

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Phantom Creature Part II: Crazy No More

I am pleased (I guess) to report that I am not the only South Brunswick Islander to experience things that go screech in the night.

I've had calls or visits almost every day from people with information and speculation about the "phantom critter of Holden Beach." I described in this space a couple of weeks ago. The woods (and marshes and dunes) were once full of 'em, so there are bound to be a few still around, right?

I may have caught a rare glimpse of a coastal cougar, they tell me. Although this isn't any great revelation among the county's hunters or folks who live on the fringe of the Green Swamp, it's a pretty big deal among scientists.

I learned in a fascinating conversation with naturalist Arthur Cartier of Little River that the last officially documented coastal cougar died in captivity in 1911. Cartier is certain they still exist; he's seen plenty of evidence, including a dead cougar kitten. Many hunters have also told me they've seen these cats, or at least their tracks, and know where their dens are.

I'll be getting together with Cartier in a few days to learn enough about these mysterious felines to make into a whole feature story. He works with state and federal agencies and conservation groups to try to document and preserve the habitats and increase the gene pool of rare and endangered (and officially extinct) species.

From what I've been told thus far, numerous others have seen the same

Lynn Carlson



kind of critter and assume it must be something else, since coastal cougars don't resemble the big pumas we know from Tarzan movies. They are "odd-looking," Cartier says, rather long-legged and thick-tailed, able to swim across waterways and roam 300 miles. They have been sighted as far north as Massachusetts. They don't look like the endangered Florida cats, of which only 17 remaining pairs are known to exist.

As I said earlier, the animal I saw at 4:30 a.m. Wednesday, May 12, had a cry bloodcurdling enough to scare the cheese dip out of anybody. Every one of my callers has agreed that it makes a noise like something being murdered.

A resident of Brunswick Avenue at Holden Beach, and another who lives on High Point Street, heard but didn't see it in the pre-dawn hours that weekend. A woman on Kirby Road heard something like it, too.

A man from Bent Tree Plantation near Ocean Isle Beach has seen and left food out for an animal he describes as gray, short-legged, bushy-tailed and "real fidgety." However, Cartier discourages such well-intentioned efforts to feed wild animals.

"They shouldn't be made dependent on man, who's their worst enemy," he explains.

A woman who lives at Sunset Beach stopped by to report that both her husband and she caught an odd-looking cat-like critter in their car headlights one night last week before it bolted into the marsh.

While I reported the cat under my floodlight to be short-legged, it could well have been just crouching, Cartier suggested. He also added that the time of year is right for females to go off alone and bear their young in a relatively safe place—like the city-block-sized marsh I see when I look out my kitchen window.

If you recall, I speculated at least halfway in just that it could have been a jaguarundi. Cartier tells me that while jaguarundi are native to the Carolinas—and a few are known to live in Horry County, where they got away from a traveling circus—they have very stringy tails and spend most of their time in trees.

My experience piqued the interest of Lorena Jodice, a self-described "unemployed cat-keeper" who came to stay with her parents in Brunswick County after being bitten by a hyena at the Knoxville Zoo, where she tended 40 large cats and "several other carnivores."

I learned from Lorena that jaguarundi can be found in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas and are easily domesticated. She said my description fit that of a tayra, native to South and Central America with a bushy tail and a pointy cat-like face.

Whatever the outcome, it's been a delight to hear from so many readers

about a column I was certain would blow my cover and expose me as an utter kook. Either I'm not, or lots of other people are, and lunacy loves company!

Odds and ends not big enough for a whole column:

In a photo caption last week, I erroneously referred to the beaches' large "Labor Day" crowd. Somehow the boo-boo slipped past several other staffers and went to press that way. I promise it wasn't a Freudian slip, and I'll try to atone on Independence Day. Duh...

I had the double pleasure Friday of attending the Ocean Isle Property Owners' Association's first Town Employee Appreciation picnic PLUS getting a sneak peek at the completed mural in the Museum of Coastal Carolina's work-in-progress swamp/forest diorama.

In a very welcome gesture of support, the town staff of 17 got some much-deserved praise, and a barbecue luncheon, from the POA. Say what you will about the way Ocean Isle Beach operates, but it's refreshing to see a citizens' group and elected officials enjoy (and work at) a genuinely civil relationship.

After the picnic, museum founder Stuart Ingram took me back to see Vic Gillispie's completed mural, which is nothing less than spectacular. I can't tell you when the new addition will go public; that's a fiscal matter, since the museum is strictly a pay-as-we-go proposition. But if you'd seen what I saw, you might want to come up with a contribution to speed things along.

'Town Meeting' Legislative Forum Should Be A Tradition

About 15 people took advantage of Monday's "town meeting" in Shallotte to speak their minds to, and answer questions of, Representatives David Redwine and Dewey Hill and Senator R.C. Soles. Another 10 or so sat in on the two-hour session without speaking. It was a rewarding exercise for the citizens and the legislators—one that ought to become a tradition.

The questions were thoughtful and the answers, for the most part, enlightening. It became quickly apparent that Brunswick Countians are keeping a close watch over their men in Raleigh, especially watchful against bills with the potential to place heavier burdens on small businesses and local governments.

Equally obvious was the dichotomy between what citizens profess to want—such as more prison beds in the state—and how little tax support they're willing to provide toward that end. It's heartening to see legislators look constituents in the eyes and remind them they can't have it both ways.

Though the crowd was weighted heavily with local government and education officials intent on staking claims to various pots of state money, a number of "civilians" were on hand to bring up such topics as health care, gun control, highway litter, the lottery, and the relationship between illegal drugs and revolving-door justice.

None of those issues has an easy answer. In particular, reform of the state's health care and justice systems will be inextricably linked to changes at the federal level—changes, as Redwine pointed out, cannot occur without pinching citizens, as well as special-interest groups, in their tender spots.

Two Friday evening town meetings are scheduled next. They are June 18 at the courthouse in Southport, and June 25 at the Leland Town Hall. Both begin at 7:00.

Even if you don't have a question or a beef, you'll learn something by attending.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Landscaping Volunteers 'Surround Us In Beauty'

To the editor:
 Holden Beach homeowners and visitors noticing the beautifully landscaped areas on the sides of, and at the bottom of, our bridge, plus the many other public areas, have a couple of hard-working ladies to thank—Fran Vogt and Hap Hart.

Although a few other people have helped on occasion, Fran and Hap have spent many, many hours to beautify our island. Fran was also instrumental in getting the merchants on the causeway to beautify their areas.

Not many people would give up every weekend of two months to oversee community workers (who can only work on weekends) as Fran has done. Even the verbal abuse and constant criticism from fellow beautification committee members does not daunt the civic pride and hard work of these special ladies.

If you haven't shown your appreciation for this beauty, please take the time to give them a call. Certainly, that is the very least we can do. I personally know how many hours of hard labor in the blistering sun these unselfish ladies have given to our community.

I thank them for surrounding us in beauty!

Judy Bryan
 Holden Beach

Explorers Introduced

To the editor:
 I am writing to let the people of Shallotte and surrounding areas

know about the Shallotte Explorers. The Explorers are a division of the Boy Scouts of America for young people 14 to 20. Their purpose is to help young people learn about law enforcement, cooperation with others and helping people.

The group is organized by the Shallotte Police Department. Advisors Keith Croom and Michael Fester work together to teach us what it takes to be a successful law enforcement officer.

The Explorers do fundraisers such as car washes, bucket shakes, etc. We also accept donations. We are now looking for donations to help get members their uniforms.

Thank you for learning about our Shallotte Explorers unit. For more information about the program, contact Keith Croom of the Shallotte Police Department.

Evonne Rutherford
 Shallotte
 (More Letters, Following Page)

Write Us

The Beacon welcomes letters to the editor. All letters must be signed and include the writer's address and telephone number. Under no circumstances will unsigned letters be printed. Letters should be legible. We reserve the right to edit libelous comments. Address letters to *The Brunswick Beacon*, P. O. Box 2558, Shallotte, N. C. 28459.

Worth Repeating...

- Democracies cannot dispense with with hypocrisy any more than dictatorships can with cynicism. —Georges Bernanos
- An example from the monkey: The higher it climbs, the more you see of its behind. —Saint Bonaventure
- Words ought to be a little wild for they are the assault of thoughts on the unthinking. —John Maynard Keynes
- There is not a more mean, stupid, dastardly, pitiful, selfish, spiteful, envious, ungrateful animal than the Public. It is the greatest of all cowards, for it is afraid of itself. —William Hazlitt
- What is so rare as a day in June? Then, if ever, come perfect days. —James Russell Lowell



(WHY THE LOTTERY IS SO TEMPTING TO STATE LEGISLATORS)



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Dragging For Kings With Captain Jamie

Remember that great scene in the movie "City Slickers" where the grizzled old gunfighter, played by Jack Palance, casually asks tenderfoot Billy Crystal if he wants to know the secret of happiness?

Stunned with anticipation that he might find some clue to this fundamental question, Crystal eagerly replies in the affirmative.

"Just one thing," Palance says, holding a calloused finger toward the sky.

After a painful silence, with no relief in sight, Crystal blurts out, "What?!"

"That's for you to decide," says Palance as their horses clip-clop down the trail.

I couldn't help thinking about that after spending a day with Jamie Milliken, a guy who has definitely found his "one thing." And if you don't know what that is, you need to read your *Beacon* more thoroughly.

To say Jamie Milliken enjoys offshore fishing is like saying a Labrador retriever enjoys chasing tennis balls. If he's ten miles out with four lines dragging, Jamie is one very happy man. Even when the only thing biting is the wind.

We had been trying to do a fishing story together for nearly a year, but had repeatedly run into scheduling conflicts. So when Jamie called last week and asked if I wanted to go along for the "Sun Fun King Mackerel Tournament," I eagerly took the bait.

A day later, partially recovered, I began to wonder if he had said "tournament" or "torment."

Piloting the *Caribbean Soul* up the waterway for a 7 a.m. start from Lockwood Folly inlet Friday, Jamie kept a running radio banter going

Eric Carlson



with his close circle of local fishing buddies aboard the *Oil Slick*, the *Reel Chase*, the *Captain Hook II*, the *Outlaw* and the *Shooting Star III*.

"There's a lot of camaraderie out there," he explains. "The local crews keep in touch and help each other out."

I would soon find that to be a very comforting thought.

As the sun began to burn through the mist and the circling competitors idled slowly toward the starting line, I got into position for what would be a beautiful photo of a dozen fully rigged mackerel boats peacefully motoring out to sea.

Silly me. The second hand hit 12. Jamie hit the throttle. The *Caribbean Soul* hit the first wave. And my head hit the cockpit roof as we began a 20-minute spray-soaked pounding that was about as peaceful as a bare-back steepchase in a hurricane.

I somehow managed to pry one hand loose long enough to stow the camera safely below deck and quickly resumed my death grip before another wave exploded off the bow. That's when I met the real Jamie Milliken.

Wedged between the wheel and the cockpit seat, his hair and mustache dripping with salt spray, grinning like a kid on Christmas, Jamie kept the big Evinrude howling

through all but the tallest swells. Now and then he'd let out a rousing "Yee Haw!" as the propeller bit the air and revved wildly to announce that the *Caribbean Soul* had gone airborne.

Bathed in the warm light of a golden sunrise, the image recalled those wonderful Frederic Remington paintings of Pony Express riders wildly slapping the haunches of a galloping horse as it bounded across the desert. A picture of unbridled enthusiasm. One I would have needed an underwater camera and an extra hand to capture.

Suddenly everything went quiet. We had reached the offshore reef that would be our first hunting ground for the \$10,000 fish.

Jamie stayed at the helm as his experienced young mate Brant McMullan moved purposefully around the cockpit baiting hooks, running out line, setting reels and adjusting the downrigger. Meanwhile, I busied myself snapping pictures.

It wasn't until we started to troll that I noticed the *Soul* had begun to roll. With a ground swell from one direction and a wind swell from another, there was no pattern to the pitching. First we'd roll fore-and-aft, then beam-to-beam. My stomach took an elevator up.

I tried all my old tricks: like deep breathing, staring at the horizon, drinking Coca-Cola and eating crackers, and even a new one—munching celery—and somehow managed to stave off a major upheaval.

Three times I came close to losing it. The first was when I went below to change film. The second was when Jamie offered me what he called a "horse doover" consisting

of a saline garnished with Vienna sausage. (I won't tell you what he calls them.)

Recoiling, I declined and asked, "Do you have any idea what's in those things?!"

This turned out to be my third mistake. Jamie simply grinned and answered by reading the ingredients on the side of the can, which basically said "parts is parts."

Brant wasn't quite so lucky. He had driven straight to the dock after finishing final exams in Atlanta the day before. So he didn't quite have his sea legs back. He spent much of the day splayed out across an Igloo cooler.

He later made a valiant recovery after generously donating his breakfast of saltines and Yoo-Hoo to the chum line.

To make a long story short, we didn't catch a thing—much less a king—that day. Neither did any of Jamie's comrades. Nor did more than 400 of the 500-something boats in the tournament.

Most blamed it on the full moon, which had given the big macks a spotlight for all-night feeding.

But getting skunked didn't seem to bother Jamie one bit. Although claimed to be "ticked off to the highest peak of tickativity," you'd never know it by looking at him. He stayed in the highest of high spirits all day, rallied his buddies with radio pep talks and predicted better luck tomorrow.

Whether they got it or not, I can't say. You'll have to turn to his column to find out. But I do know a happy guy when I see one. And whether he's catching or just fishing, as long as Jamie Milliken has a line in the water, he's one "Jolly Mon."