

Cattle Mutilations: Predator Kills ± the Vulture Factor

The mystery of what causes the killing and mutilation of cattle in the United States has been a long running whodunnit for over forty years. Sensational claims have been published that the mutilations were being done by extraterrestrial aliens in their flying saucers and some maintained that organized groups of Satanists were responsible. A third possible explanation, advanced mainly by conspiracy-minded folk over the last thirty years, suggests that US government agents or military personnel were either testing new hi-tech weapons on unsuspecting cows or else they were secretly killing cattle out on the open range in order to take tissue and blood samples which would then be checked for radioactive fallout, BSE (mad cow disease), or various other pathogens which could have disastrous effects on the American public or, at any rate, on the US beef industry. These shadowy operatives, it was said, often flew in “black helicopters” at night in search of their bovine victims. Sometimes, we were told, the newly slain cows were air-lifted away to secret laboratories for processing before the carcasses were dumped back near where they had been snatched.

It is impossible to prove a negative and to completely refute any of these explanations for US cattle mutilations but I do suggest that, if any of them are true, they only constitute a small fraction of the huge number of mutilations which have been found over the years. There is abundant evidence that the vast majority of US cattle mutilations are perpetrated by avian scavengers –principally vultures—and/or predators, such as coyotes or mountain lions that may have attacked and killed some of the cattle in the first place.

One reason that there has been this widespread failure to understand the mutilation mystery is the persistent fallacy that whatever killed the wretched cow must have also inflicted the mutilations on it. That is simply not necessarily true. An animal may have died or been killed in a whole number of different ways ranging from natural causes, disease, predator attack, or even being shot dead by some unknown person with a rifle. If its carcass is left out on the open range or in some remote pasture for any length of time, vultures, and/or other scavengers, will soon be along to feast on it.

Coyotes, wolves, mountain lions and other predatory mammals like to eat fresh meat that they have killed themselves. Nevertheless they also scavenge and will devour prey other than their own given the opportunity. Every carnivorous mammal out there is thinking about the next meal and, as with humans, beef is often #1 choice on the menu. A story from a friend of mine, Mark Young, illustrates this hunger for beef. Back in 2002 he was out alone in Beaver Basin in the La Sal Mountains near Moab, UT. He came across an extraordinary sight. There was a large bear busily eating the remains of a dead cow. Gathered around it was a pack of coyotes which clearly thought this dinner belonged to them. No matter who or what had killed the cow, the coyotes were determined to have their share. Every so often one of them would creep forward to nip at the bear’s legs. The bear would turn and chase it away but, whenever it did that, other coyotes would rush at the carcass and grab what meat they could before the bear came back to resume his feast.

As an historic note to the cattle mutilation mystery there was a 1984 TV series on NBC called **V**. This was a lavish science fiction production about an alien invasion of Earth by a carnivorous race of reptilians known as the Visitors. Their reason for coming here in their huge spaceships was to eat human beings. Clearly the idea of anthropophagous aliens must have entered the psyche of some folk who were fascinated the UFO mystery back then. When AFOSI's Richard Doty, who was based at Kirtland AFB, NM, started giving Linda Howe and other researchers disinformation about UFOs in 1983, he claimed that the US government and the ETs had come to an agreement. The aliens could conduct animal mutilations and human abductions in exchange for teaching US experts about advanced alien technologies. Linda Howe evidently swallowed all that Doty said but decided the aliens were here for rather more serious purposes than feeding on human flesh. They must, she insisted, be carrying out some genetic experimentation which was vital to the survival of their race.

Meat

The average age at which beef cattle in the US are slaughtered is between 1 and 2 years. Dairy cattle live longer but most are also slaughtered for meat before they reach 5. The US beef industry is by far the largest in the world. The average annual beef consumption by every single person in this country is a staggering 70 pounds. I don't know whether most folk who see herds of cattle while driving through the countryside in America think "meat" --or even if they salivate at the thought that those cows are, primarily, one of America's favorite foods. It could be that some people don't even make that connection and think beef is just something one gets at McDonalds or in one's local supermarket.

Be that as it may, other eyes are sometimes watching those cattle and they certainly have food in mind. Turkey vultures wheeling in the sky above and coyotes down below may well both be thinking to themselves "meat". Of course they will all eat other meat such as lamb but --for many scavengers and predators alike -- beef is often the food of choice. Besides scavengers, in some parts of America, the spying eyes of unseen predators like mountain lions may also be watching, waiting, and stalking the herd.

To put the cattle mutilation mystery into perspective one should consider roughly how many mutilated cattle carcasses are actually discovered in the US in any year though of course the figure is going to be variable. First one needs to estimate just how many UCDs (unexplained cattle deaths) must occur every year out on the open range or in remote pastures where cattle are kept. Cattle in stockyards or in feed lots can probably be excluded from this estimate since mutilated carcasses are rarely, if ever, found when the animals have been kept closely confined.

The total number of live cattle and calves in the US in 1980 was about 110 million head and the figure last year (2014) was about 90 million. If we guess that just a third of that number is unconfined on the open range, or in pastureland where mutilations are more likely to occur, then how many UCDs might one expect out of that total? It has been estimated there is an approximate wastage figure of about 1% each year in unconfined

herds. That means that nationwide there might potentially be up to 300,000 dead cattle out there each year, many of which could exhibit signs of mutilation by scavengers.

During the 1970s and 1980s there was some evidence that cattle in remote parts of New Mexico or Colorado were secretly being killed and tested for radioactive fallout or pathogens such as BSE (mad cow disease). Alternatively it was suggested that cattle which were the unintended (or perhaps intended?) victims of germ and /or chemical warfare testing by the military were being killed and sampled. If so, bovine tissue samples were presumably being removed from carcasses by government “men in black helicopters (“MIBHs”)” operating under cover of darkness without any permission from the owners of the cattle. If there ever was such a nefarious program going on back then it could only have accounted for a very small fraction of the cattle mutilations nationwide and, in any case, the carcasses in question would almost certainly have later acquired further mutilations from scavengers like vultures. So, if MIBHs did play a part in the killing and mutilation of cattle, it was minimal as regards the situation as a whole.

The fact is that most cattle carcasses left out on the open range for any length of time will receive mutilations. It is mostly done by vultures and/or other scavengers and it will obviously depend on the presence of such scavengers in the area and what opportunity they get to feed on the carcass. It might also depend on the time of year. Some farmers and ranchers are quick to dispose of carcasses by burning or burying them in which case there may be no mutilations, but others leave their dead cattle out in the open and some form of mutilation will usually occur.

The vast majority of cattle mutilations probably go unreported by farmers and ranchers. If they have an idea of what killed their animals many would regard the mutilation of the carcasses as natural and concede it was the work of predators and/or scavengers. Most cattle mutilations we get to hear about are usually those where there has been an outbreak of cases in some location in which such UCDs were not previously occurring. The real mystery then is what caused the cows to die rather than the mutilation marks which could be unconnected with whatever actually killed the cattle.

Most of us forget that nearly every single cow out of roughly 90 million alive in the US today will, during the next year or two, be sent to slaughterhouses, killed, dismembered – mutilated in other words-- and then processed into various beef products that will appear in supermarkets and restaurants all over the country. That should give one a little more perspective on the US beef industry and the fate of nearly every single cow.

Three different kinds of cattle mutilation

There are three distinct kinds of cattle mutilation which I will call Types A, B, and C. Unless one looks very carefully at how a carcass has been mutilated it is difficult, perhaps almost impossible, to distinguish between these. An additional complication is that more than one type of mutilation damage may be present on the same carcass.

Type A mutilations are done by carnivorous avian scavengers including vultures, hawks, and eagles. These birds all have claws or talons and strong hooked beaks with which they can tear meat from a carcass. Crows, ravens, and magpies also feed on carrion. Vultures will peck out eyes and/or remove organs from a dead animal. Typically a group of vultures will feed together on a dead cow, perhaps with one pulling on the tongue while the others pick at it using their sharp beaks. Vultures often start by eating the soft tissues and sometimes manage to pull out intestines and other internal organs. To do this they will even insert their head into a dead cow's anus or peck through the abdominal wall where the animal's hide is thinnest.

Type B mutilations are done by carnivorous predatory mammals and scavengers which have teeth. If the mammals are canines such as coyotes or wolves they will tear at the flesh and can chew on bones with considerable force. A coyote can bite with a force of about 150 pounds and wolves can bite with three times that strength. Mountain lions also attack and kill cattle and all of these predators can leave tooth marks on a dead animal's bones. Carnivorous mammals usually prefer to eat the flesh and chew on the bones of their victims rather than the soft tissue that avian scavengers start by devouring.

Type C mutilations are those done by human beings using instruments such as sharp knives, machetes, scalpels, scissors, or possibly laser cutting tools. It is alleged by some that extraterrestrials, MIBHs, and paranormal creatures from other dimensions use similar instruments and hi-tech equipment like this to perform whatever butchery they require. In any case the results are said to show "surgical precision" and sometimes, allegedly, microscopic effects on the flesh "that could only have been produced by high heat or lasers".

Undoubtedly there are Type C mutilation cases where humans have performed some kind of butchery --perhaps even surgery-- on carcasses. However, few cases are reported where that can be said with much certainty and many claims of "incisions made with surgical precision" really belong in the Type A category. Whereas Type Bs are often ragged and messy with spillage of blood, Type As can often appear fairly neat and precise with little if any exsanguination.

Needless to say that the longer a carcass has been dead the harder it becomes to distinguish between the different types of mutilations and decomposition often obscures the evidence. There is an additional mutilation factor resulting from the action of carrion-feeding insects such as blowflies and from maggots. These insect mutilations are usually of little significance before an animal has been dead for several days.



Turkey Vulture (buzzard)

The Vulture Factor

The role of vultures in cattle mutilations in the United States seems to have been seriously underestimated or else completely overlooked by some researchers. This is probably because the commonest and most widespread type of vulture, the turkey vulture, is not a predator and is not known to attack either calves or adult cattle. It principally eats carrion and it will feed on cattle carcasses that it seeks out irrespective of what killed the cattle. This is what vultures do and there are millions of them in the United States. Country folk often refer to turkey vultures as buzzards and regard them as just part of the scenery rather like ravens or crows. Unless one actually sees turkey vultures on a carcass one could easily think these birds were nothing to do with cattle mutilations but they are undoubtedly a significant part of the overall picture. Overlooking the role of vultures in the mutilation mystery is like ignoring one very large piece of a jigsaw puzzle.

The situation is complicated by the fact that there are also (American) black vultures which are very different and are much more aggressive birds. These are often predators rather than just scavengers and they will attack and kill calves and sometimes even adult cattle. They are somewhat smaller than the turkey vultures and have a wingspan of about 5 ft as against the turkey vulture's 6 ft span. At a glance many people would be unable to tell them apart but the attached photos of both varieties clearly show the difference. Black vultures often operate in large "gangs". I say gangs rather than flocks because they can aggressively swarm a calf --or even an adult cow-- overwhelming it. They usually peck, or pick, its eyes out first and this can send their victim into shock thereby killing it.

Whereas turkey vultures will often endlessly wheel high in the sky looking for carrion, black vultures more usually roost in trees near where there are calves and other cattle before rapidly flying in to make an attack. Alternatively a gang of black vultures may settle near a cow with its newborn calf and walk around it almost as if pretending they had no interest. Then, when close enough, they may attack a calf by grabbing its eyeballs and pulling them out blinding the animal. Or, one might grab a calf by its nose or by its

tongue. Then the rest of the vulture gang hurry over and start grabbing at it. Calves are often easy pickings for such predators. The birds will occasionally attack adult cows while they are giving birth and they also will grab and eat afterbirth that remains attached to a calving cow. When scavenging turkey vultures have discovered a fresh carcass they are sometimes driven off it by the more aggressive black vultures that may follow them.



American Black Vulture

An article from 2000 titled “Vultures and Livestock” by Laurie Paulik (National Wildlife Research Center Information Services) that was previously available on the Colorado State University website is appended at the end of this article.

It is difficult to assess what proportion of UCDs in any state in any year are attributable to predatory attacks by black vultures rather than other causes. This obviously depends on the presence of these birds in a particular state and there are many states which are not within the normal range of black vultures. We will consider their actual range later. Although they are known to prey on livestock they also scavenge on carrion and not

necessarily carrion from livestock. An attached photo shows three black vultures with a mutilated deer which they had presumably killed earlier.

Livestock predation by black vultures has sometimes meant that turkey vultures get the blame. This is because they will sometimes arrive to scavenge what the black vultures have left behind and the assumption can be wrongly made that the turkey vultures killed the animal. A different scenario is that turkey vultures which have discovered a carcass are sometimes displaced on it by black vultures. Both types sometimes roost together in trees and people are often unaware that there are different types of vulture present. It is however easy enough to distinguish between them if one examines the heads of the vultures through binoculars.

Characteristic ‘Type A’ mutilations made by avian scavengers

Here are the most common mutilation wounds that are inflicted on dead livestock by vultures --both turkey vultures and black vultures. Some of these mutilations could be inflicted by other birds --such as eagles, hawks, ravens, crows and magpies—but with cattle carcasses vultures are the most likely culprits.

- (1) One or both eyes pecked out.
- (2) Tongue of animal removed or partly removed.
- (3) Edge of mouth eaten away and sometimes a greater area of flesh around mouth.
- (4) Rectum of animal sometimes appears to be cored out.
- (5) Where (4) has occurred, the intestines may then have been pulled out and eaten.
- (6) Animal’s sexual organs (e.g. testicles) may have been removed and eaten.
- (7) If the abdominal cavity or the thoracic cavity has been penetrated, internal organs such as the heart may have been pulled out and eaten.
- (8) Carcasses may appear to be drained of blood but the blood no longer circulates once an animal’s heart stops pumping at the time of its death. Within a few hours --say about 4 hours-- blood begins to lose its fluidity and clots inside the carcass.

Vultures and other avian scavengers often prefer to eat the viscera of a dead animal first. One reason for this is that the soft internal organs such as the intestines can be extracted from a carcass by use of the birds’ beaks more easily than pulling raw flesh off the bones. It is a well known fact that vultures have bare unfeathered heads so that they can reach into a carcass without fouling their feathers or risk getting them stuck in the aperture. The black vulture in particular has a completely bare neck as well as its head.



Black Vultures with deer they have mutilated

Mammalian scavengers such as coyotes may inflict some similar mutilations on a carcass but in general they will inflict Type B mutilations with their teeth. The extent of both types of mutilation obviously depends on the number of birds or animals that have fed on a carcass and the length of time they have been at it. As remarked previously, mutilations of more than one type can be inflicted on a single carcass, often depending on the cause of death and what opportunity scavengers had later. The longer that scavengers work on a carcass producing Type A and/or Type B mutilations the less distinct these will become and the more difficult it is to establish what scavengers may have been present.

It is quite clear than many cattle mutilations that have been described as “surgically precise” in some of the literature are anything but that. Perfectly cored out rectums and dead straight incision lines that could only have been made by use of sharp metal instruments or laser cutting tools are not what one generally sees in the photographs. None of the mutilation photographs shown in *An Alien Harvest* appear to show any of this alleged “surgical precision”. If there are photos which clearly show this I would very much like to see them. As it is, most of the mutilation photographs in the literature show Type A or Type B mutilations --or possibly a combination of these types.

I don't say there are no mutilation marks which have been produced by sharp instruments and one well known case where that occurred was on the Skinwalker Ranch. That will be addressed later.

Can Colorado mutilation outbreak be attributed to vultures?

For as long as this mystery has been going on there have been outbreaks of mutilations in areas where there were none previously, or at least none that were being reported. A fresh outbreak of mutilations in some particular county may attract the attention of the local sheriff's department and that of those who research this phenomenon. Very often the mystery will remain a mystery because there is that assumption the mutilations were caused by whatever killed the animal rather than by scavengers such as vultures that came along later. In addition to this, if the vultures are predatory black vultures, gangs of them may well be responsible for unexplained cattle deaths.

A report on a number of UCDs and mutilation of the carcasses in Huerfano County, Colorado, was written and posted by David Perkins in August 2014. The following episode involves the discovery of a dead yearling by rancher Robert Wolf:-

On Sunday, August 17th, Robert Wolf went about his usual rounds, watering and checking on the animals in his care. Around mid-day, Wolf drove up one of his familiar roads to tend to some of the herd. Driving back down the road about two hours later, Wolf was shocked and amazed to see one of his yearlings lying dead in plain sight about 30 feet off the road. He stopped and examined the animal carefully. He could see no signs of mutilation. The tongue was still intact. Continuing his chores, Wolf stopped and looked at the cow two more times in the next couple of hours. It was still totally intact. Shortly before 5 p.m., when Wolf was to meet the vet at the carcass site, he arrived at the scene to find three vultures busily going after the cow's tongue. One vulture had the animal's tongue pulled out and the other two were furiously picking at it. As Wolf said: "They had it chewed up pretty bad and what they were doing was definitely not producing a smooth cut. It was very ragged."

When Dr. Root arrived, he did a "postmortem" on the fresh carcass as well as the four animals he had originally been called out to examine. According to Robert Wolf, Dr. Root cut back the jaws on the animals to determine the nature of the tongue removals. Wolf later said that, according to the vet, "on all four of the yearlings, it looked like it had been done with a smooth cut, like with a knife."

That these vultures were actually seen at work mutilating the cattle carcasses is quite unusual and there must be hundreds of mutilation reports which make no mention of vultures' involvement. I am not saying that vultures are always involved but I suggest they are responsible for a large part of the mutilation mystery. This episode in Huerfano County raises two further questions.

First, were these ordinary turkey vultures or were they black vultures? We are not told. Turkey vultures could certainly be expected to scavenge on cattle carcasses in Colorado in August since they would normally be present during the summer months. If, however, these were black vultures they could well have attacked and killed these yearling cattle unlike turkey vultures. The only problem with that solution is that the range of black vultures in the US supposedly does not include south Colorado (see accompanying map).

The second question is whether vultures “furiously picking at the cow’s tongue” could have produced the smooth cuts that were subsequently found. What Robert Wolf found was “very ragged” but it seems he drove the birds away before they had finished eating the tongue. If they had finished the job one might assume that not too much tongue would be left behind and the severed root of it would be well inside the animal’s mouth. The fact that one bird pulls on the tongue stretching it, while the others pick at it, is also more likely to produce what appears as a smooth cut. I suggest too that wounds made by hooked beaks that stretch and tear a cow’s flesh will often produce what look like linear incisions, unlike wounds in flesh that has been chewed on by mammals with teeth. Desiccation of flesh in the hot sun will also cause tightening of incisions and straighten them more. Likewise the usual bloating of a dead carcass will cause stretching and straightening of any wounds.

The report from Huerfano County makes it sound as if Robert Wolf and Dr Root both dismissed the idea that these vultures could have been responsible for the “smooth” mutilations which were found. There may be the assumption that buzzards and crows are just part of the scenery and are not really anything to do with the cattle killings and the strange mutilation marks that are found on the carcasses. It could well be true that many UCDs are not actually caused by the vultures but nevertheless they --and other avian scavengers-- are what cause most of the subsequent mutilations.

In the past the role of vultures as cattle mutilators seems to have been completely overlooked or ignored and it was usual to assume that whatever mutilated the carcass also killed the animal. Quite clearly this is often a false assumption but had the mutilations in Huerfano County, Colorado, occurred in Virginia, or in Alabama, or Mississippi, or Texas there is a strong possibility that farmers or ranchers in those states would be more aware that predatory black vultures are often the likely culprits.

When one talks of an outbreak of mutilations, one really means there has been an outbreak of UCDs (unexplained cattle deaths) in an area. The actual deaths might have been caused by disease –including agencies such as anthrax or botulism— or some sort of poisoning. The vultures don’t care and they can consume such carrion without ill effects.

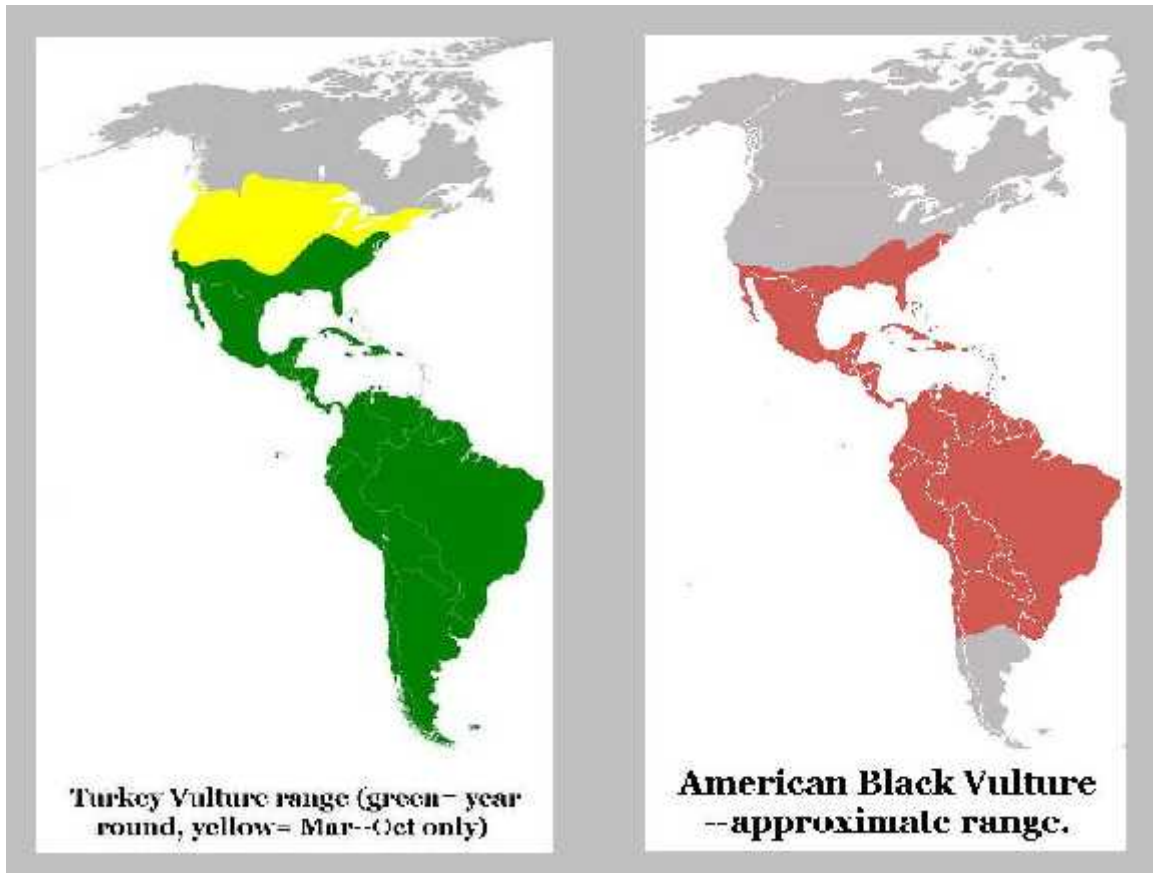
Many outbreaks of UCDs could be due to predator attacks. If a particular predator such as a mountain lion moves into a new territory there could well be a rash of predatory attacks on calves and/or cattle where there was none before.

The same would be true if predatory black vultures moved into a new area. It’s worth taking a look at the range of the American black vulture (see map) which is supposedly confined to the southern and south-eastern states of the US according to various authorities. However it has also been seen in recent years in states like Ohio, New Jersey, Illinois, Missouri, parts of Texas and New Mexico, southern Arizona and southern California. The black vulture population in the US was said (in year 2000) to be increasing at the phenomenal rate of 2.4% per annum so it would not be surprising if these birds had extended their range into New Mexico and southern Colorado. Robert

Wolf's description of the birds "furiously picking" at carcasses does sound more like black vultures than turkey vultures.

Range of Vultures in the US, and the role of vultures in India

The range of turkey vultures (see map) encompasses the whole of the US but these birds winter mainly in the East, the South and the Southwest from late October through to March. Both sorts of American vulture are found all over Central and South America. Although it needs to be checked, I suspect that the Type A mutilations typical of vultures are found on cattle carcasses in Mexico and northern Argentina where cattle ranching is carried out.



In other countries where there are vultures such as India, Iran, and some countries in Africa, the scavenging role of these birds is well appreciated. For hundreds of years Zoroastrians in Persia (now Iran) and Parsees living near Bombay (now Mumbai) in India set out the bodies of their dead on large circular stone "Towers of Silence" where vultures would eat the flesh of the exposed human corpses. In India there were an estimated 80 million white-rumped vultures in the 1980s. Quite apart from eating the flesh of dead Parsees, these birds were considered an essential element in the natural disposal of dead animals, including in particular those from an estimated 300 million head of cattle in the subcontinent. (It should be noted that only about 4% of these cattle in India are consumed by humans as meat since the Hindu religion considers the cow a holy

animal) So, almost certainly, those hundreds of thousands of dead cattle eaten by vultures each year in India would at first have shown Type A mutilations like carcasses in the US.

In the 1990s the vulture population in India went into sharp decline and at least 99% of these birds died for unknown reasons. In 2003 the cause was eventually found to be a veterinary drug known as diclofenac which was widely used to treat cattle for fever or inflammation. Research showed that if only 1% of cattle carcasses were contaminated with diclofenac this would decimate the vulture population. Tests showed that 10% of all carcasses were in fact contaminated and the drug is now banned in India and Pakistan. Vultures in the subcontinent are now making something of a comeback.

The fact that vultures will rapidly strip a human body of flesh was dramatically illustrated in May 2013 when a 52-year old woman hiking in the French Pyrenees was killed in a fall down a mountainside and her body was then almost entirely eaten by griffon vultures in about 45 minutes. Clearly the birds did not cause her death but these avian carnivores were quick to seize their opportunity leaving only her bones, clothes and shoes for burial.

This gruesome story of the woman who was devoured by vultures can be found at:- www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2319824/Woman-eaten-vultures-plunging-1-000ft-death-Pyrenees.html This also records that a French farmer, Alain Larraide, saw a group of vultures attack and start eating an adult cow. Despite the denials of conservationists and ornithologists who want the protected status of these birds maintained –which is something that also applies in the US—many farmers insist that vultures are a real and present danger to their livestock and that they should be allowed to shoot them.

Now that we have ample evidence of vultures' involvement in many cattle mutilation cases in the US, it should at least be acknowledged that the vulture factor is a very important one. There is a saying that something which looks like a pig, smells like a pig, and oinks like a pig, most probably *is* a pig. That surely reflects the situation here. When the answer to many a cattle mutilation mystery looks like a vulture, feasts on carcasses like a vulture, and leaves behind characteristic mutilation marks like a vulture, then the answer very probably is one (or more) vultures. Of course it's not the whole solution to the cattle mutilation mystery but it is certainly a large part of it.



Turkey Vulture with its hooked beak

What would the CSI team make of the mutilation mystery?

Many people must wonder whether the application of the methods of modern forensic science could solve the cattle mutilation mystery for once and all. I believe that it could and that this is something that should be done. The long running *CSI* (Crime Scene Investigation) TV crime drama is, of course, meant to be based in Las Vegas which just happens to be where Robert Bigelow's NIDS (National Institute for Discovery Science) was based. For the sake of argument let us envisage that a rather similar human mutilation investigation is being conducted in Las Vegas by the CSI team. I seriously suggest that a CSI style approach to the cattle mutilation mystery might be a whole lot more successful than NIDS ever was.

For over a year a dozen or so dead bodies have been found in Las Vegas, with curious incision marks, usually in the abdominal region. Actual cause of death in each case was not always obvious and it was also unclear whether a crime had been committed or not. The first thing for a CSI team to do would be to conduct autopsies of the victims and to establish, if possible, cause of death and time of death. This is something which is seldom carried out when it comes to mutilated cattle cadavers out on the prairie.

The autopsy reports indicate various causes of death. Some are due to natural causes and others due to drug overdoses which may have been self-administered or otherwise. At

least two of the victims were found to have been murdered, one having gunshot wounds. It is clear that the incisions made on these bodies were not the actual cause of death.

It would be most surprising at this stage if the CSI team came up with the theory that this was the work of aliens. Or that this was being done by modern cannibals --although both such scenarios are things some might consider possible in Las Vegas. Further testing needs to be done to find whether the incisions in the bodies had been made before or after the estimated time of death and also what organs, if any, had been removed. Cannibalism was ruled out when there was no indication that any part of these corpses had been eaten.

The assumption that whatever or whoever killed the victim also mutilated the body with these incisions would not be an automatic assumption for our CSI team. It does however seem to be an automatic assumption that has often been made by ranchers, sheriffs, and many mutilation researchers but, let's face it, the CSI dudes are a lot smarter than that. They would undoubtedly have secured the crime scene immediately a mutilated corpse was found and they would have closely questioned whoever discovered the body.

My fictional Vegas human mutilations can be easily understood if we correctly guess the motive for these bizarre crimes. A full autopsy shows that internal organs, in most cases kidneys, had been carefully removed from each body and were missing. Organ theft by criminal gangs with medical expertise for the purpose of transplant surgery was once thought to be an urban legend. However there have been several cases where this has occurred in India and China and that is what this fictional case in Las Vegas is about. The criminals involved all had some connection with their victims or else knowledge of their circumstances and their health status. Needless to say the CSI team arrested the felons and each of them was convicted of criminal organ theft.

So how would the Vegas CSI guys go about solving the cattle mutilation mystery? My suggestion is that the carcass of a freshly slaughtered cow is placed in a remote pasture with an automatic motion-activated video camera aimed at it from close by. This could be done in a place where there had been a recent series of cattle mutilations. Spring or summer months would probably be best in order to catch mutilators at work. Maybe the carcass should be taken and placed in position under the cover of darkness so potential scavengers did not observe this as a set-up. If examination of any resulting mutilations showed that they matched those previously recorded in the literature on the subject then we would know from the video camera recording exactly which creatures had done it. Are there any farmers or ranchers out there in the Midwest or in Colorado who would like to try out this experiment?

If such an experiment is ever tried I'm prepared to bet that the mutilators which are caught on camera are NOT Linda Howe's small gray aliens. Equally unlikely too are MIBHs, reptilian aliens, CIA operatives, Satanists, or even government scientists with hand-held laser cutters. I think the chief suspects would be avian scavengers like vultures. A freshly killed carcass might also attract scavenging coyotes, foxes, and raccoons. Let us see which mutilators make which characteristic mutilations.

The fact that avian scavengers leave behind little evidence of their visit on the ground may have been what made some investigators invoke UFO-borne aliens, or else MIBHs, in the first place. When there were no animal or human footprints, tire marks, or other signs of recent activity near a fresh mutilation it was often assumed that whatever did it must have come from the sky and departed back into the sky. To those unaware of the role played by vultures, the assumption was made that it must be either aliens or, possibly, mysterious human agents who had arrived and departed stealthily in their “black helicopters” to take away their bovine tissue samples or whatever they were after. I rather doubt that our CSI investigators from Las Vegas would allow themselves to be deceived by such false reasoning.

The reason for introducing this hypothetical CSI investigation of imagined human mutilation cases was to emphasize that a CSI-style approach is the best chance of establishing what has actually happened in a cattle mutilation case. With this in mind let us look at two particular mutilation cases, one near Ottumwa, Iowa, and one at the infamous Skinwalker Ranch in Utah. In the second case I do not believe that the NIDS investigators properly examined and considered all the possible contingencies.

A cattle mutilation case in Iowa, 2006

It’s worth revisiting this particular case which I examined at the time since it shows that a little CSI-style investigation can yield a very convincing explanation without specialized scientific equipment or expensive autopsies by veterinarians. The unexplained cattle death in question occurred on Alan Pilcher’s farm near Ottumwa, IA. A five month old heifer which had appeared perfectly healthy the previous day was found dead and mutilated in a pasture about 200 yards from the farmhouse on October 9.

Together with three others who had an interest in the UFO subject or were members of MUFON I went to examine and photograph the dead animal the next day. As can be seen in the accompanying photo the heifer lay on its side with its legs sticking out straight. The mutilations were not extensive but were quite distinctive. One eye was missing which could easily have been pecked out. Much of the tongue was missing but no clean cut was evident. The rectum was “cored out” but the way in which the soft tissue had been removed was far from obvious. There did not appear to be tearing of the flesh but nor were there any apparent “surgical cuts” as is sometimes claimed. There were what appeared to be some puncture marks flecked with blood close to the animal’s udder. These could possibly have been puncture wounds inflicted by a predator’s teeth.



Mutilated heifer, Ottumwa, IA (Oct 2006) -photo GW.

The actual cause of death was a mystery. Some blood had leaked out as a result of the injuries but there was no large amount on the ground which might be expected if the animal had suffered a sudden and violent death. There was no indication that the body had been drained of blood as is sometimes claimed.

I asked Alan Pilcher what he thought had killed his heifer. He said he was mystified and had never seen anything like this before. Of course cattle did die on the farm from time to time but that was more usually from some illness and he had no reason to think this animal had been sick. One of my companions who had for years told us that he was an alien abductee said he thought it was the doing of UFO-borne aliens and the mutilations were like those described and photographed in Linda Howe's book *An Alien Harvest* (1989).

I was somewhat less than convinced that alien grays or reptilian ETs were responsible. It made no sense at all and there was absolutely no evidence to support such an explanation. Further examination of the carcass revealed two minor details which I hadn't seen before. There were some splashes of birdpoop on the carcass which, from their position, didn't seem to have just fallen from the sky. Also a dark feather lay near the carcass. One might easily have missed these details but it was just then that a turkey vulture flew quite low overhead showing a clear interest in the cadaver and our presence in the field. This might have been circumstantial evidence but it certainly looked as if the bird wished to resume any scavenging that it may have been up to earlier.

If this vulture had made some of the mutilations on the carcass there still was no answer to what killed the heifer. I asked Alan Pilcher if there were any other unusual things that he had noticed before this UCD occurred. He then mentioned the howling coyotes. For all of the previous week the coyotes near the farm had been “singing” every night. It probably meant they were up to something and it is known that coyotes can kill calves and sometimes adult cows. On the night before the heifer was found dead the coyotes didn’t sing for the first time in days but Alan had seen some of them running along the fence of the pasture at dusk. The cattle had slept up by the barn, close to the farmhouse, and were possibly there at the time that this heifer met its death further down the field and out of sight from the house. A pack of coyotes will usually make a kill by singling out one particular cow from a herd, chasing it, and pulling it down. This particular heifer may have strayed too far from the rest of the herd unaware of the lurking danger.

A number of coyotes could easily catch and overwhelm a 300 lb heifer like this and its death might have been from shock. Coyotes kill some full-sized adult cattle as well as calves. USDA nationwide statistics for predator-related cattle losses in 2005 showed that coyotes were responsible for 51% of such losses. Contrary to what one might think, coyotes that have made a kill don’t necessarily rip open their victim immediately and feast on the flesh. Predation is usually a secretive event that takes place in areas far from human habitation. Alan’s heifer was killed only 200 yards from the farmhouse and if the coyotes did it, as seems probable, they may have been disturbed by the large dogs at the farm which are usually kept chained up. If that was so, the coyotes made a rapid exit. Carcasses of animals killed by coyotes are, for whatever reason, sometimes left uneaten.

Alan Pilcher did telephone a veterinarian but he was reluctant to come and look at the carcass saying it was not worthwhile. No report of this appeared in the local newspaper and the event seemed to be only of interest to local MUFON folk who were mostly thinking in terms of UFOs and that this cattle mutilation must have been done by aliens. I am confident that this particular mutilation was likely the work of turkey vultures some time after the heifer was killed by coyotes. It looks as if the coyotes, which are usually pretty smart animals, did not think this kill through. A dead calf is sometimes dragged away by such predators but a heifer of this size would be impossible to move.

A calf mutilation at the Skinwalker Ranch

One of the best known and best documented cattle mutilations occurred on the Sherman Ranch in northeast Utah --otherwise know as the Skinwalker Ranch. It occurred on 10 March 1997 and the remains of the mutilated calf were examined by NIDS researchers who arrived at the ranch five hours after they were alerted on the phone by Terry Sherman. The document describing the NIDS findings can be found on the internet at:-

<http://www.skinwalkerranch.org/videos/mutilationofcalves.pdf>

The story as told to the NIDS researchers when they arrived was that Terry Sherman (aka Tom Gorman) and his wife spent a bright Sunday morning tagging the ears of newborn calves. They put a tag on the ear of a calf born near the ranch house, then wandered out into the pasture for a period of 45 minutes. In that interim period, with the Shermans only 200 yards away in the pasture, the calf was attacked, mutilated, and completely stripped of flesh. Terry Sherman said they were alerted by a wail from the mother of the calf. The calf's entrails had been laid out, almost ritualistically, on the ground, but all of its flesh was simply gone, leaving only bone and hide behind. There was no blood on the ground or on the animal. Terry Sherman then made a "frantic" phone call to NIDS in Las Vegas.

[The NIDS report at the above link refers rather coyly to "the ranchers" rather than naming them as Terry and Gwen Sherman. The NIDS team who arrived at the ranch later that day is referred to as "two NIDS scientific investigators and a veterinarian" rather than giving actual names. The two NIDS investigators were Colm Kelleher and physicist Dr. Eric W Davis.]

The NIDS team flew from Las Vegas to Vernal, UT, and drove to the ranch arriving just five hours after Sherman's frantic call. They quickly scoured the area for evidence. The veterinarian performed a necropsy on the calf's remains which were then sent away to two pathology labs. The pathologists concluded the calf had been cut apart using two distinct instruments --one like a heavy machete and also something like sharp scissors. How this was done in broad daylight, in an open pasture, and in clear sight of the ranchers, remained --according to the NIDS report-- a mystery. (A second calf was said to have disappeared that same morning after being tagged and was never found. In all, 12 cattle met a similar end during the year that NIDS had by then been in control the ranch.)

Judging from the description in the NIDS report and photographs of the calf's mutilated carcass it appears these are either Type C mutilations or much more likely a combination of Type B and Type C. Let us come back to that later.



**Mutilated Calf at Skinwalker Ranch (3/10/'97)
--note camera date shows day after the killing.**

Some of the background to the Skinwalker Ranch story needs to be looked at here before considering what may have really happened as regards this calf mutilation. Terry Sherman and his family purchased the ranch in 1994 and he planned to raise top quality beef cattle there. He had already established a reputation in two states as an expert in raising Simmental and Black Angus show cattle that fetched especially high prices at cattle auctions. While his neighboring ranchers regularly lost 5% of their animals each year to predators, bad husbandry, and other mistakes, the Shermans saw it as an affront if they lost more than 1% of their animals each year. However, over the next two years, things turned out very differently with alarming losses of their animals.

It soon became plain to Sherman that his cattle raising operation was set in a very hostile environment. Several of his cattle and calves were killed and/or lost, presumably to predators which could have included wolves, coyotes, mountain lions, wild dogs, or even bears. The attacks were always unseen and, if there was any trace left of a missing animal, it would be a badly mutilated carcass. According to Terry Sherman other strange things were happening on the ranch including an approach by what seemed to be a giant wolf, sightings of UFOs, brightly colored small luminous "orbs" which attacked and sometimes killed his dogs, and a whole range of other seemingly paranormal phenomena.

This is all described at length in the 2005 book *Hunt for the Skinwalker –Science Confronts the Unexplained at a Remote Ranch in Utah* by Colm Kelleher and George Knapp. The upshot of Sherman’s disastrous ranching enterprise was that, when the outside world became aware of his misfortunes and of his weird experiences, Robert Bigelow’s NIDS (National Institute for Discovery Science) organization bought the ranch from him in 1996. Bigelow set up a research project involving a team of scientists to record and document these things using the latest cameras, night-vision binoculars, CCTV, scientific recording instruments, and such like. NIDS purchased a few dozen cows and several more belonging to Sherman were kept on the property as bait for whatever supposedly paranormal entities had been stalking and terrorizing the family.

It is quite clear from the Skinwalker book that Terry Sherman strongly believed that some invisible or semi-visible alien entity similar to a bigfoot was responsible for the attacks on his cattle and, possibly, for other strange happenings at the ranch. When watching the 1987 movie *Predator* on TV in which Arnold Schwarzenegger battles an alien life-form in a jungle in Central America, Terry and his son let out a loud yell when they first saw the shimmering alien creature. “That’s what we saw”, they both yelled in unison to the astonished family. Obviously the alien creature in the movie left a deep impression on Terry Sherman but this may well have been before he first started believing that he was seeing a similar alien predator creature near the ranch.

There are certainly other cases where a movie monster appears to have escaped from the silver screen and terrorized communities. The best example of this is probably the female monster Sil in the 1995 American science fiction horror film *Species*. When this was first shown in Puerto Rico there were soon reports of attacks by an almost identical alien monster which was called a chupacabra. The word means “goat-sucker” and this legendary cryptid supposedly sucked the blood of goats belonging to members of various Hispanic communities in Puerto Rico and further afield. These sensational claims of alien predation by chupacabras reached their peak in the late 1990s at just the same time that the predatory attacks on cattle were happening at the Skinwalker Ranch in Utah.

Hunt for the Skinwalker recounts some of Terry Sherman’s stories in which the shimmering alien predator appears from nowhere –maybe, he thinks, through a portal from a different dimension-- and terrorizes people or animals on the ranch. In one story a tall blond stranger arrived to meditate in a pasture. Terry heard the chime of a cowbell in the distance and then the blurry shape of the predator was seen moving through the trees. It broke from the tree line and, blurred as if hidden in a heat distortion, rushed toward this blissed-out meditator who seemed completely unaware of what was bearing down on him. The “thing” stopped inches from the man and let out a mighty animal roar sounding half like a bear and half like a lion. The man screamed hysterically and fell on the ground. Terry rushed to help him but as he did so the creature vanished into the trees.



Terry Sherman (a.k.a. Tom Gorman)

One could easily be excused for thinking that Terry Sherman was living in a fantasy world of his own. There were many stories of his –I’d say tall tales-- but little proof of anything. No photographs, no independent witnesses, no material evidence. What did Colm Kelleher and the other researchers from NIDS really think was going on here?

“Mike” sees Alien Predator arrive at ranch through a tunnel

Despite the sensational stories of strange happenings at the ranch in the Skinwalker book very little weird stuff seemed to be going on there that the NIDS team could photograph or scientifically measure. Despite intensive surveillance for months on end there was little to record that was actually seen by the NIDS people or which couldn’t be naturally explained. Was it possible that Terry Sherman’s alien entities and/or cryptid creatures existed only in *his* subjective reality and were basically *his* hallucinations?

There is one very telling episode which is described by Colm Kelleher in the Skinwalker book. On 25 August 1997 two of the NIDS team on duty were carrying out a night watch

on the ridge up behind the ranch house. This was just a few months after the calf mutilation episode described previously. The men are referred to by the pseudonyms “Mike” and “Jim”. After a very long watch Jim catches sight of a faint stationary light low down over the track 150 ft below. It doesn’t move but seems to brighten somewhat. Jim draws Mike’s attention to it and readies the camera with freshly loaded infra-red film. Both men look at the dim light through their night-vision binoculars.

Suddenly Mike whispers “It’s a tunnel –not just a light”. Then, he says “Jesus Christ! Something’s in the tunnel.” And, next, “There’s a black creature climbing out. I see its face”. Jim is most alarmed and feels that his companion is now bordering on panic.

Jim is desperately trying to see what Mike sees. All the time he is taking film shots with the special camera. He looks at the light through his night-vision binoculars and even swaps his binoculars with Mike’s. But he sees nothing of the tunnel or of any creature. He merely sees the light which soon begins to fade away. Mike tells Jim that “A big black creature just crawled through that tunnel, got onto the ground, and walked away.”

When the light disappeared only a deep silence remained. Nothing moved and even the distant coyotes had stopped howling. Both men later went down to where the light had been. They searched for footmarks or other signs of the mystery creature. They found nothing though supposedly a pungent smell lingered. (Aren’t bigfoots meant to leave behind a foul odor?) There was certainly no physical sign that anything had been there at all. Later when the film in the camera was processed it too showed nothing.

To his credit Colm Kelleher admits that Jim saw nothing of the supposed bigfoot-like creature crawling out of the “tunnel” which Mike believed was something like a portal from another dimension. George Knapp’s version of the same story published on the net at a later date has both men seeing the creature. So what’s the truth of the matter? First, one should know that “Mike” is none other than Terry Sherman himself which neither Kelleher nor Knapp reveal. “Jim” is a Canadian friend of mine who worked for NIDS and I’ve been over the story with him many times. He is someone who is quite ready to believe in paranormal happenings but he definitely never saw Terry Sherman’s alleged creature. “If Terry was making it up he was quite some actor”, he says. Nevertheless “Jim” has to acknowledge that Sherman could well have been hallucinating.

Others from NIDS that I’ve asked about Terry Sherman have said that he always sounded as if he was telling the truth. At least the truth as he perceived it, one might add. Whether or not Terry was telling the truth, most of the investigators never saw the UFOs or any of the paranormal animals and entities that feature in his claims which are described in the Skinwalker book. Like so many UFO stories and other tales of the paranormal these anecdotes may well have been subjective and also highly embellished. If the NIDS researchers did see anything anomalous at the ranch it was usually fleeting and was seldom capable of being scientifically recorded. Their problem was always “difficulty obtaining evidence consistent with scientific publication”. Eventually the NIDS project at the Skinwalker Ranch was terminated by Robert Bigelow and it has been many years now since there has been a suggestion that anything anomalous was still happening there.

Who or what cut up the dead and mutilated calf at the ranch?

The 10 March 1997 calf mutilation is said to be one of the few unexplained events that were examined during the project. Apparently only Terry Sherman and his wife Gwen were present when this occurred and he summoned the NIDS team which arrived some five hours later. Skeptical observers will obviously be suspicious about the sequence of events --and what really happened— and whether these events were exactly as Sherman presented them to NIDS. The report shows clear evidence that sharp instruments had been used on the calf's mutilated carcass and some outsiders suspect it was Sherman himself who carried out this butchery.

Why would Sherman do such a thing? He had sold the ranch to Robert Bigelow with an assurance that weird phenomena such as unexplained cattle mutilations were occurring there and he most probably felt an obligation to prove that to NIDS. His idea of what was doing these mutilations was an invisible (or semi-visible) alien entity rather like a bigfoot that would act swiftly, silently, and unseen. Without saying this was what did it, his account implied just that. Supposedly the attack and mutilation of the calf all occurred within 45 minutes in broad daylight when the Shermans were no more than 200 yards away. The report shows that the NIDS team uncritically accepted what he told them.

There is a far simpler explanation for what happened here and I've no doubt that the fictional CSI team from Las Vegas would, if they'd been involved, have come to a similar conclusion. There seems no doubt the calf was killed by a predator but there are few people, apart perhaps from the NIDS team, who would accept that it was Terry Sherman's alien predator like Schwarzenegger's nemesis in the movie. The most likely culprit was a mountain lion (cougar) and there is plenty of evidence for that. Mountain lions have been responsible for the predatory killing of hundreds of cattle in the western US. They are incredibly stealthy and hunt, usually alone, striking rapidly at their prey when the coast is clear. If a mountain lion did kill and eat the flesh of this calf it could easily have done so unseen in a fairly short space of time. It may well have seized the calf and dragged it away into the undergrowth to eat leaving behind only hide and bones.

The fact that there was a predatory mountain lion stalking Sherman's herd at the ranch is surely confirmed by Kelleher's account of what happened two days after the killing of the calf. A large dark shadow is seen standing near the tree line and Sherman snarls to Colm Kelleher "I'm not goin' to let him get another calf." He swings his truck away from the herd and towards the trees. Its headlights pick up two large orbs of yellow light staring fixedly from the same large tree. A huge animal was perched in the tree about twenty feet off the ground.

Sherman stops the truck and steadies his rifle on the open door of the truck. The rifle's sharp report rings out and the glowing eyes vanish. "Got him," yells Sherman triumphantly, "I saw him fall to the ground." The two of them search for the dead or wounded beast but there is no sign of anything near the tree. Then Sherman sees the

animal again, yelling to Kelleher “I see him.” Two further shots ring out but again they are quite unable to find a corpse. There’s more of this, and once more they see a large animal --maybe two-- in the dark. But despite shooting at close range there’s no sign of a body or even any trace of blood. Kelleher relates this in *Hunt for the Skinwalker*.

There is no suggestion by Colm Kelleher in the book, so far as I can see, that this was a mountain lion. Were Terry Sherman and the other NIDS people unaware that mountain lions are often responsible for livestock predation in western states like Utah? Were Terry Sherman and the NIDS people unaware that mountain lions often climb trees? Coyotes don’t climb trees and nor do wolves or wild dogs --though bears occasionally do. Even if these men had a desperate need to believe the animal in the tree was Sherman’s mythical alien predator, surely common sense should have told them that it was almost certainly a mountain lion like that in the photograph below?



A friend of mine shot a mountain lion in a tree in central Arizona about 30 years ago. He was a crack shot –unlike, perhaps, Terry Sherman. The mountain lion in question had been preying on livestock and a hunt with hounds was organized. About six hunters gathered with coonhounds that would be able to pick up on a cold trail. They followed their hounds on horseback until they checked in a wooded place. At first it looked as if their quarry had vanished into thin air but some of the dogs could see it hiding high up in a tree. When the hunters managed to spot it too, my friend was handed a rifle. He shot the mountain lion dead with a single shot. I got to meet the dead predator a few months later. The big cat had been prepared and mounted by a taxidermist and flown back from

the US to my friend's house in Scotland. There, the fearsome beast was put on display where it could be seen by all who came in by the front door.

But, returning to the NIDS calf mutilation report, we should ask why there is no mention that this could have been a predator attack by a mountain lion. The report indicates there was evidence of chewing with teeth on the carcass which makes it a Type B mutilation. There was also clear evidence of cutting with a sharp metal instrument indicating a Type C mutilation. Therefore one is forced to think that this must have been a Type B + Type C mutilation. The NIDS report appears to not even consider that two types of mutilation could have been made by entirely separate agencies. Again, it assumes that whatever killed the wretched calf was responsible for all the mutilation of its body including the straight cuts. It puts forward various scenarios suggesting that unknown persons snuck up and butchered the animal. If so, did these mystery intruders chew on the carcass too? There was never any suggestion that the carcass attracted scavengers after it was killed.

I suggest that the mystery intruder scenario is absurd and a much simpler solution is that *someone* from the ranch interfered with the crime scene after the initial predator attack. Since the report states there was no blood on the ground, it is possible the mutilated calf was moved and then laid out on its back in the place where the NIDS team were shown it. Kelleher says in the book that "there was a fastidious delicacy to the way the mutilated calf had been carefully laid out on the grass with all four legs spread neatly away from the body". Almost as if ritualistically done. Does this sound like a natural predator or even like Sherman's alleged alien predator? Hardly. It sounds much more like *someone* carefully placing it in position for the NIDS team to see when they arrived.

The left ear had been cleanly sliced off with a knife and the yellow ear tag which had supposedly been attached was missing. Cutting off the ear in this case could have been done because the calf had not yet been tagged, which would of course conflict with what NIDS was told. Or, if the ear was already tagged, the tag number could have given away the fact that the killing might have happened much earlier than said--which would again conflict with Sherman's story. Either way, there may have been good reasons for that *someone* to slice off the ear.

Besides the cutting off of the left ear with a sharp instrument, another knife or machete had been used to make a cut on the severed femur and through the forelimbs' connective tissue. Unless we are to believe that alien predators or bigfoots carry sharp knives there seems to have been what our CSI team would call "interference with the crime scene". If that is ever suspected, investigators should not accept unquestioningly the story of the person claiming to have discovered the corpse and claiming it was left exactly as it was.

The NIDS report accepts Sherman's story that this mutilation was done between 10 am and 10.45 am but omits to say whether any tests were done to independently establish the actual time of death. If there was interference with the crime scene there was certainly plenty of time in which to do it before those NIDS investigators arrived.

Is it possible that *someone* wanting to demonstrate that this mutilation was the work of an invisible alien predator would add knife cuts to a carcass already killed and mostly eaten by a natural predator, and then take it and lay it out on its back for the investigators? The answer is certainly “yes” if that *someone* was anxious to convince NIDS that this wasn’t just another natural predator attack.

I hesitate to suggest that this “*someone*” was Terry Sherman himself but he was certainly the one person who had such a motive. At some stage he must have faced this \$64,000 question: Could a necropsy by NIDS (or anyone else) distinguish between a cattle mutilation done by natural predators and a so-called paranormal cattle mutilation done by aliens, or perhaps MIBHs, or a *Predator*-the-movie-style alien life-form? Had Sherman ever put this question to the NIDS people what would they have said? Probably some of them would have scratched their heads and quoted the (then) supposed expert on cattle mutilations, Linda Howe --whose research was also at one time funded by Robert Bigelow. According to her, “genuine” cattle mutilations – that were supposedly carried out by aliens-- always showed surgical precision and linear incisions which could only have been produced by use of laser cutting tools or sharp metal instruments.

If precise straight line cuts were needed to convince NIDS it was a “genuine” paranormal mutilation, then maybe this was what needed to be presented to them. That may be the reason why the calf’s ear was sliced off with a sharp knife. It’s possible too that Colm Kelleher had asked Terry Sherman on the phone earlier that day “Are you sure this one isn’t just another natural predator attack like the others we’ve seen already? In which case, is it really worth us flying up to the ranch?” It is noteworthy too that NIDS published full details of this particular calf mutilation --rather than any others from the ranch—simply because this one showed clear evidence of cutting with instruments.

Certainly there’s nothing to indicate that vultures had anything to do with this calf mutilation and it’s doubtful too whether there are ever predatory black vultures in Utah. There are two other cattle mutilation reports by NIDS on that website in addition to the one from the Skinwalker Ranch. They both supposedly contain some indication of cutting in addition to signs of natural predation but in Case #2 NIDS was unable to examine the carcass because the rancher had already burned it. I strongly believe that Case #1 --this particular calf killing and mutilation at the Skinwalker Ranch on 10 March 1997-- was done by a natural predator, most probably a mountain lion. In this case, where there was also clear evidence of knife cuts to the carcass, it seems very likely there was also subsequent human interference with the crime scene.

Rommel was right

There looks to be little doubt that the cattle mutilations at the Skinwalker Ranch during Terry Sherman’s tenure, and during the years that the NIDS research project was in progress there, were the result of natural predator attacks. Most of the attacks were on calves and in many cases no trace of the animal was ever found. I have suggested that some of these were carried out by one or more mountain lions which are quite capable of seizing calves and taking them away to eat. Other attacks may have been by coyotes or

wild dogs. In any case one has to sympathize with Terry Sherman whose cattle raising enterprise in such a hostile environment was seriously blighted. Most of these natural predators stalking Sherman's cattle would typically target newborn calves for obvious reasons. In hindsight it may have been most unwise to allow calving to take place out on open pastureland without adequate precautionary measures such as protective corrals.

During the late 1970s the US Federal authorities came under increasing pressure to launch an investigation into the cattle mutilation problem in such states as New Mexico and Colorado among others. The case was passed to the FBI in May 1979 and the investigation was dubbed "Operation Animal Mutilation." In charge of this was retired FBI bank robbery expert Ken Rommel and his brief was principally to determine the cause of as many mutilations as he could and whether they constituted a major law enforcement problem. If he could prove that the mutilations were a law enforcement problem, he was asked to make recommendations for dealing with it.

Rommel's final report consisted of about 300 pages and his investigation cost around \$45,000. It concluded that the mutilations were almost entirely the result of natural predation. Although he stated that there were anomalies that could not be accounted for by conventional wisdom the FBI had been unable to identify any individuals responsible for the mutilations. He stated "most credible sources have attributed this damage to normal predator and scavenger activity."

It seems unfortunate that the report tended to bundle together predators and scavengers without their respective roles being made distinct. Also, the fact that, if the animal's death was a natural one, or the result of natural predation, mutilation of its carcass might well be inflicted by scavengers that acted independently. Vultures are mentioned in the report but with little acknowledgement of the major role that they play in many cattle mutilations. The fact that black vultures can be predators rather than just scavengers was not suggested. Possibly Rommel was unaware of the predatory potential of these birds and their possible presence in New Mexico back then.

In any case Rommel's report was condemned and rejected by many researchers who considered it totally unsatisfactory if not a US government cover-up. In *Hunt for the Skinwalker* Colm Kelleher slates Rommel and his report saying that not a single necropsy was conducted during his investigations and that rudimentary pathology hadn't even been carried out. That may be fair criticism of Rommel but one should ask what good is a necropsy if, like the 10 March 1997 one at the Skinwalker Ranch, there seems to have been interference with the crime scene and the most obvious possibility went unconsidered.

Paranoia as regards the cattle mutilations had risen to such a crescendo at the end of the 1970s that rejection of Rommel was widespread. What can one say about the alternative explanations that were being offered back then --and in the years since-- to account for the cattle mutilation mystery? Here is a list giving some of the supposed culprits:-

- (1) MIBHs (Men in Black Helicopters) --either military or intelligence agency men—operating covertly to take tissue and/or blood samples from cattle they have killed, possibly by use of high-velocity rifles or by the clandestine testing of chemical and/or biological weapons.
- (2) Extraterrestrial aliens in their UFOs/flying saucers beaming up selected cattle in order to collect genetic material which is removed from the beast using precision surgery. This is necessary for the survival of their race according to Linda Howe.
- (3) Terry Sherman's Skinwalker Ranch "alien predator" (as in *Predator* the movie).
- (4) Chupacabras, Bigfoots, Vampires, Werewolves, etc.
- (5) Satanists.
- (6) Assorted criminals including rustlers, delinquent shooters with hunting rifles, misfits, psychopaths, thrill-seekers, etc.

Take your pick. Without any need to say that *all* of these explanations are *very* unlikely solutions to the overall cattle mutilation mystery, let me offer this perspective: if *any* of these scenarios were actually happening during the 1970s and the 1980s, even then they must have represented just a tiny fraction of what was actually occurring nationwide. The vast majority of the mysterious cattle mutilations back then –and, indeed, today—are satisfactorily explained by the activities of predators and/or scavengers, particularly vultures. I have to say that we should seriously consider that Rommel was right after all.

George Wingfield
Ottumwa, Iowa.
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Vultures and Livestock

Vultures that kill livestock become an instant concern to farmers and ranchers. Martin S. Lowney, a biologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services Program in Virginia, responds to numerous complaints each year concerning black vulture attacks on cattle. From 1994-1996, in fact, more than 115 complaints were made. Lowney quickly points out that predation on livestock is almost exclusively caused by black vultures. Turkey vultures are often guilty only by association. They mix with groups of black vultures, scavenging what the black vultures leave behind.

"When we get someone complaining about vultures killing their livestock," Lowney said, "we start quizzing them to get them to describe the vultures, so we can make sure they understand that there's 2 different species of birds. Their replies are pretty consistent.

They describe: the little black one, the one that's aggressive, the one that's in gangs, the one that lets you walk up to within 20 to 30 feet of it."

Black vultures mostly kill cattle, though attacks on deer and other wildlife have been recorded. They will occasionally attack adult cows giving birth, but primarily pounce upon new-born calves. Virginia has large commercial cattle operations and many calves are born on the open range or in pastureland. In the early weeks of life, a calf will let vultures approach it. The vultures, when close enough, then attack by grabbing a calf's eyeballs and pulling them out, blinding the animal. Alternatively, they may grab calves by the nose or the tongue. Once attacked, they go into shock and are easy pickings for the vultures.

"I've seen 2 attacks in progress," Lowney said. "It happens so fast. I saw a group of 4 or 5 vultures sitting in a pasture. They walked up to a 1-day-old calf. Then, the mother, the cow, came over and stood over the calf and all of a sudden there were 15 or 20 vultures darting in and trying to poke the calf and grab it. The cow began charging at the vultures, scaring them away. She was stepping on the calf, and it was bawling because it was getting stepped on. That's when I broke it up."

"On the same pasture, and the same day, there was a different calf attacked. This one was about 3 or 4 days old. Again, there were about 15 or 20 vultures sitting there. One of them walked up to the calf and grabbed it by the nose, and another one grabbed it by the tail. Then the rest of them just came running over and started grabbing at it. I broke that up and ended up killing 2 of the vultures and harassing the rest of them away."

Lowney acknowledges that there are few options available for him to help farmers and ranchers with vulture problems. Since vultures are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, it is illegal to kill them without a permit. Though he will help farmers get permits, he also urges them to practice good husbandry by burying or burning dead animals and putting cows in close-by, easily watched pastures during the calving season. Alternatively, he can start them on a harassment

program with firecrackers and other pyrotechnics. Black vultures, however, are very aggressive and very persistent and quickly become accustomed to scaring devices. Even if biologists can get the birds to leave, they may not go far.

"I know in a few instances all I've done is just push the birds around the neighborhood," Lowney said. "Someone will call me up 2 days after I harass some birds and say that 80 vultures just showed up. I'll ask them where they live and then realize it's only a mile or a half-mile from the first guy. So, I start this next guy on a harassment program, the birds move on and I get a call from another farmer."

The above is from the Libraries of Colorado State University (Fort Collins)

The 'Wildlife Damage Management' article is from USDA's Wildlife Services National Wildlife Research Center in Virginia. The article details what Martin S Lowney of this USDA Research Center knew about livestock predation by black vultures. (article first published in year 2000)

See :- <http://lib.colostate.edu/research/agnic/vultures-livestock.html>
[The above link no longer takes one to the article which is presented above and seems to have been terminated at the end of 2014]

On the subject of whether predatory vultures actually attack and kill livestock the link below to an article in the UK's *Independent* newspaper describes the controversy over this that has arisen in France. Farmers in the French Pyrenees region have little doubt that griffon vultures have been killing sheep and cattle near the village of Aste-Béon. Staff at the *Falaise aux Vautours* visitor center near there will tell you otherwise. Naturalists and ecologists there insist that the vultures are really just lovable big flappy birds that only eat carrion which has long been dead. They would never, these people say, attack livestock. French griffon vultures are different from the New World vultures found in the US but maybe, like their black vulture American cousins, they can become predators if food is in short supply.

www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/return-of-the-vulture-to-the-french-pyrenees-554246.html



Black Vultures, Merritt Island, FL. (photo:GW)