prato) (Operation Saucer). France has had an ongoing investigation (GEPAN/SEPRA/[GEIPAN](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GEIPAN)) within its space agency [Centre national d'études spatiales](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CNES) (CNES) since 1977; the [government of Uruguay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Uruguay) has had a similar investigation since 1989.

**Project Sign**

*Main article:*[*Project Sign*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Sign)

Project Sign in 1948 produced a highly classified finding (see [Estimate of the Situation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estimate_of_the_Situation)) that the best UFO reports probably had an extraterrestrial explanation. A top secret Swedish military opinion given to the USAF in 1948 stated that some of their analysts believed that the 1946 ghost rockets and later flying saucers had extraterrestrial origins. (For document, see [Ghost rockets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghost_rockets#Swedish_military_opinion).) In 1954 German rocket scientist [Hermann Oberth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermann_Oberth) revealed that an internal [West German](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Germany) government investigation, which he headed, had arrived at an extraterrestrial conclusion, but this study was never made public.

**Project Grudge**

*Main article:*[*Project Grudge*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Grudge)

Project Sign was dismantled and became Project Grudge at the end of 1948. Angered by the low quality of investigations by Grudge, the Air Force Director of Intelligence reorganized it as Project Blue Book in late 1951, placing Ruppelt in charge. Blue Book closed down in 1970, using the Condon Committee's negative conclusion as a rationale, thus ending official Air Force UFO investigations. However, a 1969 USAF document, known as the Bolender memo, along with later government documents, revealed that non-public [U.S. government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_government_of_the_United_States) UFO investigations continued after 1970. The Bolender memo first stated that "reports of unidentified flying objects that could affect national security ... are not part of the Blue Book system," indicating that more serious UFO incidents already were handled outside the public Blue Book investigation. The memo then added, "reports of UFOs which could affect national security would continue to be handled through the standard Air Force procedures designed for this purpose."[[note 2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unidentified_flying_object#cite_note-44) In addition, in the late 1960s a chapter on UFOs in the Space Sciences course at the [U.S. Air Force Academy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force_Academy) gave serious consideration to possible extraterrestrial origins. When word of the curriculum became public, the Air Force in 1970 issued a statement to the effect that the book was outdated and that cadets instead were being informed of the [Condon Report](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Condon_Committee)'s negative conclusion.

**USAF Regulation 200-2**

[Air Force Regulation 200-2](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Air_Force_Regulation_200-2,_Unidentified_Flying_Objects_Reporting), issued in 1953 and 1954, defined an Unidentified Flying Object ("UFOB") as "any airborne object which by performance, aerodynamic characteristics, or unusual features, does not conform to any presently known aircraft or missile type, or which cannot be positively identified as a familiar object." The regulation also said UFOBs were to be investigated as a "possible threat to the security of the United States" and "to determine technical aspects involved." The regulation went on to say that "it is permissible to inform news media representatives on UFOB's when the object is positively identified as a familiar object," but added: "For those objects which are not explainable, only the fact that ATIC [Air Technical Intelligence Center] will analyze the data is worthy of release, due to many unknowns involved."

**Project Blue Book**

*Main article:*[*Project Blue Book*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Blue_Book)



Allen Hynek (left) and [Jacques Vallée](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Vall%C3%A9e)

[J. Allen Hynek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._Allen_Hynek), a trained astronomer who served as a scientific advisor for Project Blue Book, was initially skeptical of UFO reports, but eventually came to the conclusion that many of them could not be satisfactorily explained and was highly critical of what he described as "the cavalier disregard by Project Blue Book of the principles of scientific investigation." Leaving government work, he founded the privately funded CUFOS, to whose work he devoted the rest of his life. Other private groups studying the phenomenon include the MUFON, a grass roots organization whose investigator's handbooks go into great detail on the documentation of alleged UFO sightings.

Like Hynek, [Jacques Vallée](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Vall%C3%A9e), a scientist and prominent UFO researcher, has pointed to what he believes is the scientific deficiency of most UFO research, including government studies. He complains of the mythology and cultism often associated with the phenomenon, but alleges that several hundred professional scientists—a group both he and Hynek have termed "the invisible college"—continue to study UFOs in private.

**Scientific studies**

The study of UFOs has received little support in mainstream scientific literature. Official studies ended in the U.S. in December 1969, following the statement by the government scientist [Edward Condon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Condon) that further study of UFOs could not be justified on grounds of scientific advancement. The Condon Report and its conclusions were endorsed by the National Academy of Scientists, of which Condon was a member. On the other hand, a scientific review by the UFO subcommittee of the [American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Institute_of_Aeronautics_and_Astronautics) (AIAA) disagreed with Condon's conclusion, noting that at least 30 percent of the cases studied remained unexplained and that scientific benefit might be gained by continued study.

Critics argue that all UFO evidence is anecdotal and can be explained as prosaic natural phenomena. Defenders of UFO research counter that knowledge of observational data, other than what is reported in the popular media, is limited in the scientific community and that further study is needed.

No official government investigation has ever publicly concluded that UFOs are indisputably real, physical objects, extraterrestrial in origin, or of concern to national defense. These same negative conclusions also have been found in studies that were highly classified for many years, such as the UK's [Flying Saucer Working Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flying_Saucer_Working_Party), [Project Condign](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Condign), the U.S. CIA-sponsored Robertson Panel, the U.S. military investigation into the green fireballs from 1948 to 1951, and the Battelle Memorial Institute study for the USAF from 1952 to 1955 (Project Blue Book Special Report No. 14).

Some public government reports have acknowledged the possibility of physical reality of UFOs, but have stopped short of proposing extraterrestrial origins, though not dismissing the possibility entirely. Examples are the Belgian military investigation into [large triangles over their airspace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgian_UFO_wave) in 1989–1991 and the 2009 [Uruguayan Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uruguayan_Air_Force) study conclusion (see below).

Some private studies have been neutral in their conclusions, but argued that the inexplicable core cases call for continued scientific study. Examples are the Sturrock panel study of 1998 and the 1970 AIAA review of the Condon Report.

**United States**

U.S. investigations into UFOs include:

* According to UFO researcher [Timothy Good](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timothy_Good), he received a letter from the Army's director of counter-intelligence confirming the existence of the [Interplanetary Phenomenon Unit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interplanetary_Phenomenon_Unit). Good claims the letter shows that the IPU was established by the U.S. Army sometime in the 1940s and disestablished sometime during the late 1950s.
* Project Blue Book, previously Project Sign and Project Grudge, conducted by the USAF from 1947 until 1969
* The secret U.S. Army/Air Force Project Twinkle investigation into green fireballs (1948–1951)
* Ghost rockets investigations by the Swedish, UK, U.S., and Greek militaries (1946–1947)
* The secret CIA Office of Scientific Investigation (OS/I) study (1952–53)
* The secret CIA Robertson Panel (1953)
* The secret USAF [Project Blue Book Special Report No. 14](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identification_studies_of_UFOs#Project_Blue_Book_Special_Report_No._14) by the Battelle Memorial Institute (1951–1954)
* The [Brookings Report](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brookings_Report) (1960), commissioned by [NASA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NASA)
* The public Condon Committee (1966–1968)
* The private, internal [RAND Corporation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAND_Corporation) study (1968)
* The private Sturrock panel (1998)
* The secret [Advanced Aviation Threat Identification Program](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advanced_Aviation_Threat_Identification_Program) which was funded from 2007 to 2012.

Thousands of documents released under [FOIA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_Information_Act_(United_States)) also indicate that many U.S. intelligence agencies collected (and still collect) information on UFOs. These agencies include the [Defense Intelligence Agency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defense_Intelligence_Agency) (DIA), [FBI](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FBI), CIA, [National Security Agency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Security_Agency) (NSA), as well as military intelligence agencies of the Army and [U.S. Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Navy), in addition to the Air Force.[[note 3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unidentified_flying_object#cite_note-54)

The investigation of UFOs has also attracted many civilians, who in the U.S formed research groups such as NICAP (active 1956–1980), [Aerial Phenomena Research Organization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aerial_Phenomena_Research_Organization) (APRO) (active 1952–1988), MUFON (active 1969–), and CUFOS (active 1973–).

In November 2011, the [White House](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_House) released an official response to two petitions asking the U.S. government to acknowledge formally that aliens have visited this planet and to disclose any intentional withholding of government interactions with extraterrestrial beings. According to the response, "The U.S. government has no evidence that any life exists outside our planet, or that an extraterrestrial presence has contacted or engaged any member of the human race." Also, according to the response, there is "no credible information to suggest that any evidence is being hidden from the public's eye." The response further noted that efforts, like [SETI](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_for_extraterrestrial_intelligence) and NASA's [*Kepler*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kepler_(spacecraft)) space telescope and [Mars Science Laboratory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mars_Science_Laboratory), continue looking for [signs of life](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life). The response noted "odds are pretty high" that there may be life on other planets but "the odds of us making contact with any of them—especially any [intelligent ones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extraterrestrial_intelligence)—are extremely small, given the distances involved."

**Post-1947 sightings**

Following the large U.S. surge in sightings in June and early July 1947, on July 9, 1947, [United States Army Air Forces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army_Air_Forces) (USAAF) intelligence, in cooperation with the FBI, began a formal investigation into selected sightings with characteristics that could not be immediately rationalized, such as Kenneth Arnold's. The USAAF used "all of its top scientists" to determine whether "such a phenomenon could, in fact, occur." The research was "being conducted with the thought that the flying objects might be a celestial phenomenon," or that "they might be a foreign body mechanically devised and controlled." Three weeks later in a preliminary defense estimate, the air force investigation decided that, "This 'flying saucer' situation is not all imaginary or seeing too much in some natural phenomenon. Something is really flying around."

A further review by the intelligence and technical divisions of the [Air Materiel Command](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_Force_Logistics_Command) at [Wright Field](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wright-Patterson_Air_Force_Base) reached the same conclusion. It reported that "the phenomenon is something real and not visionary or fictitious," that there were objects in the shape of a disc, metallic in appearance, and as big as man-made aircraft. They were characterized by "extreme rates of climb [and] maneuverability," general lack of noise, absence of trail, occasional formation flying, and "evasive" behavior "when sighted or contacted by friendly aircraft and radar," suggesting a controlled craft. It was therefore recommended in late September 1947 that an official Air Force investigation be set up to investigate the phenomenon. It was also recommended that other government agencies should assist in the investigation.[[note 4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unidentified_flying_object#cite_note-59)

**Project Sign**

This led to the creation of the Air Force's Project Sign at the end of 1947, one of the earliest government studies to come to a secret extraterrestrial conclusion. In August 1948, Sign investigators wrote a [top-secret intelligence estimate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estimate_of_the_Situation) to that effect, but the [Air Force Chief of Staff](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_of_Staff_of_the_United_States_Air_Force) [Hoyt Vandenberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoyt_Vandenberg) ordered it destroyed. The existence of this suppressed report was revealed by several insiders who had read it, such as astronomer and USAF consultant J. Allen Hynek and Capt. Edward J. Ruppelt, the first head of the USAF's Project Blue Book.

Another highly classified U.S. study was conducted by the CIA's Office of Scientific Investigation (OS/I) in the latter half of 1952 in response to orders from the National (NSC). This study concluded UFOs were real physical objects of potential threat to national security. One OS/I memo to the CIA Director (DCI) in December read:

the reports of incidents convince us that there is something going on that must have immediate attention ... Sightings of unexplained objects at great altitudes and traveling at high speeds in the vicinity of major U.S. defense installations are of such a nature that they are not attributable to natural phenomena or any known types of aerial vehicles.

The matter was considered so urgent that OS/I drafted a memorandum from the DCI to the NSC proposing that the NSC establish an investigation of UFOs as a priority project throughout the intelligence and the defense research and development community. It also urged the DCI to establish an external research project of top-level scientists, now known as the Robertson Panel to analyze the problem of UFOs. The OS/I investigation was called off after the Robertson Panel's negative conclusions in January 1953.

**Condon Committee**

*Main article:*[*Condon Committee*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Condon_Committee)

A public research effort conducted by the Condon Committee for the USAF, which arrived at a negative conclusion in 1968, marked the end of the U.S. government's official investigation of UFOs, though various government intelligence agencies continue unofficially to investigate or monitor the situation.[[note 5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unidentified_flying_object#cite_note-62)

Controversy has surrounded the Condon Report, both before and after it was released. It has been observed that the report was "harshly criticized by numerous scientists, particularly at the powerful AIAA ... [which] recommended moderate, but continuous scientific work on UFOs." In an address to the [AAAS](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Academy_of_Arts_and_Sciences), [James E. McDonald](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_E._McDonald) stated that he believed science had failed to mount adequate studies of the problem and criticized the Condon Report and earlier studies by the USAF as scientifically deficient. He also questioned the basis for Condon's conclusions and argued that the reports of UFOs have been "laughed out of scientific court." J. Allen Hynek, an astronomer who worked as a USAF consultant from 1948, sharply criticized the Condon Committee Report and later wrote two nontechnical books that set forth the case for continuing to investigate UFO reports.

Ruppelt recounted his experiences with Project Blue Book, a USAF investigation that preceded Condon's.

**Notable US cases**

* The [Roswell UFO incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roswell_UFO_incident) (1947) involved [New Mexico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Mexico) civilians, local law enforcement officers, and the U.S. military, the latter of whom allegedly collected physical evidence from the UFO crash site.
* The [Mantell UFO incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantell_UFO_incident) January 7, 1948
* The [Betty and Barney Hill abduction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betty_and_Barney_Hill_abduction) (1961) was the first reported abduction incident.
* In the [Kecksburg UFO incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kecksburg_UFO_incident), Pennsylvania (1965), residents reported seeing a bell shaped object crash in the area. Police officers, and possibly military personnel, were sent to investigate.
* The [Travis Walton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Travis_Walton_(UFO_witness)) abduction case (1975): The movie [*Fire in the Sky*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fire_in_the_Sky) (1993) was based on this event, but greatly embellished the original account.
* The "[Phoenix Lights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenix_Lights)" March 13, 1997
* [2006 O'Hare International Airport UFO sighting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_O%27Hare_International_Airport_UFO_sighting)

Document on sighting of a UFO occurred on December 16, 1977, in the state of [Bahia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahia), [Brazil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazil).

**Brazil**

On October 31, 2008, the [National Archives of Brazil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_National_Archives) began receiving from the Aeronautical Documentation and History Center part of the documentation of the [Brazilian Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_Air_Force) regarding the investigation of the appearance of UFOs in [Brazil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazil). Currently this collection gathers cases between 1952 and 2016.

**Canada**

In Canada, the [Department of National Defense](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Department_of_National_Defence_(Canada)) has dealt with reports, sightings and investigations of UFOs across Canada. In addition to conducting investigations into [crop circles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crop_circle) in [Duhamel, Alberta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duhamel,_Alberta), it still considers "unsolved" the Falcon Lake incident in Manitoba and the [Shag Harbour UFO incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shag_Harbour_UFO_incident) in Nova Scotia.

Early Canadian studies included Project Magnet (1950–1954) and [Project Second Story](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Second_Storey) (1952–1954), supported by the [Defense Research Board](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defence_Research_and_Development_Canada).

**France**

On March 2007, the French space agency CNES published an archive of UFO sightings and other phenomena online.

French studies include GEPAN/SEPRA/[GEIPAN](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GEIPAN) (1977–), within [CNES](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CNES) (French space agency), the longest ongoing government-sponsored investigation. About 22% of 6000 cases studied remain unexplained. The official opinion of GEPAN/SEPRA/GEIPAN has been neutral, stating on their [FAQ](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FAQ) page that their mission is fact-finding for the scientific community, not rendering an opinion. They add they can neither prove nor disprove the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis (ETH), but their Steering Committee's clear position is that they cannot discard the possibility that some fraction of the very strange 22% of unexplained cases might be due to distant and advanced civilizations. Possibly their bias may be indicated by their use of the terms "PAN" (French) or "UAP" (English equivalent) for "Unidentified *Aerospace* Phenomenon" (whereas "UAP" as normally used by English organizations stands for "Unidentified *Aerial* Phenomenon", a more neutral term). In addition, the three heads of the studies have gone on record in stating that UFOs were real physical flying machines beyond our knowledge or that the best explanation for the most inexplicable cases was an extraterrestrial one.

In 2008, Michel Scheller, president of the [Association Aéronautique et Astronautique de France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Association_A%C3%A9ronautique_et_Astronautique_de_France) (3AF), created the Sigma Commission. Its purpose was to investigate UFO phenomenon worldwide. A progress report published in May 2010 stated that the central hypothesis proposed by the [COMETA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ufology#COMETA_Report_(France,_1999)) report is perfectly credible. In December 2012, the final report of the Sigma Commission was submitted to Scheller. Following the submission of the final report, the Sigma2 Commission is to be formed with a mandate to continue the scientific investigation of UFO phenomenon.

The most notable cases of UFO sightings in France include the [Valensole UFO incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valensole_UFO_incident) in 1965, and the [Trans-en-Provence Case](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans-en-Provence_Case) in 1981.

**Italy**



Italian Ufologist Roberto Pinotti ([it](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roberto_Pinotti)) with astrophysicist Josef in 1981.

According to some Italian Ufologists, the first documented case of a [UFO sighting in Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UFO_sightings_in_Italy) dates back to April 11, 1933, to [Varese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Varese). Documents of the time show that an alleged UFO crashed or landed near [Vergiate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vergiate). Following this, [Benito Mussolini](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benito_Mussolini) created a secret group to look at it, called Cabinet RS/33.

Alleged UFO sightings gradually increased since the war, peaking in 1978 and 2005. The total number of sightings since 1947 are 18,500, of which 90% are identifiable.

In 2000, Italian Ufologist [Roberto Pinotti](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Roberto_Pinotti&action=edit&redlink=1) published material regarding the so-called "Fascist UFO Files", which dealt with a flying saucer that had crashed near [Milan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milan) in 1933 (some 14 years before the [Roswell, New Mexico, crash](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roswell_UFO_incident)), and of the subsequent investigation by a never mentioned before Cabinet RS/33, that allegedly was authorized by Benito Mussolini, and headed by the [Nobel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobel_Prize) scientist [Guglielmo Marconi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guglielmo_Marconi). A spaceship was allegedly stored in the hangars of the SIAI Marchetti in Vergiate near [Milan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milan).

[Julius Obsequens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Obsequens) was a [Roman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Rome) writer who is believed to have lived in the middle of the fourth century AD. The only work associated with his name is the *Liber de prodigiis* (Book of Prodigies), completely extracted from an epitome, or abridgment, written by [Livy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livy); *De prodigiis* was constructed as an account of the wonders and portents that occurred in [Rome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rome) between 249 BC-12 BC. An aspect of Obsequens' work that has inspired much interest in some circles is that references are made to things moving through the sky. These have been interpreted as reports of UFOs, but may just as well describe meteors, and, since Obsequens, probably, writes in the 4th century, that is, some 400 years after the events he describes, they hardly qualify as eye-witness accounts.

**Notable cases**

* A UFO sighting in [Florence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence), October 28, 1954, followed by a fall of [angel hair](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angel_hair_(folklore)).
* In 1973, an [Alitalia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alitalia-Linee_Aeree_Italiane) airplane left [Rome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rome) for [Naples](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naples) sighted a mysterious round object. Two [Italian Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Air_Force) planes from [Ciampino](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ciampino) confirmed the sighting. In the same year there was another sighting at Caselle airport near [Turin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turin).
* In 1978, two young hikers, while walking on [Monte Musinè](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monte_Musin%C3%A8) near [Turin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turin), saw a bright light; one of them temporarily disappeared and, after a while, was found in a state of shock and with a noticeable [scald](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scalding) on one leg. After regaining consciousness, he reported having seen an elongated vehicle and that some strangely shaped beings descended from it. Both the young hikers suffered from [conjunctivitis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conjunctivitis) for some time.
* A [close encounter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Close_encounter) reported in September 1978 in [Torrita di Siena](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torrita_di_Siena) in the [Province of Siena](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Siena). A young motorist saw in front of him a bright object, two beings of small stature who wore suits and helmets, the two approached the car, and after watching it carefully went back and rose again to the UFO. A boy who lived with his family in a country house not far from there said he had seen at the same time "a kind of small reddish sun".
* Yet in 1978, there has been also the story of Pier Fortunato Zanfretta, the best known and most controversial case of an Italian alleged [alien abduction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alien_abduction). Zanfretta said (also with [truth serum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_serum) injected) to have been kidnapped by reptilian-like creatures on the night of 6 December and 7 December while he was performing his job at [Marzano](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marzano), in the municipality of [Torriglia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torriglia) in the [Province of Genoa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Genoa); 52 testimonies of the case from other people were collected.

**United Kingdom**

The UK's [Flying Saucer Working Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flying_Saucer_Working_Party) published its final report in June 1951, which remained secret for over 50 years. The Working Party concluded that all UFO sightings could be explained as misidentifications of ordinary objects or phenomena, optical illusions, psychological misperceptions/aberrations, or hoaxes. The report stated: "We accordingly recommend very strongly that no further investigation of reported mysterious aerial phenomena be undertaken, unless and until some material evidence becomes available."

Eight file collections on UFO sightings, dating from 1978 to 1987, were first released on May 14, 2008, to [The National Archives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_National_Archives_(United_Kingdom)) by the [Ministry of Defense](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Defence_(United_Kingdom)) (MoD).Although kept secret from the public for many years, most of the files have low levels of classification and none are classified Top Secret. 200 files are set to be made public by 2012. The files are correspondence from the public sent to the British government and officials, such as the MoD and [Margaret Thatcher](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Thatcher). The MoD released the files under the [Freedom of Information Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_information_in_the_United_Kingdom) due to requests from researchers. These files include, but are not limited to, UFOs over [Liverpool](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liverpool) and the [Waterloo Bridge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterloo_Bridge) in London.

On October 20, 2008, more UFO files were released. One case released detailed that in 1991 an Alitalia passenger aircraft was approaching [London Heathrow Airport](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Heathrow_Airport) when the pilots saw what they described as a "[cruise missile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cruise_missile)" fly extremely close to the cockpit. The pilots believed that a collision was imminent. UFO expert David Clarke says that this is one of the most convincing cases for a UFO he has come across.

A secret study of UFOs was undertaken for the Ministry of Defense between 1996 and 2000 and was code-named Project Condign. The resulting report, titled "Unidentified Aerial Phenomena in the UK Defense Region", was publicly released in 2006, but the identity and credentials of whomever constituted Project Condign remains classified. The report confirmed earlier findings that the main causes of UFO sightings are misidentification of man-made and natural objects. The report noted: "No artefacts of unknown or unexplained origin have been reported or handed to the UK authorities, despite thousands of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena reports. There are no [SIGINT](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Signals_intelligence), [ELINT](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Signals_intelligence) or radiation measurements and little useful video or still [IMINT](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imagery_intelligence)." It concluded: "There is no evidence that any UAP, seen in the UKADR [UK Air Defense Region], are incursions by air-objects of any intelligent (extraterrestrial or foreign) origin, or that they represent any hostile intent." A little-discussed conclusion of the report was that novel meteorological plasma phenomenon akin to [ball lightning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ball_lightning) are responsible for "the majority, if not all" of otherwise inexplicable sightings, especially reports of [black triangle UFOs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_triangle_(UFO)).

On December 1, 2009, the Ministry of Defense quietly closed down its UFO investigations unit. The unit's hotline and email address were suspended by the MoD on that date. The MoD said there was no value in continuing to receive and investigate sightings in a release, stating

in over fifty years, no UFO report has revealed any evidence of a potential threat to the United Kingdom. The MoD has no specific capability for identifying the nature of such sightings. There is no Defense benefit in such investigation and it would be an inappropriate use of defense resources. Furthermore, responding to reported UFO sightings diverts MoD resources from tasks that are relevant to Defense."

[*The Guardian*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Guardian) reported that the MoD claimed the closure would save the Ministry around £50,000 a year. The MoD said that it would continue to release UFO files to the public through The National Archives.

**Notable cases**

According to records released on August 5, 2010, British wartime prime minister [Winston Churchill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill) banned the reporting for 50 years of an alleged UFO incident because of fears it could create mass panic. Reports given to Churchill asserted that the incident involved a [Royal Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Air_Force) (RAF) reconnaissance aircraft returning from a mission in France or Germany toward the end of [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II). It was over or near the English coastline when it was allegedly intercepted by a strange metallic object that matched the aircraft's course and speed for a time before accelerating away and disappearing. The aircraft's crew were reported to have photographed the object, which they said had "hovered noiselessly" near the aircraft, before moving off. According to the documents, details of the coverup emerged when a man wrote to the government in 1999 seeking to find out more about the incident and described how his grandfather, who had served with the RAF in the war, was present when Churchill and U.S. General [Dwight D. Eisenhower](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dwight_D._Eisenhower) discussed how to deal with the UFO encounter. The files come from more than 5,000 pages of UFO reports, letters and drawings from members of the public, as well as questions raised in Parliament. They are available to download from The National Archives website.

In the April 1957 [West Freugh incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAF_West_Freugh#West_Freugh_incident) in Scotland, named after the principal military base involved, two unidentified objects flying high over the UK were tracked by radar operators. The objects were reported to operate at speeds and perform maneuvers beyond the capability of any known craft. Also significant is their alleged size, which – based on the radar returns – was closer to that of a ship than an aircraft.

In the [Rendlesham Forest incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rendlesham_Forest_incident) of December 1980, U.S. military personnel witnessed UFOs near the air base at Woodbridge, Suffolk, over a period of three nights. On one night the deputy base commander, Colonel [Charles I. Halt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_I._Halt), and other personnel followed one or more UFOs that were moving in and above the forest for several hours. Col. Halt made an audio recording while this was happening and subsequently wrote an official memorandum summarizing the incident. After retirement from the military, he said that he had deliberately downplayed the event (officially termed 'Unexplained Lights') to avoid damaging his career. Other base personnel are said to have observed one of the UFOs, which had landed in the forest, and even gone up to and touched it.

**Uruguay**

The [Uruguayan Air Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uruguayan_Air_Force) has conducted UFO investigations since 1989 and reportedly analyzed 2,100 cases of which they regard approximately 2% as lacking explanation.

**Astronomer reports**

The USAF's Project Blue Book files indicate that approximately 1% of all unknown reports came from amateur and professional astronomers or other users of telescopes (such as missile trackers or surveyors). In 1952, astronomer J. Allen Hynek, then a consultant to Blue Book, conducted a small survey of 45 fellow professional astronomers. Five reported UFO sightings (about 11%). In the 1970s, astrophysicist [Peter A. Sturrock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_A._Sturrock) conducted two large surveys of the AIAA and American (AAS). About 5% of the members polled indicated that they had had UFO sightings.

Astronomer [Clyde Tombaugh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clyde_Tombaugh), who admitted to six UFO sightings, including three green fireballs, supported the Extraterrestrial hypothesis for UFOs and stated he thought scientists who dismissed it without study were being "unscientific." Another astronomer was [Lincoln LaPaz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lincoln_LaPaz), who had headed the Air Force's investigation into the green fireballs and other UFO phenomena in New Mexico. LaPaz reported two personal sightings, one of a green fireball, the other of an anomalous disc-like object. (Both Tombaugh and LaPaz were part of Hynek's 1952 survey.) Hynek himself took two photos through the window of a commercial airliner of a disc-like object that seemed to pace his aircraft.

In 1980, a survey of 1800 members of various amateur astronomer associations by Gert Helb and Hynek for CUFOS found that 24% responded "yes" to the question "Have you ever observed an object which resisted your most exhaustive efforts at identification?"

Claims of increase in reports

In 2011, MUFON reported that UFO sightings referred to their offices had increased by 67% over the past three years as of June, 2011. According to MUFON international director Clifford Clift, "Over the past year, we've been averaging 500 sighting reports a month, compared to about 300 three years ago [67 percent]."

According to the annual survey of reports conducted by Canadian-based UFO research group Ufology Research, reported UFO sightings doubled in Canada between 2011 and 2012.

In 2013 the Peruvian government's Departamento de Investigación de Fenómenos Aéreos Anómalos (Anomalous Aerial Phenomena Research Department), or "DIFAA", was officially reactivated due to an increase in reported sightings. According to Colonel Julio Vucetich, head of the air force's aerospace interests division (who himself claims to have seen an "anomalous aerial object"), "On a personal basis, it's evident to me that we are not alone in this world or universe."

In contrast, according to the UK-based [Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Association_for_the_Scientific_Study_of_Anomalous_Phenomena) (ASSAP), reports of sightings in Britain to their office had declined by 96% from 1988 to 2012.

Identification of UFOs

*Main article:*[*Identification studies of UFOs*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identification_studies_of_UFOs)



[Fata Morgana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fata_Morgana_(mirage)), a type of mirage in which objects located *below* the astronomical [horizon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horizon) appear to be hovering in the sky just above the horizon, may be responsible for some UFO sightings. (Here, the shape floating above the horizon is the reflected image of a boat.) Fata Morgana can also distort the appearance of distant objects, sometimes making them unrecognizable.



[Lenticular clouds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenticular_cloud) have in some cases been reported as UFOs due to their peculiar shape

Studies show that after careful investigation, the majority of UFOs can be identified as ordinary objects or phenomena. The most commonly found identified sources of UFO reports are:

* Astronomical objects (bright stars, planets, meteors, re-entering man-made [spacecraft](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spacecraft), [artificial satellites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satellite), and the [Moon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moon))
* Aircraft ([aerial advertising](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aerial_advertising) and other aircraft, [missile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missile) [launches](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rocket_launch))
* Balloons ([toy balloons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balloon#Decoration_or_entertainment), [weather balloons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weather_balloon), large [research balloons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Research_balloon))
* Other atmospheric objects and phenomena (birds, unusual clouds, [kites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kite), [flares](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flare))
* Light phenomena [mirages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirage), [Fata Morgana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fata_Morgana_(mirage)), [ball lightning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ball_lightning), [moon dogs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moon_dog), [searchlights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Searchlight) and other ground lights, etc.
* Hoaxes

A 1952–1955 [study](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Blue_Book_Special_Report_No._14) by the Battelle Memorial Institute for the USAF included these categories as well as a "psychological" one.

An individual 1979 study by CUFOS researcher [Allan Hendry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allan_Hendry) found, as did other investigations, that only a small percentage of cases he investigated were hoaxes (<1 %) and that most sightings were actually honest misidentifications of prosaic phenomena. Hendry attributed most of these to inexperience or misperception.

Claims by military, government, and aviation personnel

Since 2001 there have been calls for greater openness on the part of the government by various persons. In May 2001, a press conference was held at the [National Press Club](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Press_Club_(United_States)) in [Washington, D.C.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington,_D.C.), by an organization called the [Disclosure Project](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven_M._Greer), featuring twenty persons including retired Air Force and FAA personnel, intelligence officers and an air traffic controller. They all gave a brief account of what they knew or had witnessed, and stated that they would be willing to testify to what they had said under oath to a Congressional committee. According to a 2002 report in the Oregon, Disclosure Project founder [Steven M. Greer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven_M._Greer) has gathered 120 hours of testimony from various government officials on the topic of UFOs, including astronaut [Gordon Cooper](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_Cooper) and a Brigadier General.

In 2007, former [Arizona](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arizona) governor [Fife Symington](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fife_Symington) came forward and belatedly claimed that he had seen "a massive, delta-shaped craft silently navigate over Squaw Peak, a mountain range in Phoenix, Arizona" in 1997.

On September 27, 2010, a group of six former USAF officers and one former enlisted Air Force man held a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on the theme "U.S. Nuclear Weapons Have Been Compromised by Unidentified Aerial Objects." They told how they had witnessed UFOs hovering near missile sites and even disarming the missiles.

From April 29 to May 3, 2013, the Paradigm Research Group held the "Citizen Hearing on Disclosure" at the National Press Club. The group paid former U.S. Senator [Mike Gravel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Gravel) and former Representatives [Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carolyn_Cheeks_Kilpatrick), [Roscoe Bartlett](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roscoe_Bartlett), [Merrill Cook](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merrill_Cook), [Darlene Hooley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darlene_Hooley), and [Lynn Woolsey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lynn_Woolsey) $20,000 each to hear testimony from a panel of researchers which included witnesses from military, agency, and political backgrounds.

Apollo 14 astronaut Dr [Edgar Mitchell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Mitchell) claimed that he knew of senior government employees who had been involved in "close encounters" and because of this he has no doubt that aliens have visited Earth.

In May 2019, *The New York Times* reported that American Navy fighter jets had several encounters with unexplained objects while conducting exercises off the eastern seaboard of the United States from the summer of 2014 to March 2015. The *Times* published a cockpit instrument video of an object moving at high speed near the ocean surface as it appeared to rotate. Pilots observed that the objects were capable of high acceleration, deceleration and maneuverability. In two separate incidents, a pilot reported his cockpit instruments locked onto and tracked objects but he was unable to see them through his helmet camera. In another encounter, an object described as a sphere encasing a cube passed between two jets as they flew about 100 feet apart. Nonetheless, some at the very highest levels of government may be skeptical of such accounts.

Extraterrestrial hypothesis

*Main article:*[*Extraterrestrial hypothesis*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extraterrestrial_hypothesis)

While technically a *UFO* refers to any unidentified flying object, in modern popular culture the term UFO has generally become synonymous with [alien spacecraft](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alien_spacecraft); however, the term ETV (Extraterrestrial Vehicle) is sometimes used to separate this explanation of UFOs from totally earthbound explanations.

Associated claims

Besides anecdotal visual sightings, reports sometimes include claims of other kinds of evidence, including cases studied by the military and various government agencies of different countries (such as Project Blue Book, the Condon Committee, the French [GEPAN/SEPRA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GEIPAN), and Uruguay's current Air Force study).

A comprehensive scientific review of cases where physical evidence was available was carried out by the 1998 Sturrock panel, with specific examples of many of the categories listed below.

* Radar contact and tracking, sometimes from multiple sites. These have included military personnel and control tower operators, simultaneous visual sightings, and aircraft intercepts. One such example were the mass sightings of large, silent, low-flying black triangles in 1989 and 1990 over Belgium, tracked by NATO radar and jet interceptors, and investigated by Belgium's military (included photographic evidence). Another famous case from 1986 was the [Japan Air Lines flight 1628 incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan_Air_Lines_flight_1628_incident) over [Alaska](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alaska) investigated by the [Federal Aviation Administration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Aviation_Administration) (FAA).
* Photographic evidence, including still photos, movie film, and video.
* Claims of physical trace of landing UFOs, including ground impressions, burned or desiccated soil, burned and broken foliage, magnetic anomalies, increased radiation levels, and metallic traces. (See, e. g. [Height 611 UFO incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Height_611_UFO_incident) or the 1964 [Lonnie Zamora](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lonnie_Zamora_incident)'s [Socorro, New Mexico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socorro,_New_Mexico) encounter of the USAF Project Blue Book cases.) A well-known example from December 1980 was the USAF Rendlesham Forest incident in England. Another occurred in January 1981 in Trans-en-Provence and was investigated by GEPAN, then France's official government UFO-investigation agency. Project Blue Book head Edward J. Ruppelt described a classic 1952 CE2 case involving a patch of charred grass roots.
* Physiological effects on people and animals including temporary paralysis, skin burns and rashes, [corneal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornea) burns, and symptoms superficially resembling [radiation poisoning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acute_radiation_syndrome), such as the [Cash-Landrum incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cash-Landrum_incident) in 1980.
* Animal/[cattle mutilation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cattle_mutilation) cases, that some feel are also part of the UFO phenomenon.
* Biological effects on plants such as increased or decreased growth, germination effects on seeds, and blown-out stem nodes (usually associated with physical trace cases or [crop circles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crop_circle))
* [Electromagnetic interference](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electromagnetic_interference) (EM) effects. A famous [1976 military case](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1976_Tehran_UFO_incident) over [Tehran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tehran), recorded in CIA and DIA classified documents, was associated with communication losses in multiple aircraft and weapons system failure in an [F-4 Phantom II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McDonnell_Douglas_F-4_Phantom_II) jet interceptor as it was about to fire a missile on one of the UFOs.
* Apparent remote radiation detection, some noted in FBI and CIA documents occurring over government nuclear installations at Laboratory and [Oak Ridge National Laboratory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oak_Ridge_National_Laboratory) in 1950, also reported by Project Blue Book director Edward J. Ruppelt in his book.
* Claimed artifacts of UFOs themselves, such as 1957, [Ubatuba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubatuba), Brazil, [magnesium](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnesium) fragments analyzed by the [Brazilian government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_government_of_Brazil) and in the Condon Report and by others. The 1964 Lonnie Zamora incident also left metal traces, analyzed by NASA. A more recent example involves a tear drop-shaped object recovered by Bob White and was featured in a television episode of [*UFO Hunters*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UFO_Hunters).
* [Angel hair and angel grass](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angel_hair_(folklore)), possibly explained in some cases as nests from [ballooning spiders](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballooning_(spider)) or [chaff](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaff_(radar_countermeasure)).

Ufology

*Main article:*[*Ufology*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ufology)



Photograph of "an unusual atmospheric occurrence observed over Sri Lanka", forwarded to the UK [Ministry of Defense](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Defence_(United_Kingdom)) by RAF Fylingdales, 2004

*Ufology* is a [neologism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neologism) describing the collective efforts of those who study UFO reports and associated evidence.

**Researchers**

*Main article:*[*List of Ufologists*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ufologists)

**Sightings**

*Main article:*[*List of reported UFO sightings*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_reported_UFO_sightings)

**Organizations**

*Main article:*[*List of UFO organizations*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_UFO_organizations)

**Categorization**

Some Ufologists recommend that observations be classified according to the features of the phenomenon or object that are reported or recorded. Typical categories include:

* Saucer, toy-top, or disk-shaped "craft" without visible or audible propulsion.
* Large triangular "craft" or triangular light pattern, usually reported at night.
* Cigar-shaped "craft" with lighted windows (meteor fireballs are sometimes reported this way, but are very different phenomena).
* Other: chevrons, (equilateral) triangles, crescent, boomerangs, spheres (usually reported to be shining, glowing at night), domes, diamonds, shapeless black masses, eggs, pyramids and cylinders, classic "lights."

Popular UFO classification systems include the [Hynek system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ufology#Hynek_system), created by J. Allen Hynek, and the [Vallée system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ufology#Vallée_system), created by Jacques Vallée.

Hynek's system involves dividing the sighted object by appearance, subdivided further into the type of "close encounter" (a term from which the film director [Steven Spielberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven_Spielberg) derived the title of his 1977 UFO movie, [*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Close_Encounters_of_the_Third_Kind)).

Jacques Vallée's system classifies UFOs into five broad types, each with from three to five subtypes that vary according to type.

**Scientific skepticism**

A [scientifically skeptical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_skepticism) group that has for many years offered critical analysis of UFO claims is the [Committee for Skeptical Inquiry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Committee_for_Skeptical_Inquiry) (CSI).

One example is the response to local beliefs that "extraterrestrial beings" in UFOs were responsible for crop circles appearing in Indonesia, which the government and the [National Institute of Aeronautics and Space](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Institute_of_Aeronautics_and_Space) (LAPAN) described as "man-made". Thomas Djamaluddin, research professor of astronomy and astrophysics at LAPAN stated: "We have come to agree that this 'thing' cannot be scientifically proven. Scientists have put UFOs in the category of [pseudoscience](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudoscience)."

Conspiracy theories

*See also:*[*UFO conspiracy theory*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UFO_conspiracy_theory)*,*[*Steven M. Greer*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven_M._Greer)*,*[*Men in Black*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men_in_Black)*, and*[*Brookings Report*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brookings_Report)

UFOs are sometimes an element of conspiracy theories in which governments are allegedly intentionally "covering up" the existence of aliens by removing physical evidence of their presence, or even collaborating with extraterrestrial beings. There are many versions of this story; some are exclusive, while others overlap with various other conspiracy theories.

In the U.S., an opinion poll conducted in 1997 suggested that 80% of Americans believed the U.S. government was withholding such information. Various notables have also expressed such views. Some examples are astronauts Gordon Cooper and Edgar Mitchell, Senator [Barry Goldwater](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barry_Goldwater), Vice Admiral [Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roscoe_H._Hillenkoetter) (the first CIA director), [Lord Hill-Norton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Hill-Norton,_Baron_Hill-Norton) (former British Chief of Defense Staff and NATO head), the 1999 French COMETA study by various French generals and aerospace experts, and [Yves Sillard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yves_Sillard) (former director of CNES, new director of French UFO research organization GEIPAN).

It has also been suggested by a few paranormal authors that all or most human technology and culture is based on extraterrestrial contact (see also [ancient astronauts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_astronauts)).

Famous hoaxes

*Main article:*[*List of UFO-related hoaxes*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_UFO-related_hoaxes)

* The [Maury Island incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maury_Island_incident)
* [George Adamski](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Adamski), over the space of two decades, made various claims about his meetings with telepathic aliens from nearby planets. He claimed that photographs of the [far side of the Moon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Far_side_of_the_Moon) taken by the Soviet lunar probe [Luna 3](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luna_3) in 1959 were fake, and that there were cities, trees and snow-capped mountains on the far side of the Moon. Among copycats was a shadowy British figure named [Cedric Allingham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cedric_Allingham).
* Ed Walters, a building contractor, in 1987 allegedly perpetrated a hoax in [Gulf Breeze, Florida](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_Breeze,_Florida). Walters claimed at first having seen a small UFO flying near his home and took some photographs of the craft. Walters reported and documented a series of UFO sightings over a period of three weeks and took several photographs. These sightings became famous, and are collectively referred to as the [Gulf Breeze UFO incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_Breeze_UFO_incident). Three years later, in 1990, after the Walters family had moved, the new residents discovered a model of a UFO poorly hidden in the attic that bore an undeniable resemblance to the craft in Walters' photographs. Most investigators, like the forensic photo expert William G. Hyzer, now consider the sightings to be a hoax.

In popular culture



A UFO Monument at [Tenjo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenjo), [Colombia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colombia).

*Main article:*[*UFOs in fiction*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UFOs_in_fiction)

UFOs have constituted a widespread international [cultural phenomenon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_phenomenon) since the 1950s. [Gallup Polls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gallup_(company)) rank UFOs near the top of lists for subjects of widespread recognition. In 1973, a survey found that 95 percent of the public reported having heard of UFOs, whereas only 92 percent had heard of [U.S. President](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_United_States) [Gerald Ford](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerald_Ford) in a 1977 poll taken just nine months after he left the White House. A 1996 Gallup Poll reported that 71 percent of the United States population believed that the U.S. government was covering up information regarding UFOs. A 2002 [Roper Poll](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elmo_Roper) for the [Sci-Fi Channel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syfy) found similar results, but with more people believing that UFOs are extraterrestrial craft. In that latest poll, 56 percent thought UFOs were real craft and 48 percent that aliens had visited the Earth. Again, about 70 percent felt the government was not sharing everything it knew about UFOs or extraterrestrial life.

Another effect of the flying saucer type of UFO sightings has been Earth-made flying saucer craft in space fiction, for example the United Planets Cruiser [C57D](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C-57D) in [*Forbidden Planet*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forbidden_Planet) (1956), the [*Jupiter 2*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lost_in_Space#Technology_and_equipment) in [*Lost in Space*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lost_in_Space), and the saucer section of the [USS *Enterprise*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Starship_Enterprise) in [*Star Trek*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Trek), and many others.

UFOs and [extraterrestrials](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extraterrestrials) have been featured [in many movies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_films_featuring_extraterrestrials).

See also

* [Kenneth Arnold UFO sighting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_Arnold_UFO_sighting)
* [Kosmopoisk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosmopoisk)
* [List of reported UFO sightings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_reported_UFO_sightings)
* [Majestic 12](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Majestic_12)
* [Mystery airship](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mystery_airship)
* [Psychosocial hypothesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychosocial_hypothesis)
* [UFO religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UFO_religion)
* [Ufology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ufology)
* [Unidentified submerged object](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unidentified_submerged_object) or USO

Notes

* 1. [**^**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unidentified_flying_object#cite_ref-13) For example, the USAF's [Project Blue Book](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identification_studies_of_UFOs) concluded that less than 2 % of reported UFOs were "psychological" or hoaxes; [Allan Hendry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allan_Hendry)'s study for CUFOS had less than 1 %.
  2. [**^**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unidentified_flying_object#cite_ref-44) For example, current USAF general reporting procedures are in [Air Force Instruction (AFI)10-206](http://www.theblackvault.com/documents/ufos/AFI10-206.pdf). Section 5.7.3 (p. 64) lists sightings of "unidentified flying objects" and "aircraft of unconventional design" as separate categories from potentially hostile but conventional, unidentified aircraft, missiles, surface vessels, or submarines. Additionally, "unidentified objects" detected by missile warning systems, creating a potential risk of nuclear war, are covered by Rule 5E (p.35).
  3. [**^**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unidentified_flying_object#cite_ref-54) Many of these documents are now online at the FOIA websites of these agencies such as the [*"FBI FOIA site"*](https://web.archive.org/web/20080524114748/http:/foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/ufo.htm)*. Archived from the original on May 24, 2008. Retrieved August 9, 2007.* , as well as private websites such as [The Black Vault](http://www.theblackvault.com/), which has an archive of several thousand U.S. government UFO-related documents from the USAF, Army, CIA, DIA, DOD, and NSA.
  4. [**^**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unidentified_flying_object#cite_ref-59) The so-called [Twining memo of Sept. 23, 1947](http://www.majesticdocuments.com/pdf/twiningopinionamc_23sept47.pdf), by future USAF Chief of Staff, General [Nathan Twining](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nathan_Farragut_Twining), specifically recommended intelligence cooperation with the Army, Navy, [Atomic Energy Commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Atomic_Energy_Commission), the Defense Department's Joint Research and Development Board, Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, [National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Advisory_Committee_for_Aeronautics) (NACA), Project [RAND](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAND), and the [Nuclear Energy for the Propulsion of Aircraft](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_aircraft) (NEPA) project.
  5. [**^**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unidentified_flying_object#cite_ref-62) See, e.g., the [1976 Tehran UFO incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1976_Tehran_UFO_incident) where a Defense Intelligence Agency report on the event had a distribution list that included the White House, Secretary of State, Joint Chiefs of Staff, National Security Agency (NSA), and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Several thousand UFO-related pages of more recent vintage from the CIA, NSA, DIA, and other agencies have also been released and can be viewed online. [*"Archived copy"*](https://web.archive.org/web/20090602185537/http:/community.theblackvault.com/articles/entry/All-UFO-Documents-From-)*. Archived from*[*the original*](http://community.theblackvault.com/articles/entry/All-UFO-Documents-From-)*on June 2, 2009. Retrieved June 10, 2009.*

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