

## **THE FALCON PROJECT & SASQUATCH TREKKERS**

Drones are in the news, whether delivering pizza, encroaching on airline flight paths, or locating a trophy buck. This burgeoning technology is also furthering wildlife conservation efforts. For example, orangutan nests in Sumatra's remaining forests are being surveyed from the air, to monitor the distribution and density of these elusive great apes. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that William Barnes, of St. George, Utah, concluded that aerial survey by means of UAVs had the best potential to solve the mystery of North America's great ape – the sasquatch.

Barnes encountered a sasquatch up close, one evening in the summer of 1997, at a remote gold-dredging camp in California's Sierra Mountains. He became engrossed with the objective of confirming his experience and eventually conceived of the Falcon Project – a proposal to employ an unmanned helium-filled airship to survey the wilderness for this nocturnal denizen of the forest (see the-FalconProject.com). Enter Stephen Barclay, aeronautical engineer and owner of Remote Aerial Tripod Specialists (RATS) Inc., in Alberta, Canada. He recommended his Aurora airship, a 35-foot dual-cell catamaran-style design, with a 10-hour air time and 75 pound payload consisting of cutting-edge thermal imaging cameras and high definition videography equipment.

The initial phase of the Falcon Project will consist of an intense and sustained “boots-on-the-ground” operation, referred to as *Sasquatch Trekkers*. This venture will involve a team of dedicated volunteers with appropriate experience and skills in tracking and surveillance. Many of these individuals are former military veterans, with demonstrated expertise in these areas. The *Trekkers* will function in a tag-team fashion 24/7 for a six-month period.

The *Trekkers* objectives include using forensic methods to identify, document and collect trace (e.g. tracks, sign) and physical (e.g. hair, scat, remains), as well as audio (e.g. calls, vocalizations) evidence. They will conduct observation and GPS mapping of habitat, (e.g. locations of water, potential shelter, plant resources, animals and their sign), and nighttime surveillance. FLIR will be providing handheld thermal recorders with enhanced optics for this operation. It has been inferred that sasquatch are extremely rare, relatively solitary, and largely nocturnal in their activities, as well as far-ranging and rather generalized in their diet. This combination of natural history factors makes obtaining consistent and on-going observation in the field under natural conditions extremely challenging, and for all practical purposes impossible – without the aid of drones and thermal imaging technologies.

Establishing the existence of the species based on physical remains is the ultimate goal of the search. However, while such a discovery will potentially reveal information about their taxonomy, anatomy, and adaptations, it will disclose virtually nothing about their behavior, social structure, intelligence, etc. An acknowledgement of the existence of sasquatch is the point at which the work really begins.

This is where the Aurora comes in, working in coordinated fashion with the ground crew. Data collected by the *Sasquatch Trekkers* will establish the foundation for designing the aerial survey strategies utilized in the Falcon Project proper and will provide the basis for the deployment of the *Aurora* airship and placement of the mobile command center, and ground teams.

Fundraising efforts are now on track, with several major benefactors pledging support for the project. These generous donors are committed to what they see as a historic event in anthropological exploration. Recently, *New Scientist Magazine*, listed the top ten questions facing human evolution today. Prominent among them was the question of whether relict hominoids, man-like creatures, exist alongside us today. Interest in the potential existence of sasquatch is on the rise. The resources of a major crowd-sourcing organization are being directed at the fundraising for the needed equipment and personnel. Dr. Meldrum, professor of anatomy & anthropology at ISU has been recruited as scientific advisor to the project. ISU's Office of Research has approved the Falcon Project's methodology and objectives and an account for donations towards its funding has been established with the ISU Foundation. Interest in collaboration has been indicated by conservation agencies and the US Forest Service. A scientific advisory panel has been constituted to provide independent evaluation of data collection. It includes:

Ian Redmond is a tropical field biologist and conservationist, renowned for his work with great apes and elephants. For more than 30 years he has been associated with Mountain Gorillas, through research, filming, tourism and conservation work

Jim Halfpenny, PhD is a renowned tracker, and licensed guide, founder of the Track Education Center and Museum in Gardiner, Montana. Through his organization, *A Naturalist's World*, Jim annually travels the world teaching classes on carnivores, tracking, cold, and ecology.

John Bindernagel, PhD has spent a 45-year long career as a professional wildlife biologist with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) with the United Nations, living and working in Uganda, Tanzania, Iran, and Trinidad and Tobago.

John Mionczynski is a wildlife consultant with 40 years of field experience, including trapping, radio collaring, and documenting food habits and behavior of grizzly bears in the Yellowstone Ecosystem of Montana and Wyoming for the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team and U.S. Forest Service

Bill Munns has excelled in several unique professional arts over his 45-year long career, including the "creature business" (fabricating ultra-realistic physical models of living, extinct and fictitious creatures for Movies, TV, Theme Parks and Museum Exhibits) and Computer Graphics Imagery (CGI). He has devoted 5 years to the analysis of the famous Patterson-Gimlin film.

Pete Aniello has over 20 years of experience in the geospatial field. He is currently a technical manager at Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), and has previously worked at the

National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, the United States Geological Survey, and Space Imaging.

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#### Advisory Panel

[http://the-falconproject.com/main\\_site/?p=544](http://the-falconproject.com/main_site/?p=544)

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