

## Bigfoot in Florida?

Friday, 23 November 2007

(From the Baker County Press)A sighting three weeks ago of what appeared to be a large, orange colored monkey in a tree just north of Glen St. Mary still has Baker County residents and many others scratching their heads and speculating as to what the creature actually could be.

A sighting three weeks ago of what appeared to be a large, orange colored monkey in a tree just north of Glen St. Mary still has Baker County residents and many others scratching their heads and speculating as to what the creature actually could be.

Suggestions have run the gamut from an orangutan to a spider monkey to the more colorful imaginings of a baby skunk ape (Bigfoot) and the Taylor Wild Man, a feral human who has been reported through the years to be seen in the woods near the Taylor Church cemetery.

Even the sinister El Chupacabra, a mythical nocturnal creature with a fondness for sucking the blood of goats, has been suggested.

Local media coverage of the initial sighting was picked up by Jacksonville television stations and has since been reported by news outlets worldwide.

The story has provided great fodder for web sites and is now appearing on The Bigfoot Forums, reported as the web's most popular one-stop shop for sasquatch talk.

County Commissioner Mike Griffis said that he understands the story has been reported by Yahoo News, Fox News and even the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Reports of sightings have also appeared on The Drudge Report, now giving the incident worldwide Internet coverage.

An orangutan? Bigfoot? The Taylor Wild Man? All this uproar over what the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission is now saying was probably just an "orange phase" fox squirrel, the largest species of squirrel in North America. Fox squirrels can reach two feet in length, not including the bushy, orange tail and weigh up to two pounds.

Baker County animal control officer Tina Thomas visited the location of the sighting and used binoculars to look at the animal high in a tree. She suggested it might be an orangutan.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission sent investigator Ken Holmes to the scene. No positive identification of the animal was made at the time. Mr. Holmes later stated that he would "be astonished if the animal were an orangutan" since its reported nocturnal behavior was not like that of a primate.

"More than likely it's a large fox squirrel," he said.

Tell that to Windy Tyson, who lives in the Hills of Glen development. She initially reported being awakened during the early morning hours to hear loud screeching and howling outside her home. To her, it sounded like a monkey.

About the same time, another Baker County resident whose property backs up to the Little St. Marys River reported hearing something in the darkness outside her home about 12:30 am. Startled and curious, she raised her second-floor bedroom window, hoping to hear it again. The creature shrieked once more.

"It was an ungodly sound," she said in a telephone interview.

The Baker county resident who first reported seeing the creature and prefers to remain anonymous, spotted the animal on his property the morning after Ms. Tyson heard its nocturnal calls. While working out in his barn, he saw it from about 20 yards away beside a dog pen.

He believes the animal may have been attracted to the scent of several boxes of donuts in the back of his truck. He went to investigate and watched as it climbed to the top of a tall tree nearby.

"I can tell you that it was not a squirrel," he declared. "It absolutely was a red spider monkey. Some of them get really large. It weighed between 40-50 pounds and had a very long tail.

Obviously not an orangutan, then. Orangutans are apes, not monkeys and do not have tails.

Bo Canaday, among the group of people called over to observe, didn't see the animal himself due to his

cataracts.

&ldquo;I can tell you from all the comments I heard that whatever it was, it was definitely &lsquo;monkey looking,&rsquo;&rdquo; he said.

More reports of strange noises in the night have followed, as recent as November 14. One resident, who doesn&rsquo;t want his identity or location revealed to discourage trespassers and curiosity seekers on his property, reported something &ldquo;calling&rdquo; from the tree behind his home. He has heard similar sounds before made by monkeys in the jungles of Central and South America where he has spent time. To him, what was up his tree was no animal native to the woods of Baker county.

&ldquo;My dogs were going crazy in their pens. I could tell something was moving around in the tree branches,&rdquo; he said. &ldquo;It jumped from the branches and landed on the tin roof of a dog pen directly underneath. Only something large and heavy could have made the noise it did when it hit the roof.&rdquo;

Fish and Wildlife employees have since set up a culvert trap on the property and left fruit for bait. As of late Sunday afternoon, nothing had been caught.

There have been reports of other odd activity. Several residents in the area have noticed the fruit being stripped from their Persimmon trees, virtually overnight. Persimmons have been added to the bait in the trap in hopes of luring the animal back and catching it.

All sightings and reports of noise have taken place within a 1½ mile radius area bisected by the little St. Mary&rsquo;s River.

Sightings of unusual animals are not unheard of in Baker County. Several years ago, numerous Glen St. Mary residents reported seeing a strange creature crossing Hwy 125 late at night. One resident, Mark Lyons, described the creature as having reddish, orange fur, short forearms and walking upright.

&ldquo;I know I saw something out of the ordinary,&rdquo; Mr. Lyons said. &ldquo;The next thing I knew there were reports of a Killer Kangaroo on the loose. I can understand why some people don&rsquo;t want their identities revealed. You can set yourself up for a lot of ridicule.&rdquo;

The mystery animal was the topic of conversation among some patrons of Fraser&rsquo;s Corner Cafe in Glen St. Mary during lunch November 19. When asked what she would do if she spotted the creature up in one of her trees, Christine Potter declared without hesitation: &ldquo;Why honey, I know exactly what I&rsquo;d do. I&rsquo;d run like all hell.&rdquo;