

Episode 26: Glow Tiger

Written by Alice Pow and Jarod K. Anderson

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Sky engulfs us every moment we spend on Earth. The blue expanse we see above is only the blurred edge of this gaseous bubble we call home.

Welcome to the Cryptonaturalist.

[Theme Music]

And hello to you, friends.

You know, the tools of the CryptoNaturalist trade have a tendency to accrete bits of the wild over time, take on characteristics of the places, plants, and animals we study. Take this here well-loved microphone, for example. It now carries the distinctive vinegar, brine smell of the Technicolor Pickle Snail. Yes, that scent is a remnant of a fascinating little gastropod that stowed away in my studio after a long stay in England's Gherkin Valley. It's a pleasant, nostalgic odor that greets me like an old friend each time I sit down here to record.

Pickle Snails are harmless enough, as far as we know, but it's important that I remove the smell from this old microphone. You see, I can expect the sensory signatures of any number of creatures to mix and mingle into new compounds on and around my equipment, the resulting combinations can have effects ranging from spontaneous hair growth to making subtle changes in the way my brain interprets the visible light spectrum. That last effect I mentioned resulted in yours truly needing to relearn his colors a few years ago, but that wasn't so bad. I got to revisit a number of picture books I enjoyed as a little tyke. Still, it's not safe to allow contaminated equipment to go unnoticed.

Luckily for you listeners, my recording equipment doesn't transmit olfactory data and the subtle chemistry of the smells here in my studio will remain a localized issue. In any case, your friendly host knows just the tricks to encourage a microphone like the one I have here to shed its current, charming aroma in favor of, well, less potentially toxic characteristics. I have a special place in my heart for all cryptids, but it's not wise to let their physical material linger in your living spaces. Trust me. I'll just pause for a moment to take care of a little spring cleaning.

Alright. Now that the snail smell is cleared from my microphone, I suppose I can work on cleaning off what's left of the cracked, glass-hard, faintly glowing, resin-like substance that I spent a few hours constricted by during today's fieldwork. I managed to shatter some of this coating at my joints to allow for movement, so now I feel a bit like a medieval knight in plate armor. Well... if armor was made from hardened mucus and knights smelled like stagnant ditch-water. Well, come to think of it, that's probably is what they smelled like.

I suppose I can tell you about today's work while I cook up a solvent to dissolve this cumbersome coating. I suppose this story might be a little commonplace for this show, but I started the day out doing a favor for a farmer whose coop had been breached. Not exactly groundbreaking, I suppose, but Zandra's an old friend and I'm always willing to lend a hand.

I don't usually deal with basic livestock issues, but I made an exception for Zandra. See, her brood of prize-winning miniature T-Rexes disappeared during the night and the only clue she had to go on was an unidentifiable yellow-green ooze that glowed like a firefly in the early light of dawn. For some reason, these circumstances led her to call me.

A farmer and an invaded coop. Yes, I know it's a bit of a cliché, but it can't all be Technicolor Pickle Snails, can it? Cassandra and I were in the neighborhood, so we made it to

the farm before 9am. Still, Zandra worries like a slug in a salt shop whenever one of her animals might be in trouble and I was already worried that we could be too late to save the little tyrannosauruses. Predation is a normal part of nature, but, then, so is altruism.

Unlike the standard t-rex we think of as standing just 2 meters before it dies and leaves its remains to soak up kinetic energy and expand to the colossal proportions you might see in a museum, a t-rex chick, or rexling as they are often called in the industry, stands about a dozen centimeters tall. So, they are an easy meal for opportunistic carnivores.

Well now, listeners, I'm having some luck dissolving this goo from my boot with a mixture of hoisin sauce and peroxide and, wouldn't you know it, I found a fascinating scrap of paper trapped beneath the crust like an insect trapped in amber. I think it might be time for another hidden lore segment!

[Hidden Lore]

Today's hidden lore is a poem by Aspen Hougen (HOW-gen).

"A Haunting"

There are always dead things waiting in the earth;

That's what I learned breaking ground with my father

To expand our garden. "Everywhere you step

There's something dead underfoot, the buried skeleton

Of buffalo or cave bear or sauropod –

Or, closer, the corpse of field mouse, snail,

Ant, aphid, sweetgrass, sage.

We walk on the dead, and among the dead,
We eat them and in time we go back to them,
And no thing lives that does not live on death.”

This is what my father said, while I,
Scrawny, at ten, and outsized by my spade,
Tried to break ground as gently as I could.

Oh, I know this feeling well enough. To look at the surface of the Earth is similar to looking upon the service of the ocean. You know that opaque outer skin hides a world of secrets just out of view.

Aspen Hougen is a poet and anti-racist educator. She lives in Montana's Gallatin Valley with her wife and son. Find her on Twitter at [anagyo_yo](#).

Now where was I? Oh right, within just a few minutes of following the odd, luminous trail into a nearby pinewood, I heard the anxious cries of rexlings in distress. A quick turn around some trees revealed the little things were struggling to free themselves from several concentric circles of that glowing sludge. It was a pattern I'd recognize anywhere as the mucus of the common Glow Tiger. The tiny rexes were working hard to think their way out of their imprisonment, but at that tender age they just hadn't developed the problem-solving and

abstract thinking skills necessary to outfox a glow tiger. That famous t-rex intellect, akin to members of the corvid family of birds, develops once they reach adolescence. So, I lent a helping hand and, with a little chipping and chiseling, lifted the little ones gently from their dire predicament.

Soon as they were free, the rexlings broke off into a hopping, squeaking run back toward the safety of Zandra's farm.

Just before the rexlings were out of sight, I heard the familiar creaking-floor growl of a glow tiger and turned to see a segmented, feline-like creature the size of a housecat. Its mouth took up most of its armored face with a dinnerplate sized circle of needle teeth. Its entire stripped, chitinous body was slick with bioluminescent mucus. Unsurprisingly, its gills quivered with irritation when it saw that I had liberated its breakfast.

The glow tiger, as you may know, is not actually related to any modern cat nor are they related to bioluminescent invertebrates such as fireflies or glow worms. No, these little wonders are crustaceans. Their closest land-dwelling relative is the pill bug, a rare and wonderful cryptid in the woodlice family that looks a little like an armored, alien vehicle exploring the world beneath the leaf litter. Count yourself lucky if you ever see a pill bug.

Now, I was a bit surprised to see a glow tiger that far north, but like any prepared CryptoNaturalist doing field work during a rainy July, I always keep a ball of yarn and a can of cat food in my pack. Related or not, the glow tiger share's the common cat's affinity for these toys. I spent about a half hour playing with the slimy, chittering not-kitty, dazzling it with a few advanced yarn tricks and giving it gentle scratches behind its cephalothorax. The long and short

of it was that I bought the rexlings ample time to return home to Zandra and had a lovely afternoon with a playful critter.

The only problem emerged when I got so comfortable sharing the morning with the little creature that I dozed off against a slime-coated tree, giving time for the glow tiger's excretions to approach solidity and become a major hindrance to movement. I must say, its adhesive properties are absolutely breathtaking. Literally. It's hard to take in air when the stuff hardens on your torso.

But that's really no matter. With a little patience and an improvised hammer, I managed to get to my feet and return to Cassandra, tired but awfully grateful that the glow tiger wasn't hungry enough to try a larger meal.

Ah, I have an unearthly mess on my hands, and table, and floor, but I'm mostly free of my candy coating. Plus, I've gotten word from Zandra that the rexlings are all home safe. Not a bad day's work, listeners.

I'm reminded of a passage from *Plume and Granby's Guide to Natural Adhesives*, "before removing any sticky substance, it is often worthwhile to consider and enjoy the experience of being held. Not all adhesives are formidable enough for a full body sensation, but if you ever get the chance to sit in the tight embrace of such a natural substance, commit that moment to memory before you engineer your escape."

Wise words and a practical necessity.

[Transmission Alert]

Ah, looks like we have a new field report. Let's take a listen.

(Matt Young) Skipper McCloud

Skipper McCloud transmitting on CryptoNaturalist frequency 11-58-1.

Friends, do you know the kitten trees dreaming in the sunlight on the shores of the Caspian Sea?

No?

Well, neither did I.

I first heard of these creatures while playing a poker variant called "Tuscaloosa Tickle" with Charlie Everglades.

You know Charlie.

Former professor of herpetology at UC Davis. Current mossy tree stump. All around great lady and notorious card shark.

Charlie wagered "knowledge of a cryptid I'd never seen before" on three-of-a-kind and, improbably, she lost. Well, sure enough, she made good on her bet and sent me off on an expedition to see the kitten trees.

I'll admit, at first I thought she was pulling my leg, but I was quite mistaken.

My, oh my. What can I say about these phenomenal organisms?

Picture this.

Two dozen slender trees standing on a rocky outcrop above a sandy beach. Each silent giant is robed in soft fur. Gray. Black. Fawn. Cinnamon. Calico. Tabby. The tallest of them looming a hundred feet above a sea the color of weather-aged bronze.

Upon closer inspection, I could see that each velvety trunk moved with gentle breath. I could make out something like ribs, rising and falling in the slow rhythm of a deep sleeper. I reached out and stroked the fur of a stout, cream-coated sapling and was delighted to hear an omnidirectional purr that rumbled through the entire surrounding canopy.

I stayed among the trees for nearly twelve hours before returning to my zeppelin to send this transmission and retrieve some equipment.

I plan to return to the trees for further experimentation after I zip over to Baku for some catnip and a laser pointer.

Still... even as I record these words, I have a growing suspicion that the trees will have moved elsewhere by the time I return. Something tells me that they will prove to be extremely uncooperative subjects of study. But, I feel confident that they're worth the trouble.

Wish me luck.

Skipper McCloud signing off.

[End Transmission]

Well, well, well, this episode is just full of interesting feline-adjacent creatures. I suppose cats are cats, whether they're mammals or trees or crustaceans. I think it was famed wildlife biologist Alan Rabinowitz who originally made that observation.

Until next time, remember, we're all strange animals so act like it.

End.

Show Notes: Episode 26: Glow Tiger (00:17:57)

This episode was co-written by Alice Pow. You can find Alice on twitter @AlicePow8. Special thanks to Matt Young for playing Skipper McCloud. You probably know Matt as Usidore the Blue from (one of my favorite podcasts) Hello from the Magic Tavern. The premiere of Magic Tavern season three that starts on July 22nd.

Credits

You can support the production of this show and find bonus content and exclusive episodes by becoming a patron at Patreon.com/CryptoNaturalist OR by visiting the Merch and Support sections on Cryptonaturalist.com for t-shirts, stickers, and more. \$5 a month patrons now have access to monthly CryptoNaturalist correspondence courses, providing detailed lessons on what it takes to become a CryptoNaturalist. You'll find information about submitting your poetry or prose for our hidden lore segments in the about section of our website. To connect with other CryptoNaturalist fans and see all the strange nature the internet has to offer, search out The CryptoNaturalist Fan Group on Facebook. The CryptoNaturalist is written and read by Jarod Anderson. Our theme song is Banish Misfortune, played by Andrew Collins. Stay Curious. Stay Wild. Stay Weird.