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The 1997

CANADIAN UFO SURVEY:

an analysis of UFO reports

in Canada

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Compiled by

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Special thanks go to Geoff Dittman for his work on the database.

Published by  
Ufology Research of Manitoba  
Box 1918  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada R3C 3R2  
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# The 1997 Canadian UFO Survey

## Overview

Since 1989, UFOROM has solicited UFO case data from all known and active investigators and researchers in Canada for analyses and comparison with other compilations. Individual researchers normally maintain their own files with little or no communication with others. In fact, representatives of major UFO organizations often do not regularly submit case data, and the parent organizations themselves tend not to do much analyses with the data they *do* receive, although this is slowly changing.

Although the collection and organization of the data is not yet standardized, some researchers are now collecting and storing UFO data in a consistent manner.

## The Collection of Canadian UFO Data

Many individuals, associations, clubs and groups claim to investigate UFO reports or otherwise solicit reports from the general public. However, very few of them actually participate in any kind of information sharing or data gathering for scientific programs. Many are only interest groups, perhaps based in museums, planetariums, church basements or members' homes, and do virtually *nothing* with the case reports they receive. Indeed, because there is no way to enforce standards in UFO report investigations, the quality of case investigations varies considerably.

Further complicating this problem was the cessation of the collection of UFO reports by the National Research Council of Canada (NRC). The NRC routinely received UFO reports from private citizens and from RCMP, civic police and military personnel. Included among the NRC reports were many observations of meteors and fireballs, and these had been added into the UFO report database since 1989. However, in 1995, due to budget restraint and the lack of continuing research in meteoritics at the NRC as a result of retirements, deaths and other staff changes, the NRC announced it would no longer be accepting UFO reports as a matter of course. In addition, RCMP reports of UFOs and fireballs to the NRC summarily ceased.

This has resulted in an increase in Access to Information (AI) requests filed by ufologists with various government and military agencies in Canada. These have yielded some UFO cases, but the process is very time-consuming, costly and may not uncover all the cases needed for study.

As a consequence of these factors, what has been adopted for this present study is a requirement for an "official" status regarding UFO reports. If UFO sightings are reported to groups or individuals who do not share their case data with serious researchers, those

sightings are effectively *lost* to scientific analyses. The reports may accumulate in impressive numbers claimed by some organizations, but without the data being available for study, they are of no value whatsoever.

Therefore, for the purposes of this and other scientific studies of UFO data, only those UFO sightings which have been made to contributing and participating groups, associations, organizations or individuals can be given any kind of official status. Cases reported to any other group, association, club or individual cannot be considered *officially* reported.

These factors made collection of Canadian UFO data rather challenging. Certainly, because of the changes in the way in which reports have been received, the results of the 1997 survey cannot be compared easily with earlier annual analyses. However, it will be shown that the data obtained for the present analysis yields similar results to previous studies and is still useful in understanding the nature of UFO reports in Canada, and can shed light on the nature of UFO reports elsewhere in the world.

### **UFO Reports in Canada**

For this study, the working definition of a UFO is *an object seen in the sky which its observer cannot identify*.

The following table shows the numbers of reported UFOs per year since 1989.

| Year | Number of cases | Cumulative total |
|------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1989 | 141             | 141              |
| 1990 | 194             | 335              |
| 1991 | 165             | 500              |
| 1992 | 223             | 723              |
| 1993 | 489             | 1212             |
| 1994 | 189             | 1401             |
| 1995 | 183             | 1584             |

|      |     |      |
|------|-----|------|
| 1996 | 258 | 1842 |
| 1997 | 284 | 2126 |

Although some researchers have suggested that the numbers of UFO cases have declined around the world in recent years (including a recent television special titled *Where Have All the UFOs Gone?*), this does not appear to be the case in Canada. Report numbers have risen and decreased from year to year, but, if anything, there appears to be a slight overall increase in the numbers of sightings reported. Admittedly, the yearly figures are greatly dependent on many factors, especially the cooperation of contributors to the survey. The all-time high count in 1993 was almost entirely due to a single major fireball event which was reported by hundreds of independent observers across the country.

There are several reasons for including IFOs such as fireballs and bolides in the UFO report database. First, previous studies of UFO data have included meteor and fireball reports. In many instances, observers fail to recognize stars, aircraft and bolides, and therefore report them as UFOs. That is why some UFO investigators often spend many hours sorting IFOs from UFOs. Historically, analyses of UFO data such as American projects Grudge, Sign and Blue Book all included raw UFO data which later resolved into categories of UFOs and IFOs. Another reason is that observed objects are sometimes quickly assigned a particular IFO explanation even though later investigation suggests such an explanation was unwarranted.

The issue of including IFOs in studies on UFO data is an important one. One could argue that once a sighting is explained, it has no reason to be considered as a UFO report. However, this overlooks the fact that the IFO was originally reported as a UFO and is indeed valid data. It may not be evidence of extraterrestrial visitation, but as UFO data, it is quite valid. It must be remembered that all major previous studies of UFOs examined UFO reports with the intent to explain a certain percentage of cases. These cases were the IFOs - definitely part of the UFO report legacy.

IFOs, however, are problematic in that they are not interesting to most ufologists. In fact, many UFO investigators do not record any details about UFOs reported to them which seem easily explained as ordinary objects. This may be a serious error. The UFO witness is conscientiously reporting an object which is mysterious to him or her - the exact definition of a UFO. Therefore, even the late-night anonymous telephone calls which are obviously reports of airplanes or planets should be logged as UFO reports.

With the exception of 1993, the number of Canadian UFO reports appeared to remain constant at an average of about 190 cases per year, if we discard the 1993 figure as an

aberration. If we include the 1993 data, the Canadian average is 236 cases per year. The 284 cases in 1997, therefore, is significantly more than average.

[Note: Additional reports not included in this survey were obtained from a group of individuals regularly conducting a nightly skywatch along the shore of Lake Ontario near Toronto. As many as 150 separate sightings were noted by this group during 1997, nearly all of which were Nocturnal Lights seen on or above the lake. These cases were not investigated but received as information and may form a new class of UFO which might be better studied as a whole because of the inherent skewing of data in this survey by their inclusion. It is hoped this problem will be addressed in later analyses.]

Since most UFO reports can be explained and reclassified as IFOs, we can observe that this attests to the reality of the objects seen. UFO reports actually reflect *real* events which occur. When a UFO is reported, a real object has been seen and was not just a fantasy of a witness' imagination.

### **Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind**

Each year, a few Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind (CE4) are included in the UFO data. CE4s are the sensational "alien abduction" cases which currently receive wide attention in the media. Some researchers have speculated that thousands of such abductions occur each year, based on various surveys and the number of witnesses ("abductees") coming forward. Since abductions are often reported long after the fact, exact times and dates are meaningless as UFO data. Similarly, since witnesses' memories often are clouded or obscured, other data such as colour, duration and even location may be impossible to ascertain.

Some skeptics suggest that abductions may be a psychological rather than a "real" phenomenon. For these reasons, CE4s do not seem appropriate for inclusion in UFO databases. And, if they really are true close encounters, their complexity decrees that their inclusion in a raw data listing might be inappropriate as well. The few that were included were accepted only because they were reported to an official reporting body. It is likely that annual surveys eventually will not include CE4s as data.

### **Method**

Data for each case was received by UFOROM from participating researchers across Canada. The information then was coded by members of UFOROM and entered into a Microsoft Access database and then exported into a Microsoft Excel file format where it was statistically analysed.

An example of the coding key is as follows:

Example: 997 01 09 1530 Vernon BC DD 1 3 900 silver 2 ps 6 5 UFOBC 1 2 p four obj. seen

Field: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

Field 1 is a default YEAR for the report (UFOROM is now coding to allow for the next millennium).

Field 2 is the MONTH of the incident.

Field 3 is the DATE of the sighting.

Field 4 is the local TIME, on the 24-hour clock.

Field 5 is the geographical LOCATION of the incident.

Field 6 is the PROVINCE where the sighting occurred.

Field 7 is the TYPE of report, using the Hynek Classification System.

Field 8 is the VALLEE type of report, PRIMARY Classification.

Field 9 is the VALLEE type of report, SECONDARY Classification.

Field 10 is the DURATION of the sighting, in seconds (a value of 600 thus represents 10 minutes)..

Field 11 is the primary COLOUR of the object(s) seen

Field 12 is the number of WITNESSES

Field 13 is the SHAPE of the object(s) seen

Field 14 is the STRANGENESS of the report.

Field 15 is the RELIABILITY of the report.

Field 16 is the SOURCE of the report.

Field 17 is the MUFON form type, Primary.

Field 18 is the MUFON form type, Secondary.

Field 19 is the EVALUATION of the case.

Field 20 includes any COMMENTS noted about the case.

For the 1997 data, the VALLEE and MUFON fields were added to allow comparison with other sighting databases in use. However, researchers found this additional coding awkward and these may be dropped in future analyses.

## Analyses of the Data

### Distribution of UFO Reports Across Canada

In previous analyses, British Columbia garnered between 30% and 40% of the total number of cases per year. In 1994-95, the percentage dropped to 24% and in 1996 this dropped to 16.67%. However, this was back up to 35% in 1997. Ontario and Quebec together constitute more than 60% of Canada's population, but had only 38% of the total number of UFO reports in 1994-95. In 1996, they had about 42% of the total cases. In 1997 this was even lower: only about 34%.

If we consider that UFOs are a function of population, then the percentages of UFO reports per province are not proportional. There is an over-representation of cases from British Columbia and under-representation from Ontario and Quebec. In fact, case numbers in Quebec in 1997 were only about half the number from 1996, although much nearer the Quebec average of about 27 cases per year.

For the second year in a row, there was a larger than normal number of UFO sightings reported in the Northwest Territories. Like 1996, fewer sightings than average came from Alberta in 1997, perhaps an effect of the lack of currently active researchers in that province. Conversely, the considerably large number of sightings coming from BC in recent years is likely due to the large number of active investigators there.

Some of these distribution effects are certainly due to the active solicitation of UFO reports from the public by regional investigators and groups. Other anomalies, particularly the large number of 1997 cases in the Northwest Territories, are due to regional UFO flaps.

**TABLE 1**

### Distribution of UFO Reports by Province

|      | BC | AB | SK | MB | ON | PQ | NB | PEI | NS | NF | YK | NWT |
|------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|----|----|----|-----|
| 1989 | 15 | 16 | 18 | 22 | 34 | 28 | 1  | -   | 3  | 3  | -  | 1   |
| 1990 | 76 | 9  | 10 | 20 | 21 | 36 | 7  | 3   | 5  | 4  | 1  | 2   |
| 1991 | 59 | 22 | 7  | 6  | 30 | 16 | 9  | 1   | 7  | 4  | 1  | -   |
| 1992 | 90 | 8  | 9  | 23 | 56 | 10 | 9  | -   | 3  | 4  | 3  | 1   |

|      |     |    |    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |    |
|------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1993 | 157 | 56 | 93 | 74 | 51 | 32 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 7 | - | 5  |
| 1994 | 14  | 39 | 8  | 10 | 51 | 34 | 6 | - | 9 | 6 | 3 | 3  |
| 1995 | 45  | 10 | 11 | 48 | 41 | 20 | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | 4  |
| 1996 | 43  | 10 | 11 | 39 | 63 | 45 | 1 | - | 9 | 1 | - | 35 |
| 1997 | 99  | 11 | 5  | 32 | 72 | 24 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 8 | 22 |

### Monthly Trends in UFO Reports

The monthly breakdowns of reports during each year show slightly different patterns from those of previous years. In 1989, there was a significant increase in UFO reports in the late fall, with other months maintaining what appeared to be a fairly constant "normal" level of reports. 1990 saw two major increases in report numbers in two months: April and August. The "normal" level of monthly report numbers appeared to be constant in other months, with minor fluctuations. In 1991, reports peaked in August, but there was no single obvious trough.

The 1992 breakdown again showed no clear peaks in monthly report numbers. This is most curious, because UFO reports often are said to peak in summer and trough in winter, presumably due to the more pleasant observing conditions during the summer months, when more witnesses are outside. In 1993, the opposite of what is usually imagined was true: there were peaks in winter, and troughs in summer. The October 1993 peak is easily explained as due to the fireball. Even taking this into account, there were more cases in fall that year than in summer, and more in winter than spring and early fall. In 1994, there was a noticeable increase in UFO reports in the late spring and early summer, whereas in 1995, the peak months were in the late summer and early fall. In 1996, there were three separate peak months for UFO sightings in Canada: January, July/August and November. The January peak was almost entirely due to the flap in the Northwest Territories.

There continue to be regional and national monthly fluctuations. For 1997, peaks appeared in March-April, July-August and November-December. There was no obvious seasonal peak or trough. The March flap appeared due to a concentration of activity in Quebec while the December peak seemed due to sightings in the Northwest Territories.

There appear to be no *definite* monthly trends for UFO reports across Canada.

**TABLE 2****Monthly Report Numbers**

|      | J  | F  | M  | A  | M  | J  | J  | A  | S  | O   | N  | D  |
|------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|----|----|
| 1989 | 13 | 9  | 6  | 9  | 5  | 9  | 5  | 5  | 12 | 32  | 27 | 9  |
| 1990 | 17 | 7  | 6  | 47 | 10 | 10 | 9  | 47 | 15 | 16  | 10 | -  |
| 1991 | 13 | 7  | 17 | 12 | 7  | 12 | 16 | 25 | 16 | 12  | 11 | 17 |
| 1992 | 15 | 16 | 27 | 16 | 22 | 16 | 23 | 19 | 11 | 16  | 21 | 21 |
| 1993 | 59 | 15 | 20 | 22 | 14 | 38 | 27 | 49 | 41 | 152 | 24 | 21 |
| 1994 | 16 | 12 | 15 | 21 | 15 | 37 | 19 | 8  | 15 | 10  | 7  | 13 |
| 1995 | 14 | 12 | 13 | 9  | 9  | 10 | 28 | 33 | 28 | 11  | 11 | 5  |
| 1996 | 37 | 18 | 20 | 16 | 8  | 20 | 30 | 32 | 10 | 22  | 30 | 11 |
| 1997 | 19 | 11 | 31 | 29 | 17 | 13 | 29 | 29 | 22 | 16  | 26 | 37 |

In a historical analysis of 480 Manitoba UFO cases in UFOROM's MANUFOCAT, a distinct June peak and December trough was found. Analyses of 13,000 cases in Project Blue Book found a similar June peak and December trough, though Hendry suggested that this was a statistical artefact. It is felt that further studies are needed to fully understand the monthly distribution of UFO data.

**UFO Report Types**

An analysis by report type shows a similar breakdown to that found in previous years. The percentage of cases of a particular type remains roughly constant from year to year, with minor variations. Nocturnal Lights (NLs), for example, comprised 60% of all reports in 1989, 73% in 1990, 67% in 1991, 61% in 1992, a high of 76% in 1993, 63% in 1994-95 and 67% in 1996. In 1997, however, a low of 51% were NLs. This is because of the large increase in Daylight Disc cases (DDs).

The percentage of DDs has increased considerably over the years. In 1991, there were only 7.9%, but in 1996 and 1997 there were 10.5% and 18.4%, respectively. The number of NL reports has declined somewhat as a balance; percentages of nocturnal lights were in the 60s and 70s in the early 1990s but the percentage was only 51.2% in 1997.

NL and ND cases together comprised 82.35% of all 1996 UFO reports. In 1997, this dropped to 73.15%. Still, it can be shown that the vast majority of cases occur at night.

Only 5.88% of all cases were close encounters in 1996, compared with 6.71% in 1997.

**TABLE 3**

**Report Types (Modified Hynek Classifications)**

|         | NL  | ND | DD | C1 | C2 | C3 | C4 | EV | RD | PH |
|---------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1989    | 84  | 20 | 16 | 10 | 7  | -  | 2  | 2  | -  | -  |
| 1990    | 141 | 24 | 15 | 2  | 1  | -  | 4  | 3  | -  | -  |
| 1991    | 110 | 26 | 13 | 7  | 4  | 1  | 2  | -  | 1  | 1  |
| 1992    | 136 | 44 | 20 | 15 | 5  | 2  | 3  | -  | -  | 1  |
| 1993    | 372 | 77 | 26 | 8  | 2  | 1  | 1  | 1  | -  | -  |
| 1994-95 | 234 | 78 | 28 | 21 | 1  | 1  | 5  | 1  | -  | -  |
| 1996    | 170 | 40 | 27 | 8  | 3  | 4  | 1  | 2  | -  | -  |
| 1997    | 145 | 62 | 52 | 4  | 2  | 5  | 8  | 4  | -  | 1  |

For those unfamiliar with the classifications, a summary follows:

NL (Nocturnal Light) - light source in night sky

ND (Nocturnal Disc) - light source in night sky that appears to have a definite shape

DD (Daylight Disc) - unknown object observed during daytime hours

C1 (Close Encounter of the First Kind) - ND or DD occurring within 200 metres of a witness

C2 (Close Encounter of the Second Kind) - C1 where physical effects left or noted  
C3 (Close Encounter of the Third Kind) - C1 where figures/entities are encountered  
C4 (Close Encounter of the Fourth Kind) - an alleged "abduction" or "contact" experience  
EV (Evidence) - a case where physical traces left by an event are the primary claim  
RD (Radar) - UFOs observed on radar  
PH (Photograph) - photographs of a UFO, but no actual sighting

The category of **Nocturnal Disc** was created by UFOROM for differentiation within its own report files. Similarly, **Evidence** is also an *ad hoc* creation, and may not be applicable by other researchers. **Evidence** includes such physical traces as "crop circles", "landing rings" and "saucer nests."

### **Hourly Distribution**

The hourly distribution of cases has usually followed a similar pattern each year, with a peak at 2200 hours local and a trough around 1000 hours local. Most sightings occur between 9:00 p.m. and midnight. Since most UFOs are nocturnal lights, this is not unexpected. The number of possible observers drops off sharply near midnight, and we would expect that the hourly rate of UFO reports would vary with two factors: potential observers and darkness.

In 1997, this smooth, bell-shaped curve was strongly evident. There was a general trough centred around 11 a.m. and a peak at 10:00 p.m.

Many surveys, particularly in Europe, have looked at the time of day UFOs are observed. All have found a peak during the night, with a low during the daytime. All Canadian studies have confirmed these findings. There is a slight difference in the times of the peaks found, however, not only between the Canadian and European studies and between some of the European studies themselves. Three European studies have found peaks at 2100 hours, two at 2200 hours and another at 2300 hours. Often, they found a secondary peak at 0200 hours.

The peaks in the Canadian studies have varied slightly from year to year, with peaks at 2200 hours in 1997, 1994/95 and 1993, and a peak at 2300 hours in 1996. Curiously, a secondary peak was found at 1900 hours in 1997 and at 1800 hours in 1996, as well as the more usual 0200 hours in 1996.

### **Duration**

The category of **Duration** is interesting in that it represents the *subjective* length of time the UFO experience lasted. Naturally, these times are greatly suspect because it is known that people tend to misjudge the flow of time. However, some people *can* be good at estimating time, so this value has some meaning. Although an estimate of "one hour" may be in error by several minutes, it is unlikely that the correct value would be, for example, one *minute* (disregarding the claims of "missing time" during the abduction category of experiences). Furthermore, there have been cases when a UFO was observed and clocked accurately, so that we can be reasonably certain that UFO events can last considerable periods of time.

The average duration of a sighting can be calculated as the summation of all given durations divided by the number of cases with a stated duration. The resulting value for 1991 was about 12 minutes, down from 19 minutes in 1990. In 1992 and 1993, the average duration was again about 12 minutes. In 1994-95, the value was down considerably to approximately seven minutes. But in 1996, the average length of time witnesses observed a UFO was remarkably more than 25 minutes (1,536 seconds)! This is very long time for a witness to be observing an unusual object in the sky.

For 1997, the average duration of all cases was about 20 minutes. However, the average duration of Daylight Disc sightings was only about 14 minutes, significantly less. Nocturnal lights accounted for a smaller percentage of the extremely long-duration cases in 1997, accounting for only 33% of the cases greater than 10,000 seconds duration, as compared with 100% in 1996. Considering the small number of cases involved, however, this is likely just the result of the sample size.

In 1996, 30 cases (23%) of all sightings were briefer than 30 seconds. In 1997, there were many more in this duration category: 60 cases (42% of the total). In 1996, 36 cases (28%) were longer than half an hour in duration, but in 1997, this was down to 25 cases (18%).

Previous analyses have shown that long-duration sightings tend to occur in the early morning hours, from about midnight until 6:00 a.m. It is probable that the majority of observations at this time are those of astronomical objects, moving slowly with the rotation of the Earth.

Extremely short duration events are usually fireballs or bolides, while very long duration events of an hour or more are very probably astronomical objects. In between, there can be no way to distinguish conventional objects from UFOs solely with **Duration** data. A Canadian study by an Ontario UFO group which timed aircraft observations found that the duration of such sightings varied between 15 seconds to more than 8 minutes. There does

not seem to be a clear relationship between the number of reports and the **Duration** of UFO sightings.

## **Colour**

In cases where a colour of an object was reported in 1996, the most common colour was white (27% in 1996 and 37% in 1997). The next most common colour 1997 was red (12%), followed by 'multicoloured' (10%) and then orange (9%). In 1996, the second-most-common was multicoloured (22%), followed by blue (12.4%). This variation is curious, but not mystifying. Since most UFOs are nocturnal starlike objects, the abundance of white objects is not surprising. Other colours such as red, blue and green often are associated with bolides (fireballs).

The colours reported for Nocturnal Lights in 1997 are consistent with 1996, though orange became much more common in 1997 (from 5.21% in 1996 to 14% in 1997).

The 'multicoloured' designation is problematic in that it literally covers a wide range of possibilities. Some studies of UFO data have adjusted the category of colour to include both "primary" and "secondary" colours in cases where the observed UFO had more than one colour.

The multicoloured label has been used, for example, when witnesses described their UFOs as having white, red and green lights. For the present study, the **Colour** classification refers only to the primary colour in the witness' description.

## **Witnesses**

The mean number of witnesses per case between 1989 and 1997 is exactly 2.00. This value has fluctuated between a high of 2.4 in 1996 to as low as 1.4 in 1990. In 1997, the average number of witnesses per case was 1.80.

This indicates that a typical UFO experience has **more than one witness**, and supports the contention that UFO sightings represent observations of physical phenomena since there is usually a corroborator present to support the sighting.

In 1997, 155 cases (56.57%) had only one witness. All the others had more than one. In fact, 17 cases (6.2%) had more than 5 witnesses.

## **Shape**

Although witnesses' descriptions of the shapes of UFOs varied greatly, the overwhelming majority of cases (47.1%) are of 'point sources' - that is, starlike objects. The next most common shape is a triangular, or 'delta-shaped' object (7.5%) followed by 'round' (6.6%) and discs (5%).

A point-source light continues to be the most common description of a UFO. Likewise, disc/saucer, cigar and diamond-shaped objects continue to be reported at relatively the same rate as previous years. The number of triangular UFOs reported has stayed relatively constant: 19 or 7% in 1996 and 17 or 6% in 1997.

### **Strangeness**

The assigning of a **Strangeness** rating to a UFO report is based on a classification adopted by researchers who note that the inclusion of a subjective evaluation of the degree to which a particular case is in itself unusual might yield some insight into the data. For example, the observation of a single, stationary, starlike light in the sky, seen for several hours, is not particularly unusual and might likely have a prosaic explanation such as that of a star or planet. On the other hand, a detailed observation of a saucer-shaped object which glides slowly away from a witness after an encounter with grey-skinned aliens would be considered highly strange.

The numbers of UFO reports according to strangeness rating show an inverse relationship such that the higher the strangeness rating, the fewer reports. The one exception to this relationship occurs in the case of very low strangeness cases, which are relatively few in number compared to those of moderate strangeness. It is suggested this is the case because in order for an observation to be considered a UFO, it must usually rise above an *ad hoc* level of strangeness, otherwise it would not be considered strange at all.

The average strangeness rating for UFOs during 1997 was 4, where 1 is considered not strange at all and 9 is considered exceptionally unusual. This would seem to suggest that most UFOs reported are of objects which do not greatly stretch the imagination. Hollywood-inspired flying saucers are, in reality, relatively uncommon in UFO reports.

### **Reliability**

The average **Reliability** rating of reports in 1996 and 1997 was slightly greater than 5, indicating that there were about the same number of higher quality cases as those of low quality. Low reliability was assigned to reports with minimal information on the witness, little or no investigation and incomplete description of the object(s) observed. Higher reliability cases might include actual interviews with witnesses, a detailed case investigation, multiple witnesses and other supporting evidence.

The **Reliability** and **Strangeness** ratings varied together in classic bell-shaped curves. In other words, there very few cases which were both highly unusual and well-reported. Most cases were of medium strangeness and medium reliability. However, there were also very few low-strangeness cases with low reliability. Low-strangeness cases, therefore, tended to be well-reported and probably had explanations.

## Conclusions/Evaluations

The breakdown by **Evaluation** for 1997 cases was similar to results from previous years. There were four operative categories: **Explained**, **Insufficient Information**, **Possible or Probable Explanation**, and **Unknown (or Unexplained)**. Readers are cautioned that a classification of **Unknown** does *not* imply that an alien spacecraft or mysterious natural phenomenon was observed; no such interpretation can be made with certainty, based on the given data (though the probability of this scenario is admittedly never zero).

In most cases, evaluations are made subjectively by both the contributing investigators and the compiler of this report. The category of **Unknown** is adopted if the contributed data or case report contains enough information such that a conventional explanation cannot be satisfactorily proposed. This does *not* mean that the case will never be explained, but only that a viable explanation is not immediately obvious.

The average proportion of **Unknowns** since 1989 has been about 13%, and 1997 did not vary, with a value of 13.7%. This is a relatively high figure, considering that this would imply that more than one in ten UFOs cannot be explained. However, there are several factors which affect this value. The level and quality of UFO report investigation varies because there are no explicit standards for ufologists. Some "believers" might be biased to consider most UFO sightings as mysterious, whereas those with more of a skeptical predisposition might tend to subconsciously (or consciously) reduce the **Unknowns** in their files.

During the first few years of these studies, an evaluation of **Explained** was almost nonexistent. Contributors at first tended to ignore UFO sightings that had a simple explanation and deleted them as actual *UFO* data. However, because many IFO cases such as fireballs and meteors are initially reported as UFOs, the **Explained** category is necessary for a full review of UFO data. Early American studies of UFO data included such cases, so present-day comparative studies should include such data as well. Furthermore, since there are no absolutes, the subjective nature of assigning **Evaluations** is actually an interpretation of the facts by individual researchers.

### TABLE 4

#### Evaluation of Canadian UFO Data

| Explained |   | Insuf.<br>Info. |   | Poss.<br>Explan. |   | Unexplained |   |
|-----------|---|-----------------|---|------------------|---|-------------|---|
| #         | % | #               | % | #                | % | #           | % |

|             |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |
|-------------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|
| 1989        | 0   | 0    | 74  | 52.5 | 47  | 33.3 | 20  | 14.2 |
| 1990        | 0   | 0    | 90  | 46.4 | 78  | 40.2 | 26  | 13.4 |
| 1991        | 2   | 1.2  | 80  | 48.5 | 69  | 41.8 | 14  | 8.5  |
| 1992        | 17  | 8    | 83  | 37   | 74  | 33   | 49  | 22   |
| 1993        | 154 | 31.5 | 170 | 34.8 | 115 | 23.5 | 50  | 10.2 |
| 1994-<br>95 | 71  | 19.1 | 124 | 33.3 | 131 | 35.2 | 46  | 12.4 |
| 1996        | 24  | 9.3  | 105 | 40.7 | 87  | 33.7 | 42  | 16.3 |
| 1997        | 17  | 6.0  | 106 | 37.3 | 122 | 43   | 39  | 13.7 |
| Total       | 285 | 12.5 | 832 | 41.3 | 723 | 35.5 | 286 | 13.8 |

If we look only at the **Unknowns** with a quality or **Reliability** rating of six or greater, we then are left with 19 higher-quality **Unknowns** in 1997 (6.7% of the total). Of these, only 7 had a **Strangeness** rating of six or greater (2.1% of the total). As a comparison, USAF Blue Book studies found only three to four percent of their cases were "excellent" **Unknowns**.

It should be emphasized again that even high-quality **Unknowns** do not imply alien visitation. Each case may still have an explanation following further investigation. And of those that remain unexplained, they may remain unexplained, but still are not incontrovertible proof of extraterrestrial intervention or some mysterious natural phenomenon.

### **Additional Analysis of Unknowns**

In order to gain a greater understanding of cases classified as **Unknown**, UFOROM members and associates held a special meeting to study and discuss these reports. Available information about each of the 39 cases originally listed as **Unknown** was discussed in detail and the cases completely re-assessed.

All case reports were read individually by each of the UFOROM evaluators, who in turn assigned an independent numerical rating to each case, based on various criteria. Cases were then placed in unanimously "high" or "low" piles. Cases with major disagreements

between the evaluators' ratings were discussed in detail with the entire group. Upon agreement, the outlier ratings were then dropped, the rating for those cases adjusted to an average of the other values and the cases then placed in the "high" or "low" piles, accordingly.

Through this process, only 13 cases were identified which seemed to be above-average quality, higher reliability and which each of the evaluators considered to be the most unusual of 1997. This re-evaluation therefore left only 4.6% of the total number of 1997 cases as "good" unknowns. These cases are summarized at the end of this report.

It was the consensus of the group that this process was most revealing in that a better appreciation of the difficulties in using UFO data was gained. Many reports were good as "stories" but seemed to have possible or probable explanations. Some witnesses' descriptions were deemed less than accurate and a significant fraction of cases appeared to need more investigation.

In short, the exercise showed that the analysis of UFO reports is a very tricky procedure, relying heavily upon mere text of subjective estimates and interpretations of witnesses' less-than-accurate observations. Members of the group recommended that accounts of UFO sightings should not be taken at face value and that caution be used in interpreting what was "really" seen.

### **Summary of Results**

The *1997 Canadian UFO Survey* does not offer any positive proof that UFOs are either alien spacecraft or a specific natural phenomenon. However, it does show that some phenomenon which often is called a UFO is continually being observed by witnesses.

*The typical UFO sighting is that of two people together observing a moving, distant white or red light for several minutes. In most cases, the UFO is likely to be eventually identified as a conventional object such as an aircraft or astronomical object. However, in a small percentage of cases, some UFOs do not appear to have an easy explanation and they may be given the label of "unknown."*

What are these "unknowns?" From a completely scientific standpoint, we have no way of extrapolating a definitive explanation based on this data. Biases for or against the view that UFOs are extraterrestrial spacecraft often hinder the scientific process and cloud the issue. A 'debunker' who has a strong belief that UFO reports are all fabrications or misinterpretations may tend to dismiss a truly unusual case out of hand, whereas a 'believer' who believes aliens are indeed visiting Earth may read something sinister into a case with a conventional explanation.

All that a study of this kind can do is present the data and some rudimentary analyses. The recognition that there really are only a handful of true unknowns among the UFO cases might lead a debunker to believe they, too, might find an explanation if enough effort were to be expended, but to a believer this might be the required proof that some UFOs have no explanations.

The **Evaluation** value is a subjective value imposed by the investigator or compiler (or both) with a scale such that the low values represent cases with little information content and observers of limited observing abilities and the higher values represent those cases with excellent witnesses (pilots, police, etc.) and also are well-investigated. Naturally, cases with higher values are preferred.

For the 1997 data, all cases given an **Unknown** label were reviewed by a group of UFO researchers, investigators and other interested individuals. Consensus was reached on the ultimate level to which each case could be described as "unexplained." This avoided later accusations that coding was done by one or two persons who may have had unconscious biases in interpreting the UFO data. The group agreed upon 13 higher-quality, unexplained cases as the "best" of the year.

The interpretation of this baker's dozen is that these cases were among the most challenging of all the reports received in 1997. It should be noted that most UFO cases go unreported, and that there may be ten times as many UFO sightings that go unreported as those which get reported to public, private or military agencies. Furthermore, it should be noted that some cases with lower reliability ratings suffer only from incomplete investigations, and that they may well be more mysterious than those on the above list. And, above all, these cases are *not* proof of extraterrestrial visitation.

### **Other comments**

UFOs were reported at a rate of about 24 per month across all of Canada in 1997. Throughout the past eight years, the rate has been approximately 19 per month. In other words, the number of UFO reports is increasing; there were about 10% more UFOs reported in 1997 than 1996.

UFO witnesses range from farmhands to airline pilots and from teachers to police officers. Witnesses represent all age groups and racial origin. What is being observed? In most cases, only ordinary objects. However, this begs a question. If people are reporting things that can be explained, then the objects they observed were "really" there. Were the objects we can't identify "really" there as well? If so, what were they?

These are questions that only continued and rational research can answer, and only if researchers have the support and encouragement of both scientists and the public.

## **1997 Canadian UFO Survey: Summary of Results**

The number of UFO reports made in Canada has increased slightly during the past nine years. There were 10% more UFO reports made in 1997 than 1996. There now are approximately 240 cases of unidentified flying objects reported each year, up slightly from previous years' calculations.

The distribution of UFO reports in Canada was somewhat related to the distribution of population. However, UFO reports come from all regions of Canada: from coast to coast and from the prairies to the high Arctic.

During the past nine years, there was no definite monthly trend found in Canadian UFO reports, although there are some regional monthly fluctuations. UFOs are as likely to be reported in summer as in winter.

Approximately 80% of UFO sightings were merely observations of lights in the night sky.

About 13% of all UFO reports are unexplained. This percentage of unknowns falls to about 4.5% when only higher-quality cases are considered.

Most UFO sightings occurred between 9:00 pm and midnight.

UFO incidents usually have more than one witness; in fact, most sightings have two witnesses.

In 1997, the typical UFO sighting lasted about 20 minutes, down from last year's average of half an hour.

Most reported UFOs were white in colour.

The most important findings of this study include the fact that UFO sightings have continued to be reported at a constant level over the past several years. People still report observing unusual objects in the sky, and some of these objects do not have obvious explanations. Many witnesses are pilots, police and other individuals with reasonably good observing capabilities and good judgement. Although most reported UFOs are simply lights in the night sky, a significant number are objects with definite shapes observed within the witnesses' frame of reference.

Popular opinion to the contrary, there is yet to be any incontrovertible evidence that some UFO cases involve extraterrestrial contact. However, the continued reporting of UFOs by the public suggests a need for further examination of the phenomenon by social, medical and/or physical scientists.

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## **The "Best" Canadian UFO Cases of 1997**

January 13: Abbotsford, BC

A woman was driving to work when she saw a single cloud in an otherwise clear sky. As she watched, it "burst downwards" and dissipated, revealing a "black bar" floating in the sky. After 5 minutes, a beam of light shot out from the first object and a second object appeared.

February 22: Aklavik, NWT

Five people were followed along a road by two silver-grey objects which hovered over the highway then "glided smoothly down to the snow" behind them. The objects had rows of "windows" with bright blue light shining through them. After 15 minutes, the objects were lost to view as the witnesses turned along an ice road.

March 6: Whitehorse, YK

On Easter Day, a mother and her three children were chased along a highway by an object "like a small satellite dish." At one point, the object was directly above the witnesses' car at about treetop level.

June 8: Treherne, MB

As he was driving, a former police officer saw a turquoise object which seemed to land in a field near the highway. The object seemed to remain on the ground for 10 to 15 minutes and appeared to have a light on its "front" and "back." The witness said he had "never been so scared" in his life.

June 28: Blind River, ON

Four witnesses watched the flight of a red, triangular object with jagged edges and a "square forward section." Within seconds of its disappearance, an egg-shaped object appeared in the same location and flew along a similar path, "flaring" every 2 seconds into a bright white from a dull grey.

July, n.d.: Sault Ste. Marie, ON

A "square of eight lights" was seen in the sky by witnesses, one of whom is an Air Force and Coast Guard veteran. Fifteen minutes later, a completely silent, "boomerang-shaped" object glided over the witnesses "like a huge bat" at low altitude. Its underside was covered with hundreds of small, dim, rectangular lights.

July 3: Nojack, AB

Two witnesses driving along Highway 16 saw in the air a "black ring" with faint lines hanging down to a "big puff of smoke" that was motionless in the sky. It was in view for about 5 minutes.

August 4: Hadashville, MB

Two forest rangers in different towers simultaneously observed a "silver ball" which hovered over the trees some distance away from them. A second identical object approached the first and the two travelled away together.

November 13: Lac la Biche, AB

Two witnesses were driving home at night and saw a "diamond-shaped object," consisting of "3 white lights in the front and 1 red light in the rear," suddenly "turn on." It hovered over trees an estimated 300 metres away and the witnesses could see the "belly" of the object.

November 17: Winnipeg, MB

As a mother was tucking her child into bed, she looked out a window and saw "an inverted triangular object with no wings." It had many rows of lights across its surface and was "lavender and steel grey" on one side which was "illuminated."

December 8: Surrey, BC

After watching two brightly-lit objects fly across the sky, a "granddaddy" object, disc-shaped and "pewter-coloured," like "out of a fifties movie," spinning and bobbing in the night sky. The witnesses gave chase in their car, but lost sight of it after a short time.

December 14: Vancouver, BC

Seven witnesses saw an object shaped like an "@" sign. It zoomed into view and stopped in midflight. It was a "flattened silver pyramid" and hovered for a few seconds, bobbed up and down and acted like a "wimpy yo-yo" before disappearing suddenly.

December 22: Halifax, NS

An object described as an "airplane wing cross-sectioned" was seen by a witness familiar with aircraft. It had a "solid appearance" and was very slow-moving, moving out of sight after eight minutes.