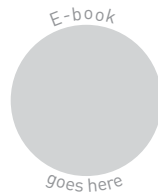




# Monster Hunting

By Rebecca McEwen



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Written by Rebecca McEwen  
Edited by Alison Auch  
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# The Dinosaur That Wasn't Dead

African legend tells of a monster living far below the surface of the sea. Its scales were so hard, they could be used as arrowheads. Its flesh was so foul, oil seeped out of it long after it died...

A few days before Christmas, 1938, a fishing boat working along the east coast of South Africa caught a coelacanth (SEE-la-kanth) – a massive fish described in local legends. Scientists believed it had been extinct for more than 65 million years.

Looking back, it isn't surprising that this animal had escaped notice for so long. Until that December day, the only true evidence the fish ever existed was found in **fossils** dating back to when the dinosaurs disappeared. These fish live thousands of feet below the surface of the sea, in waters so deep that even modern **technology** hasn't helped people fully explore them. Although coelacanths can live for more than 60 years, they are very rare. Only about 1,000 still survive in those deep, dark waters.



## SIZE SCALE



▲ How can something so large have gone unnoticed for so long? Coelacanths measure more than 6 feet (1.8 m) long and can weigh up to 200 pounds (91 kg).

When the mythical giant monster turned out to be a real animal, it became the perfect evidence that there is a lot about the world we don't understand, and there may be many animals that science hasn't yet recognized.

## FAST FACT

Coelacanths may have survived over millions of years because they have an effective way to stay alive when food is scarce. A coelacanth can slow its **metabolism** so much that it can shut its own body down until conditions around it improve.

Cryptozoology is the study of these mysterious creatures. What some call “monster hunting,” cryptozoologists consider to be science. They are exploring a world that isn’t yet fully understood, just like scientists in the past made theories about and studied things that they didn’t understand.

Some cryptozoologists hunt for monsters of legend, such as sea serpents or flying dinosaurs. However, most are searching for animals that are probable, but not yet proven, such as pygmy (PIG-mee) elephants or ivory-billed woodpeckers.



While the animals they seek vary widely, cryptozoologists use similar methods when trying to track down a **cryptid**. Their best tool is biology, and they study the **natural environment** for any trace the animal might leave behind. Tracks, hair or scales, signs of food that has been eaten, and droppings are all valuable evidence in proving that an animal exists.

Cryptozoologists also rely on stories. They conduct interviews and collect information from everyone they can find who claims to have seen a mysterious animal. The more they can find out about a creature, the better chance they have of finding it or proving that it is real.

Ivory-billed woodpeckers are officially “definitely or probably extinct.” Yet large rewards have been offered for finding one alive. ►

