
Survey of Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon Reports in Delaware County, Ohio¹

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ABSTRACT. People living near the location (Delaware County, Ohio) of a recent, unpublished, possible observation of an unidentified flying object (UFO) were surveyed to examine the frequency of UFO observations, the ratio of reported/unreported observations, and the accounts of the observations. The 62 respondents were well educated and used to being out-of-doors. Thirty-one percent of the respondents reported UFO observations; 17% reported knowing of someone who had made an observation. Thirty-two unit sightings were reported; of these, three could probably be explained as known phenomena and one contained insufficient information for evaluation.

OHIO J. SCI. 87 (1): 24-26, 1987

INTRODUCTION

Numerous surveys have shown the unidentified flying object (UFO) phenomenon to be widespread. National surveys in 1947, 1950, 1966, 1973, and 1978 (Gallup 1935-1978) have shown an increasing awareness of this phenomenon. In 1966, 96% of the people surveyed had read or heard about UFOs; in 1973, 11% of respondents thought they had seen a UFO. Similar results have been found during surveys of the readership of *Industrial Research* (Anon. 1971), the membership of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA) (Sturrock 1974), and the membership of the American Astronomical Society (AAS) (Sturrock 1977). The present survey was conducted to study the frequency of UFO reports, the ratio of reported/unreported observations, and descriptions of reported objects in an area with a recent, unpublished possible UFO sighting.

METHODS

The survey was done on persons who were acquainted with the interviewer, and who lived within approximately 16 km of the location (Bale Kenyon-Powell Road intersection, Delaware County, Ohio) of the UFO observation. The respondents were queried about possible sightings of their own and of associates. The reliability, stability, and intelligence of the respondents were assessed by assign-

ing one point each for more than 12 years of school, membership in a landowner family in the community for at least five years, being continuously employed (or a responsible housewife) for more than five years, and no evidence of other factors such as psychological problems that could result in hallucinations or being untruthful. Respondents also were queried about any special training in relevant observational techniques. The reports from respondents or associates were either oral accounts or a signed report form from the Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS).

Possible UFO sightings were classified using the conventions developed during a study done for the Air Force (ATIC 1955). A sighting was a report (or reports) of an observed phenomenon that remained unidentified to the observer until reported. A single observation was a single report of a sighting; a unit sighting was a group of reports for each sighting. Sightings were categorized (Table 1) according to ATIC conventions (ATIC 1955, Maccabee 1979) as those containing: 1) too little information for evaluation; 2) sufficient information for an identification as a known phenomenon with an expected probability greater than 50% that the identification was correct; 3) sufficient information so that an identification as a known phenomenon should have been possible, but the characteristics of the phenomenon did not match those of known phenomena; and 4) those characteristics of the phenomenon described in the report that did not conflict with those of known phenomena, but for which there was insufficient information to specify the nature of the phenomenon.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of 62 people questioned, 19 (31%) reported possible UFO sightings of their own (Table 1). In comparison, 11% of professional astronomers (Condon and Gillmor 1969), 22% of the readers of *Industrial Research* (Anon.

¹Manuscript received 30 June 1986 and in revised form 3 November 1986 (#86-26).

1971), 3% of the membership of the AIAA (Sturrock 1974), and 5% of the membership of the AAS (Sturrock 1977) reported observations. Seventeen percent of the respondents in the present study reported knowing someone who claimed to have observed a UFO. In comparison, 36% of respondents in the *Industrial Research* survey (Anon. 1971) reported knowing someone else who claimed to have had a sighting. Factors that could account for these differences in survey results are regional differences in the density distributions of UFO stimuli (ATIC 1955) and the acquaintance of the respondents and the interviewer in the present survey.

The observation in category 1 was reported orally by a relative (Table 1). Those unit sightings in category 2 included a unit sighting by 13 witnesses (independently observed by one group of eight, one of three, and one of two) of what the observers believed to have been a Russian rocket that fell from orbit on 27 July 1984. Other

observations were similar to a description of ball lighting (1948) and a group of meteorites (1984).

Of the 22 unit sightings in category 3 (Table 1), two possible unit sightings were witnessed independently (i.e., the witness did not know that another person had made an observation). Nine observations took place in daytime or at dusk. In four instances an object was observed to either appear or disappear; in three instances this occurred during daytime or dusk observations. In 21 observations, the objects were described as noiseless; in 20, the objects displayed no visible means of propulsion. In 12 instances, at least one witness had special training in either astronomy, aircraft identification, or aeronautical engineering, or had pilot or Air Force training. Of the six unit sightings in category 4, one was reported by a policeman in the area; two were made in daytime or at dusk (Table 1).

TABLE 1

Summary of unidentified object reports, showing estimates by the witness(es) of the hour the sighting began, duration of the sighting, altitude of the object, and size of the object, for the four sighting categories.

No. of witnesses	Date	Hour	Duration (min)	Altitude (m)	Size*** (m)	Description****
Category 1:						
1+		1970s				follow with car
Category 2:						
11(31*)	27 Jul 1984	2300	5		<moon	o, seven in glow, fa, R
2	19-27 Jul 1984	2200	2	low	star	o, rocket, debris, fa, R
1	Mar-Apr 1948		<1	2.7	0.6	l, spherical, sw, R
1	22 Sep 1984	1900	1	0.0		o, spheres, red, R
Category 3:						
3(11*)		1970s	2100	15	6 × moon	o, blimp, green, hover, sw, R
2	Aug 1980	2100	60	610.0	4 × moon	o, disc, orange, hover, sw, R
2	18 May 1984	2135	<1	low	3 × moon	l, streak, white, descend, R
2	18 May 1984	2135	<1	23.0	3.7	o, rocket, black, descend, R
1	Sep 1970	0600	5	274.0	1 × moon	o, disc, orange, hover, fa, R
2	Jun 1955	dusk			1 × moon	o, disc, white, whir, d, R
1	1967-68	dusk	7	low	9.0	o, silver, disc, land, fa, R
2(11*)	1975-76	0900	<1		<moon	o, eye-shaped, white, fa, R
2(11*)	1975-76	night	5	low	3 × moon	o, disc, multicolored, fa, R
2	?07 Jul 1948-53	2200	3	1-2.0	0.3	o, orange, circle furniture, R
1	1950s	0300	3	304.0	1 × moon	o, disc, orange, slow, fa, R
2	13 Jul 1968	2300	90	7.6	1 × moon	o, blimp, dark, windows, fa, R
2	?Jul 1971	2300	1	low	<moon	o, round, white, ?d, R
1	29 Feb 1984	1530	3	23.0	0.6	o, amorphous, dark, fa, R
1	Apr 1984	2200	5	6.1	10 × moon	o, sphere, red rays, d, R
1	Jun 1966	0700	4	1524.0	1 × moon	o, discs domes, silver, sw, R
1	Mar 1980	dusk	2	6.1	0.6	o, bird-shape, trail, sw, R
1**		0300		low		o, oval, change colors
1**		0300				o, two by car
2	1965-68	dusk	1	15.2	<moon	o, low, dark, lights, d, R
1	13 Jul 1968	2300	3	low	0.6	o, sphere, rotate, sw, R
5	23 Feb 1984	1600	20		¼ moon	o, rectangle, rotate?, sw, R
1	24 Aug 1984	1030	15		point	o, star-like, appear, d, sw, R
1	Summer 1985	night	5	low	room	o, disc, colors, shower, fa, R
Category 4:						
1	Feb 1984	night	>60	low	0.3	o, sphere, yellow, blink, sw
1		1940	dusk	1	<moon	o, over house, fa, R
1	Oct-Nov 1983	2200	<1			flash, large, bright, R
1	1970s	1900	2	305.0	<moon	o, cigar, metallic gold, d
1	Fall 1985	night	10		1 × moon	l, round, over house, sw, R
1	17 Oct 1973	2245				o, change colors, hover, R

*I = an independent observation.

** = witness reliability < 4.

***Some estimates are compared to the moon's angular diameter (<moon = 25 - 100% of moon's angular diameter).

****d = disappeared; fa = disappeared by flying away; l = light; o = object; R = signed report or taped interview; sw = stopped watching.

None of the unit sightings in categories 3 and 4 had been reported by the local residents to UFO authorities prior to 1984 (Table 1). In comparison, the Condon study (Condon and Gillmor 1969) indicated that approximately one of eight sightings is reported. Sturrock (1974) showed that two of 21 observations were reported. His 1977 poll showed that 18 of 65 observations were reported (Sturrock 1977). In the present study, only one (3%) attempt to photograph an object was made. This was a lower percentage than that (11%) reported by Sturrock (1977). In his study, as in this one, the photography was poor.

Respondents, when queried orally about the possibility of misidentifications, were aware that many reported UFOs are misidentifications. Because of their location in a rural area near a resort and a large city with two airports, all of the witnesses were familiar with balloons, landing lights, searchlights, astronomical objects, model airplanes, kites, ultra-light aircraft, the planet Venus, meteors, and clouds. Advertising planes did not operate in this area. In addition, most respondents were frequently out-of-doors. In the present study, people cited the assumption that no one would believe them, the possibility of public ridicule, a lack of knowledge about where to report, and the belief that nothing is done with reports, as reasons for not reporting their observations.

Although the media may influence the public acceptance of UFO phenomena, perhaps this increased acceptance also occurs because a portion of people believe themselves or close acquaintances to have made observations. Recent surveys have shown not only an increasing awareness, but also an increasing public acceptance of UFO phenomena (Gallup 1935-1978; Anon. 1971), which suggests that more study of these phenomena is needed.

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